

- Jesus tells us in numerous places: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” ...the second great commandment.
 - That, of course, implies that we DO love ourselves. We instinctively care and protect and love ourselves. That’s simply our survival instinct.
 - But...Jesus tells us today: “ “[*Better any earthly loss*] *than...to be thrown into Gehenna [Hell], where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’*”
 -
 - What is it that we seek in our lives? We might say love. Fame. Excitement.
 - But all those are simply vehicles to a goal...means to an end. Some better than others.
 - What ALL seek is: happiness. And true happiness can only be found in God.
 - But humanity’s constant question is: where to find it? The perpetual, unending quest...while in this life, at least.
 -
 - So Jesus uses rabbinic hyperbole to emphasize that nothing leading us away from that eternal happiness is worth hanging on to... which seems obvious.
 - We are not literally supposed to cut off hand or foot or pluck out eye, but rather remove from our lives those things to which we may be attached, but which lead us to sin.
 - For, as Jesus says in another place: “*I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.*” (John 8:34)
-
- The world views many wrongful actions as “freedom”, but they are not—marital relations outside of marriage, elective abortion, incapacitating drugs, pride, etc.
 - Pornography is a terrible problem now...and getting worse, especially among men and young people...with even Christians seeming to forget Jesus’ warning: “*...everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his*

heart.” (Matthew 5:28) And, of course, though the text implies men, it means women as well.

- In fact, that statement in the Gospel of Matthew comes just before Jesus’ statement today of cutting off hand or food...emphasizing the importance of avoiding such temptations...of chastity, even in the mind. For each of the baptized is a temple of the Holy Spirit... a tabernacle of Christ Himself.

-
- In regards to all sin, though...we priests hear confessions, and we see so very plainly the slavery that sin causes. Persons come into the confessional time and again confessing the same things... bound by the slave shackles of sin.
 - We confessors see patterns, of course...by age, by gender, etc.
 - For instance, many men confess pornography and the sins that accompany it. If such were “freedom”, it would not have such an iron hold upon them, and they could quit easily. But...they struggle month after month.
 -
 - Few women tend to confess pornography, though the young women are beginning to succumb to it.
 - Women much more often confess pride, grudges and an inability to forgive...even minor slights.
 - If such were freedom, it would be easy to let go and let live. But...those shackles seem to extremely hard to break...even though Jesus expressly warns us: “...*if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*” (Matthew 6:14-15) So very important for us to let go of slights and hurts...knowing that that is both the requirement and desire of God Himself.

-
- Now...Jesus speaks of “Gehenna” today—traditionally known as a nasty dumping ground for the continuously-smoldering disposal of trash and scum, and was thus considered analogous to Hell.

- Gehenna, Hades, Sheol, Hell...the lake of fire...where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched, as He says. And who would know better than He, who is God Himself?
- And remember the rich man's plea to Abraham in one of Jesus' parables: "*Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to [even] dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.*" (Luke 16:24)
-
- It's very unpopular to talk about Hell in our day. A very common thought even among Christians is that no one will go to Hell.
- But Jesus talked about Hell quite frequently...adding such phrases as: "*...the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*" (Matthew 7:13-14)
- And thus...it is not simply an empty threat, but a very real punishment for those who refuse to do good...as James warns the rich in our second reading today...speaking of those who cheat others for their gain: "*Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries...the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud...[and] have reached the ears of the Lord...*"
- Thus, defrauding workers of their just wages is one of the sins that cry to Heaven...wealth being one of those hands and feet that we must cut off to aid others...as Jesus says that He will say to the charitable at judgment: "*Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...*" (Matthew 25:34), and St. Paul: "*[The rich] are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed.*" (1 Timothy 6:18-19)
- Always pulling at us is that lure to selfishness and sin.
- But let us always remember those verses of Sirach: "*If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter*

of your own choice. / Before a man are life and death, he is given whichever he chooses.” (Sirach 15:15-17)

- So...as Moses said: “...therefore choose life...loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you...” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Reading 1
[Nm 11:25-29](#)

The LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses.
Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses,
the LORD bestowed it on the seventy elders;
and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied.

Now two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad,
were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp.
They too had been on the list, but had not gone out to the tent;
yet the spirit came to rest on them also,
and they prophesied in the camp.
So, when a young man quickly told Moses,
"Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp, "
Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, said,
"Moses, my lord, stop them."
But Moses answered him,
"Are you jealous for my sake?
Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!
Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!"

Responsorial Psalm
[Ps 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14](#)

R. (9a) **The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.**
The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.
R. **The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.**
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.
R. **The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.**
Though your servant is careful of them,
very diligent in keeping them,
Yet who can detect failings?
Cleanse me from my unknown faults!
R. **The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.**
From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant;
let it not rule over me.
Then shall I be blameless and innocent
of serious sin.
R. **The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.**

Reading II [Jas 5:1-6](#)

Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.
Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten,
your gold and silver have corroded,
and that corrosion will be a testimony against you;
it will devour your flesh like a fire.
You have stored up treasure for the last days.
Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers
who harvested your fields are crying aloud;
and the cries of the harvesters
have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure;
you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter.
You have condemned;
you have murdered the righteous one;
he offers you no resistance.

Gospel [Mk 9:38-43, 45, 47-48](#)

At that time, John said to Jesus,
"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name,
and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us."
Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him.
There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name
who can at the same time speak ill of me.
For whoever is not against us is for us.
Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink
because you belong to Christ,
amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,
it would be better for him if a great millstone
were put around his neck
and he were thrown into the sea.
If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter into life maimed
than with two hands to go into Gehenna,
into the unquenchable fire.
And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter into life crippled
than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna.
And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.
Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye
than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna,
where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"