

22nd September 2021

In this Sunday's Gospel, from Mark, Our Lord says, "if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that cannot be put out."

Our Lord teaches us to cut everything that leads us to sin out of our lives. To 'avoid the near occasions of sin' as we say. Unfortunately, few take our Lord's words seriously, but are seriously strict when it comes to health. I've heard people even uncharitably cutting off friends from their lives with the idea of protecting their health! Let's be ruthless with sin, but not with people.

Earlier in the week was the feast day of St Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist. Matthew's Gospel is often the first that people will read. It is clear, powerful and profound. St Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors worked for the Romans and often used the power derived from that to exploit their fellow Israelites. For this they were despised as traitors. Our Lord called St Matthew as he was doing the counting. Jesus said, "Follow me." (Mt 9:9) Immediately Matthew left that life to follow Christ alone with no divided loyalties. We still benefit from the response he gave to Jesus to this day whenever we read his Gospel. When we respond to Jesus with faith and undivided loyalty, Jesus can reach unknown numbers of people. Ps a reminder to read the Gospels daily!

Today is the feast day of St Pius of Pietrelcina or 'Padre Pio'. He was the greatest miracle worker and mystic of 20th Century. His miracles are innumerable, but my favourite was his ability to read souls as they came for confession and for advice. Because of this he knew how to bring a person back to God, even if it meant giving advice that was hard to hear. Often in confession he would simply say, 'you forgot something', or 'you forgot to mention *so and so*', detailing the sin and how long they had been carrying it around for. St John Vianney was well known for this gift too. Padre Pio is most well known of course for miraculously suffering the stigmata, the wounds of Christ. As St Paul says, we make up in our own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. (Col 1:24) We all offer up our sufferings on the cross with Christ for the salvation of souls. Christ gave St Padre Pio the gift of sharing His sufferings in a physical, literal and miraculous way. Others such as St Francis of Assisi and St Catherine Sienna also suffered this.

In you need to be inspired in your faith, you could watch a TV series called 'Chosen'. It's difficult to do a 'life of Christ' TV series, but this is done very well in my opinion. Or you could read any of the many books on Padre Pio. There's also a great movie on Padre Pio called 'Padre Pio: miracle man' that I recommend to you. Or read a life of St Francis of Assisi such as by St Bonaventure or Thomas of Celano. Or read a biography of St Catherine of Sienna by Sigrid Unset or by her spiritual director Raymond of Capua.

Anyway, till next week, God bless

Fr John Paul