

## LESSON 4

# WE MUST AVOID SIN AND GROW IN HOLINESS

### BACKGROUND READING



Even with all the signs along the way that help us choose the path of life, we can still take a wrong turn. Because of our attachment to sin due to our wounded natures (the consequence of Original Sin) we live in a constant struggle between life and death. Sanctifying grace is literally God's very life in our soul. Sin destroys that life and leads to the death of the soul. But God in His mercy gives us countless opportunities to turn back onto the path of life if we have a contrite heart.

Mercy in its fullness was shown to us in the sacrificial Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into the world to forgive sinners. The angel Gabriel affirmed this when He said to Joseph: "You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). In order to receive God's mercy, we must know that we are sinners and in need of His loving forgiveness. Thus, any study of the moral life must include a study of sin.

#### What Is Sin?

The *Catechism* defines sin as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law." Sin always sets our wills against the eternal

love of God. It is a rejection of God and His love, and a choice for love of self. The traditional teaching of the Church distinguishes between two types of sins: mortal sin and venial sin.

When we sin mortally we lose the supernatural life that is necessary for us to live in Heaven. That is why we call mortal sins "mortal." Like how a mortal wound leads to the death of the body, a mortal sin leads to the death of the soul. When we sin mortally, we must seek conversion of heart through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. A good confession not only brings about forgiveness of our sin, but it also restores the life of sanctifying grace, the gift of divine life, to our souls.

In order for a sin to be mortal, the following three conditions must be met:

- ▶ The sin must be of grave or serious matter. Grave matter is those sins that are specified by the Ten Commandments, and some sins are graver than others.
- ▶ The sin must be committed with full knowledge. This means that the person sinning must know that what he or she is doing is wrong and violates God's law.

- › The sin must be committed with complete consent. This means that the sin must be a deliberate and personal choice. Passions, external pressures, and pathological disorders can lessen the voluntary nature of the act and therefore lessen or even eliminate the moral responsibility for the sin.

Venial sin is all sin in which one or more of the conditions for mortal sin are not met. But even though venial sin does not destroy God's life within us, that does not mean that venial sins should be easily brushed off. Venial sins weaken our charity and get in the way of our doing good and forming moral habits; therefore, they make it easier for us to commit mortal sin.

It is important for us to know that we cannot sin by accident or by mistake, and that temptation itself is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted to do wrong, but He never sinned. When temptation enters our minds, we must turn to God in prayer and ask Him for the grace to do the right thing.

## The Precepts of the Church

God's mercy is unlimited, and we can throw ourselves on His mercy in the pursuit of the moral life. No matter how much we stumble and trip up, our sins can be forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation and we can start afresh in God's grace. In our

journey toward holiness, the Church gives us five precepts or laws that act as starting points to show us the very minimum required to develop our spiritual lives and grow in love of God and of neighbor.

The five precepts of the Church are:

- › We must attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
- › We must confess our sins to a priest at least once a year.
- › We must receive Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter season.
- › We must observe the days of abstinence and fasting. (The Church calls us to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday, all Fridays during Lent, and Good Friday, and to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.)
- › We must contribute to the support of the Church.

The Five Precepts of the Church are a basic framework of what is required for Life in Christ. If we follow these five precepts, then we participate in the life of the Church that will help us on our journey toward holiness. These precepts are the barest minimum, however. We should try to receive the Sacraments, most notably the Eucharist and Penance and Reconciliation, as often as we can in order to ask God for His mercy and the strength to avoid sin.