

Sun 9A

There is a story told about this guy who was arrested for car theft. He was always ready to pull a stunt to get him out of a jam. To help his pleas of innocence, he stripped off his shirt to expose a tattooed chest with the words 'crime does not pay' written across it. The judge, who was convinced of the man's guilt, remarked that the tattoos made the man even guiltier, because there was such a wide gap between what he did and what he proclaimed.

I suppose this side of the grave there will always be some gap between faith and practice. However, a true believer will always be trying to narrow this gap - otherwise it's a faith built on sand. You'll remember a few years ago certain buildings in China were reduced to rubble when a medium sized earthquake struck the area because they were built on very shaky foundations. If our faith doesn't run deep and inform all that I do it will easily crumble as well when tested in the crucible of life.

Christian faith is more than a feeling or a pious sentiment, For instance praying for people sounds hollow if it is within my capacity to visit them and I never do.

Reconciliation between people should extend beyond words and lead to gestures of forgiveness. In the gospel Jesus says: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, not the peace talkers.

When repenting of my sins, time should not be wasted on indulging in self-loathing but on deciding on ways in which I can turn my back on sin, make reparation for them and move on. St John Paul 11 often said 'it's not the falling but getting up again after a fall which pleases Our Lord.

Converting sorrow for sin into action also begs the question: 'What can I do to make up for past sins. How can I make good the damage which I've caused? For instance if I have thrashed the good name of another, how can I discretely make up for

what I've done? Should I deliberately look for opportunities to flag up their good qualities which may far outnumber their faults? Should I take on a secret fast as a penance?

In the past non-Catholics used make fun of us for regularly running to confession to 'clean the slate' only to go out and do the same thing again. Absolution from the priest was always 'on tap' and our usual 'shopping list' had very little 'to do's' or calls to action at the end of it.

Or, religion can be a one hour a week exercise when I put on my 'Sunday best' for outward appearances but then get back into the 'real world' on Monday morning. I half remember an old rhyme which went something like this:

*Mr A, he went to Mass
He never missed a Sunday
But Mr A he went to Hell
For what he did on Monday.*

And it is often good to remind ourselves that at the Last Judgement whether we stand at Christ's left or right side will be determined on whether 'we put flesh on the bones of our repentance or not'.

*I was hungry and you fed me
I was sick and you visited me
I was a stranger and you made me welcome.
There is no trace of pious sentiment here but only a life-giving
faith in action.*