

March 2023 Reflection

It's On Us

God's accessible forgiveness should inspire us toward a virtuous life, but it sometimes weakens us into greater sin. We know we can be forgiven, we've already committed one sin, might as well commit another.

If you think God gets frustrated with this line of thought, today's verse before the Gospel will verify your suspicions. "Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed, says the Lord, and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit" (Ezek 18:31).

In this verse, God does not say, "I love you," or "I forgive you," or even "I'm here to help," as he does in so many other places. In this verse, God does not talk about himself. God talks about us. God does not exhort us toward a better life. God commands it.

God can do only so much. We have to cast away our crimes. We have to make ourselves a new heart. We have to adopt a new spirit. God only points the way.

This verse from Ezekiel prepares for a Gospel in which Jesus says that our righteousness must surpass "that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Matt 5:20). The same Gospel acclamation appears twice more during Lent: Tuesday of the Second Week, where later in Matthew Jesus again criticizes "the scribes and Pharisees" (23:1-12); and Saturday of the Fifth Week, when religious leaders plot to take Jesus' life (John 11:45-56).

On this Friday of Lent, we abstain from meat to show our repentance. But we must take a further step: cast our crimes away to make for ourselves a new heart.

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