

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

1st Sunday of Lent | For Sunday, March 1, 2020

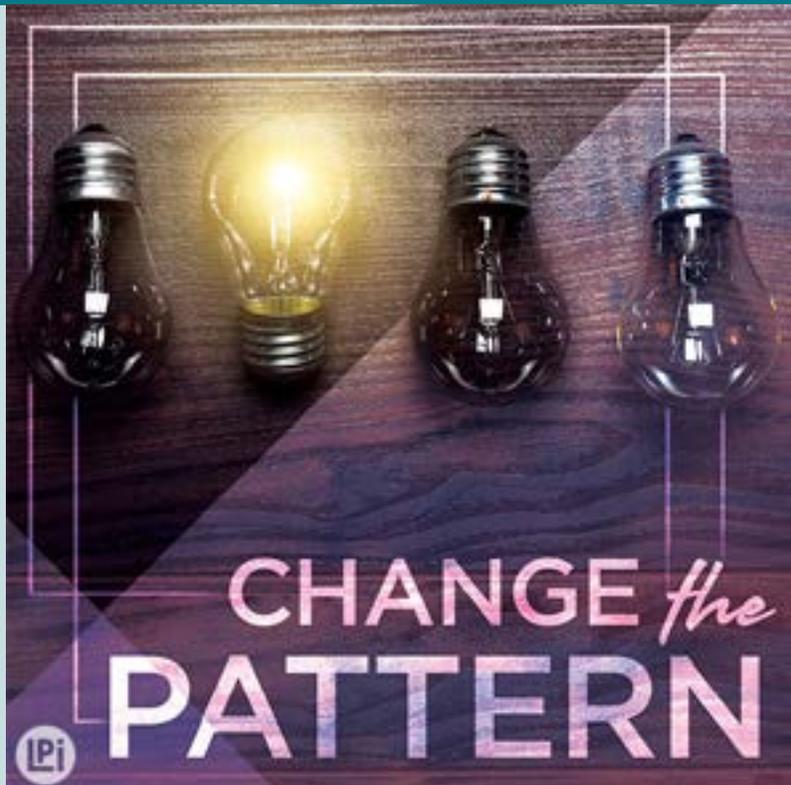
An Anatomy of Sin

Written by Br. John Marmion Villa

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

**Romans 5:12-19 OR
5:12, 17-19**

Matthew 4:1-11



Kichijiro is a supporting figure in Martin Scorsese's 2016 drama/history movie, [Silence](#). In the movie, Kichijiro is a Japanese guide who serves and accompanies the French Jesuits, Frs. Rodriguez and Garupe. The Jesuits go to Japan on a mission to find their lost mentor, Fr. Ferreira, who has been rumored to have committed apostasy. Kichijiro is a cowardly drunkard who denies being Christian and betrays his visitors to the Japanese officials, only to return to Fr. Rodriguez, begging to have his confession heard. This cycle happens a number of times throughout the movie.

From Kichijiro's character in the movie, we can surmise what some might call the "anatomy of sin." Sin is mysterious and predictable, depending on how you look at it. We can come to understand what the early Church Fathers have described as a four- fold path: Suggestion, Conjunction, Acceptance, and Captivity. In Suggestion, a thought or image, desire or feeling is presented to the soul. (For the sake of clarity, I'll just use the word "thought" to encompass all these sentiments.) Some of these thoughts draw the soul towards God, but not all. The next step, Conjunction, is the interchange that we have with that thought. We can entertain the thought with delight or repulsion. Up to this point, these thoughts can be temptations towards sin, but we have not yet committed it, either in thought or in action. Acceptance follows, wherein the thought is embraced by the will, and a plan for carrying out a corresponding action ensues. Up until this point, the person — you and I — have the will power to make course corrections on the thoughts which have been presented to us. But if we linger in this acceptance, we become enslaved — or held Captive, the fourth stage — to the thought and its expression, from which there is no escape of our own volition.

Some of you might be thinking to yourself, “Gee, this sounds like a summary of an addiction recovery course.” Well, in a certain sense, yes. This approach does fit in that arena. But it also applies to our spiritual lives, at least I know it does for me! This cycle helps me to understand why it is that when I go to confession, I usually have the same set of sins. I have often reflected at how my life can look like Kichijiro’s: the fears I can have about the loneliness of virtue, the anxieties about wanting to save my reputation among people with conflicting ideas, the need for unconditional acceptance without embracing the consequences of my actions, etc. When external events trigger these thoughts within me, there are predictable outcomes, none of which I am proud.

The wisdom of the Church gives us six weeks to reflect on how we have this tendency to prefer the fleeting pleasure or power of sin over the goodness and mercy of the Father. This is where sin is a mystery to us: why, when given the choice to pursue goodness and virtue, do we instead choose pleasure and vice? Are we even mindful or aware of the diversity of thoughts that we have throughout the day? Are we conscious at how our actions and speech are dictated by those interior thoughts? [St. Isaac the Syrian](#) gives us a hope-filled insight here: “the inflamed thoughts are uprooted and turned to flight by *constant occupation of the mind with God*. This is a sword that puts them to death... Whoever always thinks about God drives the demons away from himself and pulls up the seeds of their malice.”

PRAYER

Father,
You know that I don’t do so well when I look inward,
so I’m going to stop.
I am relying on You to point out to me the things that I need to see.

I promise to stay in Your Word.
You said that Your Word was a sword—so please
use it to cut me deeply.
Expose those things in me that are not pleasing to You.
But in doing so, please give me the grace to forsake them.

I also promise to come before You daily. Your presence is like a fire.
Please burn from me those things that are displeasing to You.
Melt my heart until it becomes like the heart of Jesus.
Be merciful to me in these things.

I also promise to stay in fellowship with Your people.
You said that iron sharpens iron.
I expect You to anoint the “wounds of a friend” to bring me to my
senses when I’m being resistant toward You.

Please use these tools to shape my life until Jesus alone is seen in me.
I believe that You have given me Your heart and mind.
By Your grace I am a new creation.
I want that reality to be seen,
that the name of Jesus will be held in highest honor.

While we cannot know the interior dimension of a fictitious movie character, we can examine our own interior with the wisdom of the Church during this season. Maybe we can practice being mindful of our thoughts during this time. Maybe we can learn to be more discerning of what we allow our thoughts to entertain. Maybe, during this Lenten season, we can learn to think more about God throughout the day and let His thoughts become our thoughts so our actions and words might better reflect His.

Br. John Marmion Villa