

SERMON - THE 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT - 8 MARCH 2009  
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina

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*ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul.*

Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians **1 Thes. 4:1-2 (KJV)** *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. <sup>2</sup>For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.* Then goes ahead to exhort them to lead a life without sin.

Sin.

Let's talk this morning about sin, a subject that is close to everyone's heart; a subject that we don't talk much about anymore.

There is sin. There is mortal sin, those sins that we commit willingly, knowingly and deliberately. There is venial sin, those sins we commit without much thought, those same tacky sins we commit habitually without thinking about them.

It's those sins that Paul agonized over in **Romans 7:15 (ESV)** *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

There are sins of commission and sins of omission.

Sin is sin and as St John tells us in **1 John 5:17 (KJV)** *All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.*

And as Paul puts it more clearly in **Romans 6:23 (KJV)** *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Sin. What is sin? Sin is self. Sin is putting self in place of God. It's very simple. When we put our self ahead of God, we are sinning. When we put self in the center of the universe in place of God, we are sinning.

Let's talk this morning about something that is a sin, a sin that we don't think about often as a sin.

We who study such stuff as theology have among many others a saying, *Lex Orindi, Lex credendi*. which means how we worship is how we believe. If you come to the Wednesday night class, you will run into such stuff. But, anyway, it is how we worship that determines how we believe.

If we are casual in our worship, then we are casual in our belief. If we put self ahead of worship, we are putting self ahead of God. In other words, if we put our self, our excuses, whatever, ahead of attending Mass, we are committing a sin.

No one is immune from the temptation to skip church, even clergy.

This reminds me of the old story about the wife getting ready to go to church and finding her husband still in his pajamas and bathrobe, unshaven, sitting reading the paper with a cup of coffee. "Aren't you going to church?" she asked him. "Nope!" he replied.

"Give me three good reasons why you are not going," she demanded. '

"No one ever talks to me. No one pays me any attention and thirdly, I just don't want to go," he replied.

"Let me give you three good reasons why you need to get ready and go with me," she

asserted. “One, some of the folks there do like you and talk to you. Two, there are some that do listen to you. And three. You are the rector and you have to be there.”

Seriously, the first duty as a Christian is, “To assist at Mass every Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation.” To assist is to come to Mass and participate, to be part of the Ekklesia, the Gathering of the faithful at Mass, at the Holy Eucharist, at the Divine Liturgy.

Scripture points out how from the earliest days of the Church the we have been coming together to celebrate the Eucharist.

Let’s start with **Hebrews 10:21-25 (KJV)** *And having an high priest over the house of God; <sup>22</sup>Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) <sup>24</sup>And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: <sup>25</sup>Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Let me repeat this again, <sup>25</sup>*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

And as we read in **Acts 2:42 (KJV)** *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

And again as Paul wrote **1 Cor. 10:16-17 (KJV)**

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*

And again in *1 Cor. 12:12-13 (KJV)* *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

But more specifically on the subject we are exhorted in the Prayer Book about the danger to our soul by not attending Mass.

*Wherefore, most dearly beloved in Christ, take ye good heed, lest ye, withdrawing yourselves from this holy Supper, provoke God's indignation against you. It is an easy matter for a man to say, I will not communicate, because I am otherwise hindered with worldly business. But such excuses are not so easily accepted and allowed before God. If any man say, I am a grievous sinner, and therefore am afraid to come: wherefore then do ye not repent and amend? When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say ye will not come? When ye should return to God, will ye excuse yourselves, and say ye are not ready? Consider earnestly with yourselves how little such feigned excuses will avail before God. Those who refused the feast in the Gospel, because they had bought a farm, or would try their yokes of oxen, or because they were married, were not so excused, but counted unworthy of the heavenly feast.*

And the Prayer Book goes on to say, *And as the Son of God did vouchsafe to yield up his soul by death upon the Cross for your salvation; so it is your duty to receive the Communion in remembrance of the sacrifice of his death, as he himself hath commanded: which if ye shall neglect to do, consider with yourselves how great is your ingratitude to God, and how sore punishment hangeth over your heads for the same; when ye wilfully abstain from the Lord's Table, and separate from your brethren, who come to feed on the banquet of that most heavenly food.*

Each one of us have a duty, an obligation, a Holy Obligation to participate in the Holy Eucharist. There is really only one excuse to fail to be here; to die enroute. If we are sick, then it is our duty to inform a priest so he can bring us communion. If we are

traveling, it is our duty to find a parish where we can attend and participate in the Eucharist. If we are working, it is our duty to attend and assist in the next scheduled weekday Mass.

But if we do not attend Mass just because we have something else we want to do, it is a sin.

Think about it.

Amen.