

The Near Occasion of Sin!

Now I can hear you, the reader, saying, “Near occasion of sin? Man, what about sin?” Why talk about the near occasion of sin when we are not talking about sin itself? If the very mentioning of sin is culturally unacceptable today, **the near occasion of sin** would be considered completely idiotic. So why write on a subject that is apparently of no importance to Christians inside or outside the Church?

This type of thinking may seem logical. However, I believe that with a little scrutiny, we may see something that at first glance we might have missed. Something that is so reasonable and logical that we don’t see it staring us square in the face.

Bishop Sheen once made the statement that sin isn’t the worst thing in the world. It is the denial of sin. I truly believe the good bishop was right. I also believe that his concept of sin and the world’s denial of it, is much more prevalent in our day than it was in his own.

A Warning!

Yes, the near occasion of sin is a warning. The Church, good mother that she is, is warning us of the dangers which we are heading toward. As children, we are often unaware of the many seductive traps that the enemy has set for us. We are too busy to bother because we are having a good time and not really interested in anything but the good time. We are too busy to see the dangers because we just want to have fun; we want to enjoy life to its fullest. After all, we are good Catholics — we go to church, we say our prayers, we are even personal friends with Father. He comes to our house and eats meals with us. We are good Catholics, not perfect, but who is? Yep, we are good Catholics.

When the Church ceases to warn her children to avoid the near occasion of sin, the children fall, the children sin, and the children suffer. Life becomes extremely burdensome, and things are just not right. We might pretend, overlook, deny, but we know that we are not right with God and ourselves. The process of denying sin has begun—and the denial of God and His church is soon to follow.

Foresight!

Foresight is essential in avoiding the near occasion of sin. One who has foresight is able to see ahead and avoid a peril.

Let’s take a situation where a young man is going on a date with his girl. If he is a moral young man, who has foresight, he will avoid being alone with her for extended periods of time. He will avoid being too intimate. He avoids getting into a situation where his passions will be aroused. He knows it is a lot easier to avoid sin prior to the emotional buildup, than it is in the heat of the passionate emotion.

The husband who allows himself to be placed in a situation where he becomes overly friendly with a woman, who is not his wife, has allowed himself to be put in the near occasion of sin. It would be easier for him to be faithful, if he does not allow himself the occasion to be alone with her. Yes, it is quite difficult for a man to trash his marriage vows if he avoids private encounters with any woman who is not his wife. It can be said that before a sin is committed, the near occasion of sin must take place. One’s emotions are more easily kept under control if we avoid putting ourselves in the heat of a sinful situation. Yes, avoiding the near occasion of sin is nothing more than a virtuous person using good foresight in an effort to remain virtuous.

Television

Often parents will allow their children to watch programs on TV that promote fornication, adultery, along with language and actions that would be completely disgusting for almost anyone with a functioning conscience. These parents are allowing their children to be placed in the near occasion of sin, and in some instances, sin itself. Yes, the TV can be a near occasion of sin when not properly monitored. TV, with all its benefits, has caused people to lose their good moral values by a constant, day in and day out, devaluing of decency, while at the same time making indecency a normal way of life. Furthermore, it is making the immoral and perverted the norm.

Though individual parishes throughout the United States have been silent on this, the Church has always

taught that to deliberately put oneself or another in the near occasion of sin is in itself sinful. It is something that is unbecoming of a child of God who is trying to save his own soul and aid others to do the same. This is sometimes hard for the average person to understand, since the average person thinks and acts like the world he lives in. God and the things associated with God are to the worldly, more or less fringe endeavors, things that one does on Sunday or on special occasions. In the eyes of the worldly person, these things are never a way of life that demands something from him, such as a certain moral value or lifestyle. Religion, in the mind of the worldly person, is more on the lines of a social organization. You try to make the meetings and follow the spirit of the organization, but it doesn't dictate moral beliefs to you.

However, there are those who believe that God is the author of all life. They believe that living in accordance to His precepts is the best way to assure happiness in this life as well as in the next. God is the center of their life. (Theo Centric.) As Christians, these people strive to apply their Christian principles to everyday living. Many start their day by saying a morning offering, and end their day with night prayers. The hours between are filled with little prayers and actions that remind them of who they are and who God is. They are careful to remember which position is theirs and which is God's. For the committed Christian, the near occasion of sin is something they definitely want to avoid.

Staying out of the reach of sin for the committed Christian, is much like staying out of the reach of a mad dog on a leash. As long as we keep our distance, we are safe, but when we start moving toward the mad dog and come within his reach, we are asking for trouble.

Worldly people would look at committed Christians as people who are missing out on life. People who just don't know how to have a good time. This notion is, in reality, the furthest thing from the truth. Christians who keep themselves out of the near occasion of sin are the happiest of people. These Christians know and understand the reasoning behind what the Church teaches. This, in fact, is what gives them the desire and courage to stay out of situations that the worldly consider exciting. These Christians are well aware of the fun and excitement that exist in sinful pleasures. They are also well aware of the dangers lurking in those particular persons, places, or things that the Church has cautioned them to avoid. They also can see the heartache and suffering that a sinful lifestyle brings about. These problems are usually unseen and completely missed by the worldly who, as Sacred Scripture warns, have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not (Jer.5:21). Their indifference toward God has blinded them to the realities of life, though in their mind they are convinced that it is the loyal Christian who is naive. We are here speaking of Christians who are of sound mind and understand the teachings of Holy Mother Church. We are well aware of those poor souls who tend to be fanatical in their religious practices, and do not heed the directions of the Church. These people, no doubt, are sincere; they are just sincerely wrong, and often fare out in life not much better than the worldly.

Conclusion

If Catholics are to once more see the value of avoiding the near occasion of sin, they must see the great horror in sin itself. As human beings, we learn the value of things more by what people do than what they say. We must always remember our Lord's warning: "It is not those who say, 'Lord, Lord,' but he who does the will of the Father..."(Mat.7:21). So what is really needed today are Catholics who, by word and example, teach their children that sin is truly something horrid and unacceptable. They do this best by not only eliminating sin from their life, but by eliminating the near occasion of sin, as much as possible from their life and the life of their children. This is something that any logical person can understand, even if they are not a Christian.

In the Our Father, we ask God to *Lead us not into temptation* (Mat. 6:13). However, God will not stop us if we deliberately choose to put ourselves into **the near occasion of sin**. God gives us the freedom to choose. It is truly sad when our actions are a contradiction to our prayers, thus exposing our insincerity. Our prayers, if truly sincere, should be followed by actions that correspond to the desired results of our prayers.