

3B

People often talk about the first few lines of a play as setting the scene for what will follow. The same could be applied to the ministry of Jesus. His opening words are: "the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Good News'. This sets the scene for what's to come. His mission was to usher in the Kingdom of God but if we're to be part of it, on-going repentance needs to be high on our agenda.

There are only two types of people in the gospel the contrite of heart like say Zacchaeus or Mary Magdalene and the unrepentant who hardened their hearts against Jesus and had him crucified.

Now, repentance is something we could easily put on the back burner. For Catholics it is normally followed by a confession of sins to a priest in private confession. This is mandatory for serious sins. But we must prepare for this moment by a detailed analysis of the way we live our lives against the backdrop of the commandments and gospel teaching.

Repentance affects the core of our being. It's how we understand reality - whether we view others as objects to be used or people to be loved. It involves seeing everyone as our brothers or sisters in Christ and if need be to change our approaches toward certain people. It involves following Jesus faithfully not just as a fair-weather friends but also when our faith in God is stretched.

Repentance means putting aside cynicism which is a sort of unacknowledged atheism. It's calling a sin a sin and not camouflaging it or muddying the water for our own convenience. Like we said two Sundays ago, real conversion of heart will mean that in making moral decisions we will have recourse to objective moral standards as outlined in Scripture, and taught in the catechism and not act merely on personal feelings or on the advice of people with limited knowledge of our catholic beliefs on many moral issues.

The first apostles didn't know what they were letting themselves in for when they left their nets to follow Jesus. The question is what do we need to let go of in order to become more ardent followers of His?

Unlike evangelical Christians, who believe repentance is a 'one off born again' experience, we Catholics are much more realistic and believe that it is on-going through life. Some people will try putting us off listening to

God or our conscience. The Tempter told Adam and Eve, for instance, that if they eat the forbidden fruit they will not die but on the contrary become God's equal, knowing good and evil. They swallowed the bait and were banished from Paradise. When our friends tell us that something which used to be a sin is not a sin anymore, in our gullibility or naivety we may be persuaded to believe them. They're playing the Tempter's game and repentance is not part of his agenda. Our Lord says that 'we must be wise as serpents and simple as doves'

Only the contrite of heart will enter His Kingdom. Ongoing repentance is good for us, good for our families and indeed good for society at large. Without it, our following of Jesus will fall short of the standards set before us in the gospel.