

Homily for February 8th2018

Two theological students were walking along a street in the Whitechapel district of London, a section where old and used clothing is sold. "What a fitting illustration all this makes!" said one of the students as he pointed to a suit of clothes hanging on a rack by a window. A sign on it read: SLIGHTLY SOILED GREATLY REDUCED IN PRICE.

"That's it exactly," he continued. "We get soiled by gazing at a vulgar websites, reading a course book, or allowing ourselves a little indulgence in dishonest or lustful thoughts; and so, when the time comes for our character to be appraised, we are greatly reduced in value. Our purity, our strength is gone. We are just part and parcel of the general, shopworn stock of the world."

Yes, continual slight deviations from the path of right may greatly reduce our usefulness to God and to our fellow humans. In fact, these little secret sins can weaken our character so that when we face a moral crisis, we cannot stand the test. As a result, we go down in spiritual defeat because we have been careless about little sins.

We see this clearly played out in the life of King Solomon. As a young man we are told that he desired wisdom above all else. Even into chapter 10, read at Mass yesterday day, he had the knowledge to not only to know the right thing, but to also do it.

But today we read how little by little he started to compromise his faith and when he was old his multitude of wives turned his heart away from the Lord. What did he do?

Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. 8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods.

In other words, Solomon established these places where his wives could worship their gods, and while the text does not say Solomon worshipped their gods, his heart was turned away from the Lord because he acted foolishly.

Why were these high places such a problem?

The Catholic Bible Dictionary explains it this way:

After the foundation of the Temple, the high places had no part in orthodox worship of the Lord. A frequent complaint about wicked or insufficiently zealous kings was that they built or failed to suppress high places that were in competition with the Temple (1 Kgs 12:31–32; 13:33). Jerusalem was now the only legitimate center of worship.¹

¹ Hahn, S. (Ed.). (2009). In Catholic Bible Dictionary (p. 361). New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday.

Solomon did not take to heart that the high places were not to be erected. His knew this was so because these words from Deuteronomy 12 would have been know to him.

4 Stay clear of those places where foreign gods are worshipped when you enter the land I am giving you. Don't let what went on there contaminate the worship of God, your God. Instead find the site that God, your God, will choose and mark it with his name as a common center for all the tribes of Israel. Assemble there. Bring to that place your Absolution-Offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and Tribute-Offerings, your Vow-Offerings, your Freewill-Offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. Feast there in the Presence of God, your God. Celebrate everything that you and your families have accomplished under the blessing of God, your God.

Here is the sobering fact. Solomon was the one who built the Jerusalem Temple but then makes room for all these other high places where his wives can worship gods with names like Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, Molech.

What is the point here?

When we allow the godless values of the world shape and guide us we are greatly reduced in value. Our psalm for today expressed it this way:

***but they mingled with the nations
and learned to do as they did.
36 They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.
37 They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;
38 they poured out innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,***

This is what Solomon did.

We are cheapened because our hearts are turning away from the Lord.

Also, it is a cautionary warning to reflect on how we end our life is the most important chapter in our decades long story. It is better to start poorly and end in a state of grace with the Lord, then to start in a state of grace and end separated from the Lord because of a wayward heart. We then end up just part and parcel of the general, shopworn stock of the world.

May we have the grace to live what the Lord teaches until our dying breath as we ask the Virgin Mary to "pray for us at the hour of our death, Amen".