

SECOND SUNDAY EASTER [A]

Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

Stalagmites are found in limestone caves. They are created when drops of water fall from the ceiling. The drops are mostly water. However, there is a fraction of limestone in each drop. When the drop strikes the floor the water drains off and the fraction of limestone is deposited right on top of the previous fraction of limestone that had been deposited from the previous drop of water.

Over the centuries, the fraction of limestone on top of the fraction of limestone becomes very, very large and – viola! – a massive stalagmite rises from the cave floor.

And of all things, stalagmites have helped me to understand better the Risen Lord Jesus and what He wishes to do for me and for you.

You see my sins, from first to last, have fallen to the bottom of my soul like drops of water falling from the ceiling to the floor in limestone caves. Every sin I commit is like a drop of water falling. Now the vast majority of sins have been drained off, thanks to Confession and Mass and prayer.

But there are a few sins in which my repentance has not been perfect, and with these there remained a fraction sin in my soul like a fraction of limestone on the cave floor.

There is a fraction of sin deposited, for example, when I am “mostly” sorry, when I “kind of” want to be forgiven, when I “sort of” wish to change, or [like Thomas] when I need to have God prove it to me on my terms and in my way.

In these instances, a fraction of sin remains and is deposited on my soul atop the previous fraction of sin – mind you, not because God’s mercy is lacking but rather because my repentance is conditioned.

This is exactly what is meant by a “hardened heart” in the Bible. When the Bible describes those who have a “hardened heart”, this is a heart of stone that we make ourselves. Small infractions like compromising the truth, lingering in doubt, loving with conditions, wanting to settle a score all harden one’s heart.

How can I be free? How can I break the hardening in my own heart?

The only solvent that can remove the incrustation caused by my imperfect repentance is the Risen Lord Jesus. He alone wields the power to pulverize the spiritual stalagmite that I have created in my soul.

For me these days, the expression prayed during Mass right before we receive Holy Communion has taken on an immensely personal meaning. The priest holds high the Body of Christ and says “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” His is the only power that can set me free and make it right so that I truly become the man, Christian [and in my case] and priest whom I have been created by God to be.

How can I be free?

The solution lies with God and daring to allow the Risen Lord Jesus really to be the Lord of my life.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter is recorded as having said, “Repent and be baptized...for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). From God’s point of view, repentance is united perfectly with the Sacrament of Baptism.

And for those of us long since baptized, we experience the forgiveness of our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We truly are given such a great gift in this holy Sacrament! It is here – in the Sacrament of Reconciliation – that we encounter the Risen Lord Jesus who, with the unparalleled power of His Spirit, removes every last fraction of our sin so long as we allow Him to do so.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is the place in which pardon is proclaimed – *God’s pardon* - celebrated and certified by the Church. Today’s Gospel chronicles the institution of this holy Sacrament by Jesus who says to the apostles, “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them” (John 20:23).

How can I be free from whatever fractions of sin are my soul?

How can I be free from whatever it is that is keeping me from drawing closer to heaven?

How can I be free from whatever is preventing the best version of myself from being known and experienced every day?

Accept the Risen Lord Jesus’ peace and forgiveness.