

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

All good things come to an end (except apparently elections in Florida). This week we saw our autumn blown away in this first snow fall that tells us winter is quite literally on our doorsteps. Thanksgiving this coming week initiates the Christmas rush. And our liturgical year ends next weekend with the Feast of Christ the King.

Jesus is telling his disciples in today's Gospel that the world as we know it will also come to an end. Obviously, by extension, we also know that our lives on this earth will also come to an end. Yes, it's true. All good things come to an end.

But, the Good News is that all bad things have already come to an end. That is the message of our second reading today. The Sacred Author states: "...this one (namely Jesus) offered one sacrifice for sins and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. (Unfortunately omitted in our reading are the next two verses). The Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying: 'This is the covenant I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds.' He also says: 'Their sins and their evildoing I will remember no more.' Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin."

Some years ago there was a story that came out of Salonika in Greece. It seems that many pending trials could not be held as planned because mice had devoured the court files. The evidence against the alleged criminals had totally disappeared. All records of their crimes had been permanently destroyed. They could never be tried for their misdeeds. Surely, it seemed like a gift from heaven! The mice chewed up their crimes!

We're all familiar with the old school excuse, "The dog ate my homework!" But that's all that is—an excuse. This is more like a complete pardon. The mice chewed up my crimes!

That's the lesson from our reading today in the Book of Hebrews. Jesus Christ, through his death on the cross, took away our sins as if they had never before existed. "For by this one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated."

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, this is why Christ came into the world. He came to take away our sins. You and I do not have to hold on to our guilt any longer. We are forgiven. He paid the price of our sins on Calvary.

That is the best of Good News! All bad things have already come to an end—at least, according to the reading from Hebrews, "he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated."

Ah, there is the question! Do we count ourselves among those "made perfect forever by being consecrated"? I suspect that few of us do.

Why do I say that? Principally, it seems to me that there are few in this building not holding on to some level of guilt. Perhaps it's a misdeed from your youth that has been lingering in your conscience for decades. Or maybe it was an action from a more recent time. Maybe you betrayed someone you love, or neglected someone who needed you, or spoke unkindly or falsely against someone else. Whatever it is, whether major or seemingly minor, you regret it now. If only God could remove the guilt, you would be healthier and happier if it could just disappear.

Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. We feel a stab of pain and we know that something is wrong; something needs to be taken care of. So it is with guilt and the soul. Guilt helps us see that something is wrong with our lives just as pain tells us something is wrong with our bodies.

A spiritual director on a retreat gave each retreatant a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes. The director then instructed them to write on each of those potatoes any wrong, any shameful deed that they might be carrying in their hearts. They were then told to carry this bag with them everywhere for the whole week of the retreat, putting it beside their beds at night; on the pew next to them during their times of prayer; next to their seats at meals. Some of their bags were quite heavy.

The hassle of lugging this bag of potatoes around with them made it clear what a weight they were carrying spiritually, and how they had to pay attention to it all the time to not forget and keep leaving it in embarrassing places.

Eventually the condition of the potatoes deteriorated to a nasty slime. That is how guilt works. If it is allowed to sit in our hearts it deteriorates to a nasty slime...and who wants to carry around nasty slime? Guilt motivates us to make a change in our lives to get rid of that slime forever. Guilt tells us that there is something in our lives that needs to be taken care of.

Guilt has a more profound purpose. It points us in the direction of God. What can I do with my guilt? Who but God can relieve me of it? There is only one way you can blot out your sin as if it had never happened. And that is to turn it over to God. It is to confess that you have done wrong and to pray for strength so that sin never gains hold of you again.

But, how can I be sure God has forgiven me, you may ask? A sign would be helpful to have that blessed assurance that God "remembers my sin no more".

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, we Catholics are blessed among all people on the earth to believe in "an outward sign instituted by Christ" that God has forgiven us. We call it the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for older Catholics, the Sacrament of Penance, or just plain confession.

Too many of you object, “Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest? Why not just confess them to God?” Well, when the Lord told Peter, in Matthew 16, “...you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,” He gave the Church not only the power to forgive sin in his name, but to consecrate in his name. Therefore, when you “go to confession” not only are your sins forgiven, but, according to what we hear in Hebrews today, you are being consecrated so as to be made perfect forever.

That is astounding! That is the great Good News of the Sacrament of Reconciliation! Through this great Sacrament the bad things in your life are already gone. The slime of guilt can be banished from your minds and hearts. It is in this Sacrament that you can hear God speak to you through the priest, “I remember your sins no more.”

Then, you might ask, “Well, why all this evil in the world? Why so much anger; so much hate; so much violence; so much intolerance? The answer is plain—not all have accepted the consecration of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

The final bell has yet to toll. The victory has already been won for “the consecrated who are being made perfect” through Christ’s offering of himself on Calvary. But when the bell tolls, the Lord tells us today through the Prophet Daniel: “At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some shall live forever; others shall be in everlasting horror and disgrace. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.”

In summary, we know that the world as we know it will end. Our lives as we know them will end. We don’t fear the end because Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary has washed away our sins. However, the slime of guilt that we have speak to us of a sickness of our souls that need to be consecrated so that we may continue to be made perfect in the sight of God. That consecration is given to us as an outward sign of God’s already-forgiving love in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, administered to us by Christ giving to the Church the power to forgive sins in the person of a priest ordained by the Church for that purpose. Finally, all evil in the world will come to an end when God sends “Michael, the great prince, guardian of his people; especially at “a time unsurpassed in distress, since nations began”.

This is such a time unsurpassed in distress—wars being fought throughout the world; nations in disputes with each other; our own country terribly polarized; children in our schools and people in places of worship being killed; our own church steeped in scandals;

bitterness and anger within our families. These are the reasons we pray each Sunday the prayer to St. Michael. So, please pick up a prayer sheet in your pew or look at the top of the back of your missalette and pray with me:

ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL, DEFEND US IN BATTLE, BE OUR PROTECTION AGAINST THE WICKEDNESS AND SNARES OF THE DEVIL. MAY GOD REBUKE HIM WE HUMBLY PRAY; AND DO THOU, O PRINCE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST, BY THE POWER OF GOD, CAST INTO HELL SATAN AND ALL THE EVIL SPIRITS WHO PROWL ABOUT THE WORLD SEEKING THE RUIN OF SOULS. AMEN.