



Last Sunday we heard the first recorded words of Jesus in St. John's Gospel: "What are you looking for?" This Sunday we hear the first recorded words of Jesus in Mark's Gospel: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent**, and **believe** in the gospel." If we think about it, Jesus' first words in Mark's Gospel answer the question posed in John's. What are we looking for? – Fulfillment. How do we get there? – Repent and believe in the gospel. This raises the question: what is the relationship between fulfillment, repentance, and belief (faith)?

First of all, and most obviously, repentance and faith are prerequisites for fulfillment in the kingdom of God. But what is the relationship between repentance and faith? Authentic faith entails not only mental belief or consent to the teaching of the Gospel, but in addition, it entails love and commitment to God: a commitment to be faithful to Jesus and His message – the Gospel. Faith without works is dead. Can we have faith without repentance (i.e. renunciation of sin and Satan)? Louis Bouyer answers the question of the relationship between repentance and faith as follows:

"Renunciation comes first as the necessary prerequisite to positive commitment. A man cannot belong to Christ if he continues to belong to Satan. True enough, Christ alone can free us from Satan finally and completely, but He will never free us unless we first consent to abandon Satan and to pay the price necessary to do so." Bouyer, *Intro to Spirituality*, p. 166.

So, repentance precedes commitment; yet, at the same time, only by faith can we repent:

"Commitment to Christ, with all that it implies, will not be concretely realized except in and by real renunciation in act of Satan, his works and his pomps. And equally, this renunciation is not possible except by reason of this commitment." Ibid, p. 167.

In summary, repentance and faith must go hand-in-hand – you cannot have one without the other. They are in effect, two sides of the same coin. Therefore, just as we need to study, pray, and do charitable works to grow in faith, so we also need to foster a spirit of repentance to grow in faith.

What does it mean to "repent"? The ancient liturgical formula for repentance, still used today, includes the rejection of 1) Satan, 2) all his works and 3) all his empty promises ("pomps"). To reject Satan is to reject the very principle of sin – the rejection of pride, self-exaltation, arrogance and self-righteousness which prevent us from hearing and submitting to the truth of God's Word which comes to us through Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching of the Catholic Church. To renounce Satan's works is to renounce all the particular sins he has enthused in us and in the world. To renounce Satan's "empty promises" is to renounce actions and things which may be good in themselves, but can become false gods, idols, when they wrongly take priority over more important things such as the worship of God, prayer, dutiful labor and/or loving time and attention to family, friends, neighbors and those in need.

Jesus announces to us today that the kingdom of God and ultimate fulfillment are close at hand. It is reserved for those who repent and believe in the gospel. Today is the day of salvation. Today we must renew our belief – our commitment to Jesus. Today we must acknowledge the sin we see around us, and most importantly, the sin we have embraced in our own hearts, so that we can forcefully repent by actually renouncing Satan, all his works, and all his empty promises. Ironically, we must speak to the Devil in order to find fulfillment in the kingdom of God!

Your Servant in Christ,
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