

*Excerpt from the homily given by Catholic Archbishop Adam Exner during the VCCRS conference held on September 29th, 1996*

Suppose that tonight you were to die and you would come face to face with God and suppose that God would ask you this question:

“Why should I let you into heaven?”

Just take a few moments and think about what you would say. Why should I let you into heaven? I strongly suspect that many of us, if perhaps not most of us, would answer that question in somewhat the following fashion.

We would probably say to God:

- I really tried to be good.
- I tried to be honest.
- I tried to be truthful.
- I really tried to be kind.
- I prayed every day.
- I went to church regularly.
- I attended Mass with great devotion.
- I received the sacraments.
- I belonged to many organizations in my parish.
- I was really active in my parish.
- I was a member of the Knights of Columbus.
- I was a member of the CWL. (Catholic Women's League)
- I was a member of the Parish Council.
- I taught Catechism.
- I was the Choir Director, or I sang in the choir.
- I helped clean the church.
- I really was involved and I gave generously of my time, my talent, and even my treasure, especially for the poor.
- I was a good husband or wife or son or daughter.
- I tried to be very honest in my profession and I tried to do an honest day's work.
- I even belonged to a prayer group, oh yes! And I was baptized in the Holy Spirit and I spoke in tongues.

- I was really not all that bad you know, but you know God I do admit that I wasn't perfect. Whenever I failed, I repented and I asked for forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I think most of our answers would sound a little bit like that. What about these answers? It's really quite frightening because they are all the wrong answers, everyone of them, because really what we're doing is, we are asking God to let us into heaven because of what we did, not because of what Jesus did for us. We didn't even mention Jesus. We talk to God as though we were our own saviours; we were our own healers; we refuse to accept our helplessness; we refuse to accept our powerlessness; we want to stay in control.

These answers reveal that we really are depending on ourselves for our healing and our salvation and are not really depending on Jesus and what Jesus did for us. These reasons reveal the very deepest root of sin, in every human being, that makes us sin, which makes us desire to be in control and makes it so hard for us to let go, to be helpless. That root of sin makes it so hard to be dependent on someone else. We want to be independent by our own rules and we want to be autonomous.

Now these desires to be independent, to be autonomous, to be in control, these were the motivations that led to original sin, to the very sin of our first parents. They are also the root of our own sinfulness and they are the root of the sinfulness of the [Pharisee] who went to the temple to pray. [Luke 18:9-14] Notice how he prayed. He said: "God, thank God I am not like that man in the back, that sinner. God, you should be congratulated on having such a fine worshiper as me". He has blown his own trumpet with a full blast. "I do this, I do this, I do that, I fast, I give alms".

He gave God answers similar to the ones that we talked about a little while ago. He is dependent on what he did and what he could do for his healing and his salvation. The parable says this man did not go home justified. Whereas, the publican at the back of the church admitted his helplessness, his powerlessness, and he was ready to give control to somebody else and he beat his breast and he said, "God, have mercy on me a sinner". He looked to the Lord for his healing. He looked to the Lord for his salvation, and the Gospel says...that man went home justified and at peace with his God. We need to meditate on the teaching of St. Paul in this regard. St. Paul said: "I have given up on the salvation that would come from what I can do". And we need to do that, because the root is so deep. And then, in Ephesians Chapter 2, Paul says: "...but by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your doing, it is a gift of God".

We must realize that ultimate healing and ultimate salvation is not something we can earn. Too often we try to do business with God, and we say, "Look, I've done this, and this and this, and now you owe me". He doesn't owe us anything. His salvation is not earned. His healing is not earned. It is a gift, an unearned gratuitous gift. And so, a really right answer that we should give to God, (in reply to the question, "Why should I let you into heaven"), should sound something like this: "Because God, your son Jesus died on the cross for me and rose again, restoring life, liberating all from sin and restoring life; and aided by your grace, by faith, I accept that gift of salvation. I accept Jesus as my Healer and Saviour. That, God, is the reason why you should let me into heaven".

Or you could say it in a very simple way: "You should let me into heaven God, because I have accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour." That's the right reason.

We are healed and saved because of what JESUS did for us, not because of what we do.

And His GIFT is gratuitous, unearned.

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