
Whatever Happened To Sin?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Whatever Became of Sin? was the poignant title of a little book written (by Karl Menninger) back in 1973. In fact, like a few other books, the title itself was referenced far more often than the contents of the book itself. The title says it all. Why don't we talk about sin? What happened to conversation about sin? Have we re-defined it, analyzed it, avoided it, out of existence?

When I read Psalm 56 this past week, I lingered on its opening verse: "My enemies are hounding me; all day long they assault and oppress me." Who are my enemies, I wondered. Well, they are certainly not people. Sure, there are always some who are angry at me, or who disagree with me, or who simply don't like me. But they are hardly my enemies.

Too often these days, we are too quick to assign the title, "enemy." Of course, we rarely express that designation. Rather, we keep that title inside ourselves. We think to ourselves, "You cross me here, and you are my enemy. I will fight you at every turn." To designate another person as an "enemy," sets up an impermeable barrier between myself and that person, a barrier that even the Holy Spirit has difficulty burning through.

I believe that Jesus spoke about loving our enemies (Matthew 5.44), and praying for our enemies, just so that we could quickly grow out of those antagonistic relationships. The kingdom of God consists of former antagonists who are now reconciled. No one person is meant to last long with the designation "enemy."

Who, then, are our enemies? When the Psalms speak about hating our enemies, who should we imagine? Who should we hate? (Psalm 139.21-22 says, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? I hate them with a perfect hatred; I count them among my enemies.").

The answer is rather simple. It is too simple. Our enemies are the seven deadly sins. Whatever happened to them? They have been variously described through the ages, but we would do well to remind ourselves of their presence even today. They are: Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, and Sloth. I capitalize those words when I write them, because they are truly proper names. They are real.

Not one among us is absolutely free of those enemies. Those enemies reside in us; and it is they who hound us through the day. When we think we are being assaulted by the comments and actions of others, look again. Where does the wound really come from? It comes from inside us. It comes from our own sin.

It is our Pride that was wounded. It was Covetousness that then made us Envious of another person around us. It was Lust that distracted us from the soul of another. It was Gluttony that made us so sluggish and sullen this morning. It is Anger that scares us away from intimate conversations. It is Sloth (known also as Dejection, Melancholia, Indifference) that paralyzes us.

Who are my enemies? My enemies are not the sins of others, the shortfalls of others, or even the actions of others. My enemies are those realities inside me that keep me from enjoying the grace and peace of God. I probably have more than seven of them, and they sure are deadly. "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" exclaimed an exasperated St. Paul (Romans 7.24). He answered immediately, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Yes, our enemies are real; but they are not where we think they are. They are inside us. Thank God, however, that also inside us is a reality far stronger than sin. That reality is Grace. Grace, too, is a proper name. Grace is the true presence of God, who overcomes our enemies, who overwhelms them with a love beyond our understanding. That Grace, too, is inside us. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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