

The contrite of heart

People often talk about the first Act of a play as setting the scene for what follows. It also applies to Scripture.

Jesus opens his ministry with the words: 'The time has come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand, repent and believe in the Good News'

Repentance means becoming free of sin and growing in love. If one year from now I'm still committing the same sins, then the conclusion could be drawn that I'm not taking repentance seriously and I'm not taking God at His word either. The late Holy Father said that one of the problems facing society today is that people have lost a sense of sin. We Catholics were once accused of being guilt ridden but the pendulum has now swung to the other extreme where we scarcely acknowledge guilt at all. Repentance sorts out genuine Catholics from those who are merely playing at it.

Repentance is calling a sin a sin and not **camouflaging it** or muddying the water in order to suit ourselves. It's the constant summons of the Gospel. Unacknowledged sin blocks our way to the Kingdom.

Unlike our **evangelical friends**, who believe repentance is a 'one off' experience, we Catholics believe that it is an ongoing process until the day we die. Some people will try and keep us from changing certain things in our lives and give us every reason why we shouldn't. The enemies of Jesus do their level best to silence Him **because he kept on at them to change** or they would never see the Kingdom. He told them that they would die in their sin.

The Kingdom of God is close at hand. We distance ourselves from His Kingdom if ongoing repentance is not part of our lives. It's up to us to make sure that it is.

QUESTIONS

1. *If Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, where does the Church fit into the picture?*

2. *Some say, often cynically, 'a leopard never changes its spots' when referring to someone whom they believe will never change for the better. Has the group ever come across people who have altered their life style in response to the gospel or because they have been challenged by their family? Discuss.*

3. *People often like to think of themselves these days as 'liberal Catholics' as opposed to 'conservative Catholics'. What might they mean by this? Shouldn't all Catholics believe the same things? Discuss.*

4. *Is it politically incorrect to talk about SIN anymore? Should we call it by another more appealing name? Are people often more sinned against than sinning? Discuss*

5. *There is 'good guilt' and 'bad guilt'. How can we distinguish between the two? Discuss*