

10th Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

In my years as a priest I have had occasion to work with people who worried a lot. Some of them were such worriers that they were afraid they could not be saved.

The worry made them latch on to the Scripture passage we hear in today's Gospel: "What? You mean there's an unforgiveable sin? What if I've committed that one?!"

And so, they've come to me asking about "the sin against the Holy Spirit," wanting to know what it is exactly. It's one of those questions a priest had better be ready to respond to. It's bound to come up sooner or later.

The best response to the question I've read come from the Latin American Jesuit theologian, Juan Luis Segundo. He concludes that the unforgiveable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit, is to have something happen right before your eyes that has to be from God, but refusing to recognize it—some concrete liberation that gives life, brings healing or frees the human heart.

In the Gospel, the scribes were so caught up in their ideology about what God could and could not do that they were unwilling to acknowledge that the things Jesus was doing were exactly those things the prophets had foretold as markers that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

They refused to see the work of God as the work of God, even though they had every reason to accept it.

Jesus calls this the unforgiveable sin because people

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who willingly imprison themselves in an ideology wall themselves off from grace and initiate a vicious cycle that can only end in them not being willing to recognize even the most obvious signs of God's action in their midst.

People who entrap themselves in such rigid, self-imposed blindness can only go from bad to worse.

This is scary stuff, primarily because it sets up a situation that makes it hard for God to get through. Whether it's an unforgiveable sin, in the sense that God couldn't forgive it even if he wanted to, I don't know.

I do know that the attitude seen here in the comments of the scribes did lead to Jesus' crucifixion. Bad did go to worse.

But I also know that, on the cross, Jesus prayed for those who crucified him and asked the Father, "forgive them for they know not what they do." It doesn't seem to me that he would have bothered with that if there was no point in it if it were not possible.

Maybe Jesus called this sin against the Holy Spirit "unforgiveable" because it is, by its nature the worst situation we can put ourselves in—actively and intentionally refusing to acknowledge God's saving action in the world just so we don't have to adjust our thinking.

The people who have come to me worried about whether they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit are probably the ones least likely to have done

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so because at least they still care about God and the state of their relationship with him. That's always a good foundation to build on when walking the way of conversion, and one that God will readily make use of.

For those of us who are not particularly worried about whether we've committed the unforgiveable sin, we can still ask ourselves a good test question: "Am I willing and open to that "something new" that God is trying to accomplish in our midst? Can I recognize good when I see it, even if comes from people I don't give a lot of credit to? If we can honestly say that we are, we are probably in good shape.

If we are inclined to set up conditions, say for example, that the good that comes from God has to happen in the Church, or by people who have been baptized, we may be in trouble.

If we have to admit that we prefer God to stay put where we've parked him and just do those things we expect him to do, then maybe we've stepped on the warning track and are about to hit the wall.

As long as we draw breath, it's not too late to make a change, and make room in our lives for the living and true God, the one who wants to save us, and to let go of the little gods of our own making: control, comfort, familiarity, "we've always done it this way" kind of thinking.

It's hard to imagine we'll ever arrive at the kingdom if that's all we've ever lived by.

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1. Have worked with many worriers in my day. Some worry so much they are afraid they can not be saved.
2. Worry makes them latch onto today's Scripture passage: What?! There's an unforgiveable sin?! Maybe I've committed it!
3. So, they come to me asking what it is.
4. The best response I've come across: to have something happen right before your eyes that has to be from God, but refusing to recognize it.

Some concrete liberation that gives life, brings healing, or frees the human heart.

5. In the Gospel, scribes were so caught up in their ideology about what God could and could not do that they were unwilling to acknowledge what he was doing—through Jesus exactly those things the prophets had foretold as markers of the Kingdom

They refused to see the work of God for what it was

6. Jesus calls this the unforgiveable sin because people who do it wall themselves off from grace and initiate a vicious cycle that leads from bad to worse.

Scary stuff! Primarily because it makes it hard for God to get through.

7. Whether it's truly an unforgiveable sin, I don't know. It is the attitude that led to Jesus' crucifixion, though. Bad did go to worse.

I also know that Jesus asked the Father to forgive

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those who had crucified him. Doesn't seem like he would have bothered if it had been an impossibility

8. Maybe he calls it unforgiveable because it is, by its nature, the worst situation we can put ourselves in—actively and intentionally refusing to acknowledge God's saving action

Just so we don't have to adjust our thinking.

9. People who are worried about it are probably the least likely to commit it. They still care about the state of their relationship with God. Always a good spot to be in because it gives God room to act.

10. For those of us who are not particularly worried about it, we can still ask ourselves a few test questions:

- Am I willing and open to that “something new” that God is trying to accomplish in our midsts?
- Can I recognize good when I see it, even if it comes from people I don't give a lot of credit to?
- If yes, we are probably still available for God's saving grace.

11. If we are inclined to set up conditions, though,

- That good can only come through the Church, or from the baptized, we may be in trouble.

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If we have to admit that we prefer for God to stay put and just do the things we expect him to, then maybe we've stepped onto the warning track and are about to hit the wall.

12. Was long as we draw breath, it's not too late. We can make a change, make room for the living and true God, the one who wants to save us

And let go of the little gods of control, and comfort and familiarity—the “we've always done it this way” kind of gods.

It's hard to imagine we'll ever arrive at the Kingdom if that's all we've ever lived by.