

A NOTE FROM FATHER EICKHOFF

There is a danger in the Sacrament of Confession.

I should be more specific. The danger does not lie within the Sacrament of Confession itself, but rather in how penitents sometimes act within the Sacrament of Confession. During confession we are meant to bring before God and His people (the priest representing both God and His people) our faults and misdeeds. The danger occurs when we do not confess our faults and misdeeds, but rather someone else's sins. We conceal our faults and misdeeds by placing the blame on someone else or we try and minimize our own sins by bringing up what we imagine are the greater sins of another person. This is a very common situation. We can say that it goes back to the very beginning of salvation history. Think of the situation in the Garden of Eden after both Adam and Eve had eaten the apple. When confronted by God, Adam blames Eve (the ever-popular excuse of "that other person did it first, blame them"). Eve for her part turns and blames the snake. We can note that no one is taking responsibility for their own actions in this situation.

This situation is so common and so prevalent that Jesus Christ takes the time in today's Gospel to specifically warn us against this danger. The Pharisee spends his time in prayer stating all of his accomplishments before God. The Pharisee also takes the time to disparage the nearby tax collector. I think we can all recognize that God is not likely to be impressed by someone listing all the ways in which a human being is wonderful and is really not going to be impressed by bad-mouthing a fellow human being. The tax collector on the other hand admits his faults, his misdeeds, and his own sins. He does not blame others, nor he does not point out other people's faults. He has escaped the danger when he confessed his sins.

What is this danger exactly? The first part of this danger is a lack of humility before God. Can we even imagine that our attempt to conceal the truth of our actions is going to work with God? When we blame others for our sins we are essentially thinking that God can be fooled by us and that is arrogance of the highest order. We cannot fool or mislead God. The second part of this danger is that by avoiding taking responsibility for our actions we do not seek God's aid in not committing those actions in the future. Instead we remain committed to the same path that led us to sin in the first place since we refuse to admit we are doing wrong. The end result is continued separation between us and God. And this is never a good thing.

Yours in Christ,

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