



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
Love's Reply
Cajetan Esser O.F.M. & Engelbert Grau O.F.M.

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Meditation – Community
Sin and the Life of Penance

I. The Fact of Sin

“Nothing must displease the servant of God save sin alone.” ...Francis characterized it [sin] as “the evil of self-will.” In sin man takes to himself what doesn't belong to him and disputes God's dominion over him.

... Though the devil and the world are so often the source of such temptations, Francis nonetheless sees that man is not left defenseless before the powers of darkness. God's grace is ever there to help him. Ultimately, then, man himself is to blame for letting himself open to sin and consequent abandonment by God. “There are many who, when they commit sin or suffer any wrong, often blame their enemy or their neighbor. But that is not so, because everybody has his real enemy in his own power and that enemy is his own person when he sins with it. So, blessed is the servant who always keeps that enemy thus given into his power under control and guards himself prudently against him; for let him do that, and no enemy visible or invisible can do him any harm.”

II. Vigilance against Sin

... The more a man places himself in prayer in God's light, the more will he recognize his own frailty and peril, and the more vigilant will he become in regard to self and to all that is not God. This watchfulness must not become idle and useless self-scrutiny, which is ultimately a form of self-seeking and leads to self and not to God... But because man, when left to his own resources, is too easily blind to self, while his self-love shuts out the light God would give him, Francis desires him to be surrounded and protected by the fraternal concern and watchfulness of his brethren. ...“Should there be among the friars, wherever they are, any brother who is minded to walk according to the flesh and not according to the spirit, the friars who are with him should admonish and advise and reprove him with all humility and care. But if after three admonitions he will not amend his ways, they should send him to his minister and servant, or inform the latter...”

...“Let all the friars earnestly apply themselves to some good work, for it is written: ‘Always be doing some good work or other, that the devil may find you occupied’... Therefore the servants of God must ever be engaged in prayer or in some other good occupation.” In particular, the friars should strive to achieve the true spirit and outlook of the Christian life, since the virtues confound and put to rout our failings, sins and vices...



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II. Reparation for Sin

...But sin touches the community as well as the individual, since “the devil seeks to pervert many through the sin of one.” For this reason Francis requires that the sinner make reparation before the community, for he who thus acknowledges his faults and offences shows that he has inwardly repented of them. His confession of the sin is at once a confession ---or a praise---of God and his ways, and a means of repairing what harm his sin has done to the brotherhood...Francis himself gave an example of this when in his grave illness he wrote to the friars at the general chapter, publicly acknowledging and confessing his failings and negligences, to make reparation for them. No one could reproach him for not practicing what he preached.

The harm which the community might suffer through the sins of individual Francis sought to off-set by several admonitions which show how clear-sighted he was on this point: “Let them not judge or condemn; nor should they, as the Lord says, consider even the slightest sins of others, but rather recount their own in bitterness of soul.” This will keep them from spiritual pride, which has no place in the imitation of Christ and offers no help to erring friars; such an attitude, in fact, harms the individual and so makes for unrest and unhappiness in the community... “Forgive, and you shall be forgiven! And if you do not forgive men their sins, neither will the Lord forgive your offenses.”

III. Application

...But since the Gospel invariably links the love of God with the love of neighbor, the very love of God, which leads man to break with sin, will also induce him to show to his neighbor and brother that he has recognized his sins and failings and disavows them in a sincere confession, whether before a priest as the representative of the Church in the Sacrament of Penance, or before the superior as the representative of the community, or before the friars themselves. Then he will experience what the pious Thomas of Celano adds to the account of a similar confession among the friars: “Great are the works of the Lord in the company and assembly of the just! For in that company the tempted bind a check, the fallen are lifted up, the lukewarm are encouraged. In it iron sharpened with iron, and brother helped by a brother stands fast like a strong city.