

A HOMILETIC SMORGASBORD

SAINT ANTHONY'S BREAD

On Wednesday of this week we celebrate the feast of our parish patron, Saint Anthony. His actual name was Fernando de Bulhoes but when he became a Franciscan he was told to take a new name and he took the name of one of the Desert Fathers of Egypt, he chose the name of Saint Anthony of Egypt. He has now become more well-known than the saint whose name he took. After Communion today I will bless these small loaves of bread and after Mass ends members of the Liturgy and Worship Commission will distribute them to all who come forward, one loaf per family. It is good bread. Saint Anthony was good bread. And the origin of Saint Anthony's Bread flows from his gift as a Finder of Lost Items. Oftentimes, people who lost things would pray to Saint Anthony for help in finding what they had lost. I have prayed to him many, many times. I have contributed much money to his poor. Sometimes people will promise to make a donation of money in Saint Anthony's memory with the money going to purchase bread for the poor whom Anthony loved. Thus, Saint Anthony's Bread. So, today as you leave with a loaf of bread, remember to do something for those less fortunate.

IS THERE AN UNFORGIVABLE SIN?

Is there really a sin that cannot be forgiven? Is it in the Scriptures? And if there is such a sin why is it unforgivable? IN the gospel for today taken from Chapter 3 of Mark's gospel is this passage from the lips of Jesus himself: "Amen, I say to you all sins and all blasphemies that people utter will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never have forgiveness but is guilty of an everlasting sin."

So what is this blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and why unforgivable? First off, look at the context of Jesus remarks. He who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and upon whom the Holy Spirit descended at his baptism in the Jordan is truly filled with the Spirit of God. And yet, those opposed to him, even though they are witnessing the miracles, the healings, the casting out of demonic spirits, the breaking of addictions, and the restoration of so many suffering people to their regular lives, some of these people claim that Jesus is possessed by the devil. And it is the power of the evil one that is on display in Him.

Right there is the crux. If you witness the good with your own eyes all this good which is being done and instead of giving thanks to God for the good being done claim not that it is the work of God but that it is the work of the evil one, if you refuse to recognize the truth of the Spirit of God at work in your midst but choose to call that the work of evil--that is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The reason why it is unforgivable is very simple. The Spirit is the source of forgiveness, it is the unifying love in God Himself. If you choose to claim the work of the Holy Spirit is the work of the devil then there is no other means available for you to be forgiven. You have cut yourself off from the only source of forgiveness. It is unforgivable because it is against the very source of forgiveness. No other way around it.

The danger for the ordinary person of faith is that for some reason I choose to harden my heart to what God is doing right in my presence. I harden my heart to God's love and other's love. I close the door of my heart to conversion. Then there is no forgiveness for me—even if I think there will be, even if I believe that I can qualify and experience God's forgiveness without admitting my own sin. It just doesn't work. Not that way. Not ever. It is unforgiveable

SHAME AND DENIAL AND BLAME LEAD TO TEMPTATION

In the Genesis story, Adam and Eve sin and almost immediately new things enter the world. Shame. Denial. Blame. Shame is the feeling that accompanies our recognition of our sin. Guilt emerges and with the guilt comes shame. We hate shame. Because of the way it makes us feel. To get out from under the feeling of shame we do one of two things. Sometimes both. We deny we did what we actually did do. "I didn't do that." Or, if it is so evident that we actually did do something we try to pass the blame off onto someone else. "It's not my fault. It's his fault or her fault or even Your fault, God." Shame, denial and blame have been with us since sin entered our world. They are with us still. Try to imagine this world or your own life with no sense of guilt or shame or with no effort to try to get out from under by shifting responsibility onto someone else.

Jesus did not shame other people but he was surely blamed for many things—being King of the Jews for example.

Guilt and shame often serve as temptations to us which in turn lead to other sin. And we should realize that even though the evil one has been defeated and sin has been overcome, the spiritual battles still rage even though the outcome has been assured. We are still in spiritual combat. The devil, St. Augustine says, **"Tempts the senses in order to dominate the will of a person. Satan strikes at the innermost self. Satan tries to reign in people's wills or else in their coveting of things or people."**

Jesus came to set us free from this being controlled and to show us how to resist and how to overcome such temptations, and to make the power and the grace available to us all the time. **But we still have to do the work.**

My friends, three little reflections this day—St. Anthony's Bread. The unforgiveable sin. Shame, denial and blame. But we have good news. Christ has shown us the way into goodness and truth. In this Eucharist let us surrender to his invitation.