

Quinquagesima Sunday (2 Sparrows)

"When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away the things of a child."

1. Last Sunday we reflected on how a certain Doppelgänger literature form seems to have proliferated after the French Revolution even to our own day. Doppelgänger in the sense of an evil twin or double... an alter ego, an inner demon rising up to impersonate, as it were, the good man in us... rising up uncontrolled to commit various sins. As Catholics, we know that this Doppelgänger is not someone else ...but rather the fallen nature present in man... it is the Old Adam that needs to die so that our fallen human nature can be remade completely in the image and likeness of the New Adam.
2. As an example of this Doppelgänger literary form, last time we mentioned Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Another example is found in Charles Dickens' novel, *The Tale of Two Cities*... that begins in a sort of Doppelgänger manner: "*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...*" The two main characters are all but identical twins—Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay. Many have noted that they seem to be doppelgängers, even a pair "of characters that together, represent one psychological persona in the narrative." Darnay is worthy and respectable but dull (at least to most readers), Carton, on the other hand, is disreputable... alcoholic... dissolute... but magnetic and easily to identify with.
3. Recall how the story ends with Sydney Carton switching places with Darnay so that he can go free to be with Lucie Manette (the woman they both love) while Sydney dies. Given what Dickens was going through at the time (struggling to overcome an illicit attraction to young lady), it is obvious to many that Carton and Darnay together embody the psyche of Dickens himself. After all, Carton and Darnay together shared his own

initials... C. D. In any case, this same idea has been repeated over and over to our own day in a variety of ways.

4. Sad to say, since the revolutions of the late 18th Century and beyond have upset our world... with Atheism replacing Theism, Humanism replacing Christianity... man no longer considers the reality of this Old Adam inside of us all as something worth acting upon. Thus, the various artists feel compelled to project what is happening to them in some story or on some screen. Since they are not allowed to talk about the Old Man Adam...they put him on display for all to see.
5. Yet, as we discussed last time, Our Lord and His saints take this problem very seriously. It is intimately connected to Original Sin and has much to do with why Christ became man and dwelt among us... why He is going up to Jerusalem to die for us. The Doppelganger problem has been addressed by God...and He has provided the solution (starting with Baptism). Put the old Adam to death! He must go! There shall be two in one field, two in one bed, two grinding at the mill, but only one shall be taken up, flying to its heaven... and it will not be the old man Adam. Those who insist on denying his presence or clinging to him will have to live the Doppelganger dual life...one of division and discord for all eternity in the deep confines of the earth... that is, in hell.
6. Lent is the Church's way of encouraging us to engage anew in mortal combat with this Old Man inside. Thus, we have provided you with a worksheet to help you take this seriously.
7. Continuing with this same theme today, consider for a moment another saying of His Majesty that seems to touch upon this Doppelganger problem and how to overcome it. First He says, *"fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell."* Then immediately He says: *"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?"* (Matt 10:28-29). Who should we fear? Those who do not want to fight the duplicity in man... those who act like all is well... those who allow the Old Adam to live on and even grow stronger... end by killing both body and soul in hell. As the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde shows, we should also fear those who look to worldly ways to solve spiritual problems... seeking science (e.g., medicine and

drugs) to suppress the old man Adam... but only end up making him stronger.

8. Still there is more here as St. Thomas Aquinas points out, namely that the two sparrows passage is a reference to the fourteenth chapter of Leviticus, wherein the rite of a leper is detailed...which in part reads:
9. "And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: This is the rite of a leper, when he is to be cleansed. He shall be brought to the priest: Who going out of the camp, when he shall find that the leprosy is cleansed, shall command him that is to be purified, to offer for himself two living sparrows... and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop. And he shall command one of the sparrows to be immolated in an earthen vessel over living waters. But the other that is alive, he shall dip, with the cedar wood, and the scarlet and the hyssop, in the blood of the sparrow that is immolated: Wherewith he shall sprinkle him that is to be cleansed seven times, that he may be rightly purified. And he shall let go the living sparrow, that it may fly into the field."
10. The symbolism here is very rich. The physical malady of leprosy has often been seen by the Fathers as symbolizing the state of sin in man... it is the Old Adam rotting and decaying from the growth of the seven deadly sins. To get back into the City of God, the leper not only must be cleansed in his body (that is healed of the physical malady) but must be cleansed in his soul. This requires spiritual remedies... and that is what the sparrows, wood, scarlet and hyssop represent along with the living waters. The two sparrows can be taken to mean our divided nature... the old man and the new man. One of the sparrows must die...be killed for the other to go free. This can only be done in union with Christ... thus, the living sparrow was tied, or connected to the wood of the Cross and the hyssop by the scarlet cord...dipped into the living waters... flowing from the side of Christ making Baptism and the other Sacraments possible. The Leper is sprinkled with the water and blood seven times to conquer the seven deadly sins completely... such that the other sparrow is then released... to fly unto the field of heaven. The death of the one enables the other to fly free!
11. This is what Lent is about. Tying ourselves to the wood of the Cross with the blood red cord (in prayer, fasting and almsgiving)... to engage the old Adam in a contest unto the death... aided by the grace given from

the Blood and Water flowing from the side of Christ in renewing our Baptismal vows and receiving the Sacraments devoutly... ALL so that we can fly free on Easter.

12. The freed sparrow prefigures the fruits of a good Lent. We are cut loose more and more from the bondage of this world... from the seven deadly sins... Thus, another way to look at Lent ... it is practicing for this future flight (many saints depicted as doves flying up to heaven at the death of their bodies...e.g., St. Scholastica)... Lent is practicing for Heaven. Here is how...
13. (i) In St. Matthew's Gospel, we hear His Majesty say: *"in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven."* To practice for heaven, all should live chastely according to their state in life. But even those who are married, the Roman Catechism has this to say about Lent: "But as every blessing is to be obtained from God by holy prayer, the faithful are also to be taught sometimes to abstain from the marriage debt, in order to devote themselves to prayer. Let the faithful understand that (this religious continence), according to the proper and holy injunction of our predecessors, is particularly to be observed ... during the solemn fast of Lent. Thus will they find the blessings of marriage to be daily increased by an abundance of divine grace; and living in the pursuit of piety, they will not only spend this life in peace and tranquility, but will also repose in the true and firm hope, which confoundeth not, of arriving, through the divine goodness, at the possession of that life which is eternal."
14. (ii) In heaven, all share the same reward in possessing God and all are enriched by each other as well. Love shares all. Love empties itself of everything such that all are enriched. Thus, even in this life the faithful are called to live not for themselves or this world... but to use their goods for God's glory and the good of His Church. Almsgiving is practicing for heaven.
15. (iii) Those in heaven do not sleep... but are always praising, loving and serving God. To practice for the heavenly life, we need to rise up early and pray ...and repeat our efforts throughout the day. Praying is practicing for heaven!

16. (iv) No one in heaven eats anything. Even those who have bodies in heaven do not eat. Thus, fasting is a way to practice for heaven. By fighting the battle of the belly, the Resurrection takes a deeper hold upon our hearts, making it more and more receptive of God's heavenly food of light and grace. The fasting rules of the Church are at an all time minimum... and people still complain! Let us not bemoan the little we have to do, but rather try to add more times of fasting. In any case, please do not prepare for Lent by indulging on Tuesday. That is a big mistake...
17. (v) Finally, the saints in heaven are happily fixed in God. They no longer make choices. They have arrived! They possess God! They see only God! What more is there? We can practice this now by putting God first in all things and cutting down what we feast our eyes upon. Our motto ought to be "all for Jesus with a smile" or "for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls!" We must also practice fixing our wills in God by adhering completely to the teachings of the Church and all her traditional disciplines, come what may. Thus, why not stop watching things on some screen this Lent and spend more time studying the faith?
18. When embracing Lent in this way, slowly but surely, little by little, the old Adam will be left behind... and at his death, with the help of God's grace, we will be like that little sparrow... free to fly up and be at rest with God forever and ever. "When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away."