

Bulletin Reflection 2021.09.26. Year B1. Week 26. Ordinary Time.

If only cutting off sins was as easy as cutting off a hand...

Back in 1988, as I was being prepared for Baptism one of the most exciting prospects was the remission of all past sins. A clean slate, who would say no to that? Thrilled by this new beginning, as the holy water trickled down my forehead I made a resolution to never sin again. But alas, my baptismal innocence didn't last too long and soon I was reverting back to familiar vices. In hindsight, I should have figured why First Confession was scheduled only a week after Baptism – they clearly knew I couldn't keep it up. Admittedly, for an introverted pre-teen, it was awkward and unnerving to reveal my soul to another human being. But once I overcame this hurdle and received this sacrament over... and over... and over... it became apparent that my confessions were becoming rather repetitive.

It was as if I had an inexplicable spiritual defect, a condition which made me susceptible to sin – if only someone had explained to me the meaning of concupiscence! Still, I was zealous enough to pursue a remedy, which eventually led to the Gospel about cutting off hands and feet that cause sin. Regrettably, I had no exegetical guidance to properly interpret this passage. Reduced thus to a literal reading, I began contemplating which limbs should go first. For Christ's message was irrefutably true, that it would be better to enter into the kingdom of God with a few missing body parts than be thrown into hell with all of them intact.

Thankfully, I wasn't insane or radical enough to carry out the deed, though my imagination made it sufficiently terrifying. But what was Jesus' point, if he wasn't actively encouraging dismemberment? He was equating the pain of overcoming sin with that of severing limbs. Experience shows some bad habits are immensely difficult to shed. Nevertheless, we ought to keep struggling, even if the sting of conversion feels like cutting off a hand or a foot. For according to Christ, unless we're *that* serious and sincere about rejecting sin, the sinful delights we'd rather keep could end up dragging us into hell. But we don't have to do it alone, as God shall help those who genuinely desire to be holy and virtuous.