

REPENTANCE

People often talk about the first few lines of a play as setting the scene for what will follow. This 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 establish the Kingdom of God but if we're to be part of it, on-going repentance needs to be high up on our agenda.

There are only two types of people in the gospel - those who turn towards the light like say Peter and Mary Magdalene and those who prefer to remain in darkness like for instance Judas and Herod. It was the unrepentant who put Jesus on the Cross it was the contrite of heart who followed Him.

Now repentance is something we could easily put on the back burner. For Catholics it is a vital part of the build-up to private confession which for most catholics has gone out of fashion. But we must prepare for this moment by a thorough inventory of our lives in the light of the gospel.

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 brother or sister in Christ and if need be to change our attitudes toward those who would not naturally be our friends? It means not giving up on God and prayer even when things are going a bit pear-shaped in our personal, social or family life. It's following Jesus faithfully when most others would distanced themselves from him.

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 in order to suit ourselves. Like we said two Sundays ago, real conversion of heart will mean that in making moral decisions we will have recourse to objective ethical standards as outlined in Scripture

and taught by the sacred Magisterium of the Church and not rely solely on our own personal feelings or views.

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 closer friends of His?

Unlike some evangelical Christians, who believe repentance is a 'one off born again' experience, we Catholics believe that it is on-going until the day we die. Some people will try and impede us from changing aspects of our lives and give us every reason why we shouldn't listen 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 driven from the garden of Paradise. When our friends tell us that something which used to be a sin is not a sin anymore, refuse to believe them. They're playing the Tempter's game and repentance is not part of his agenda.

Only the contrite of heart will enter His Kingdom. Sorrow for sin is good for us, good for our families and indeed good for society at large. Without it, our following of Jesus is going nowhere.