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Holiness of the Pharisees

by: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio



Radio talk show hosts make a living on it. Show after show, they bring before our eyes stupid, unjust and wasteful situations in order to produce outrage. We love to listen and get ourselves all worked up. Our indignation keeps us tuned in and the show's ratings high.



It's easy to focus on the outrageous things that others do. It's easy to clamor that this intolerable situation must come to an end **now**. For to say this requires little or nothing from us—our demand is that **others** do something about it, that others mobilize and take action, that **others** be set straight.

This is “holiness of the Pharisees” mentioned by Jesus in Mat 5:20 that he says we must go beyond. They were so preoccupied in removing the splinter from the eye of others that they missed the log in their own.

When it comes to confronting **our own** sinfulness and foolishness, we, like the Pharisees, tend to lose the sense of urgency. We procrastinate, rationalize, and change the subject. That's the very points of one of the hardest sayings of this Sunday's gospel. “If your hand is your difficulty, *cut it off!* Better for you to enter life maimed than to keep both hands and enter Gehenna” (Mat 5:30).



The Lord is not encouraging self-mutilation here. He is rather calling for aggressive action, even action that hurts. Of course, our hands, feet, and eyes are just bodily organs. Of themselves, they can't cause us to sin. But some places that our feet take us, some things we do with our hands, some things we focus our eyes upon damage our relationship with God. Going to a particular club may not be in itself sinful, but for me, it may be a near occasion of sin. Every person is a child of God. But hanging around with certain children of God may present an occasion of sin to me.

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We tend to try to manage it. “I’ll keep my cable subscription, but just not watch that channel.” “I’ll keep surfing the web, but just won’t visit that site.” “I’ll go the club, but stop after two drinks.”

If it works, great. But when it doesn’t, many of us go on fooling ourselves that it will—the *next* time. We keep trying half-measures, avoiding the necessary treatment because it will sting too much, cost too much.

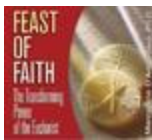


Jesus says to wake up, get real, and take aggressive action. If the internet is your problem, shut it down. If TV is your problem, turn it off. Better you go through life unplugged and offline than spend eternity in Satan’s chat room.

However, to avoid taking aggressive action against our own personal compromises with the devil, we frequently change the subject and point out the sins of the liberals, the right-wingers, the Muslims, the politicians.

Persistently, the Lord brings us back to the real issue, the issue we want to avoid. He bids us to forget about others’ issues and attend to our own . . . our own divided hearts, our own hidden hypocrisy, our own little compromises.

Fortitude, one of the four Cardinal Virtues, is not just about enduring evil and hardship for the sake of doing good. It is also about taking aggressive action against evil. If we see evil in our lives, we mustn’t tolerate it, make excuses for it, and procrastinate. We must pounce on it.



Feast of Faith DVD & Workbook

In this enlightening, four-part adult faith formation series developed for the Eucharist, Dr. D’Ambrosio offers profound reflections and practical suggestions to make the Holy Eucharist more truly the “source and summit” of our Christian experience.

Getting More Out of the Mass--Audio CD on the Eucharist

Is Christ really present in the Mass? This dynamic and entertaining talk explains what is meant by the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and how to unlock the transforming power of the Mass in your life.



The Fathers of the Church - Who They Are and Why They Matter

If you are not familiar with the Fathers of the Early Church, Dr. Marcellino D’Ambrosio, in this single, upbeat talk, full of examples and stories about some of the Church’s most intriguing personalities. Marcellino D’Ambrosio explains who people are talking about when they refer to the “Fathers of the Church” or “Early Church Fathers. Though the ranks of the fathers include a tremendous variety of cultures, locales, and personalities, there is surprising consensus that emerges from them on a variety of the most important questions of our day. In this talk, Marcellino makes clear just how much these figures have to teach us today.

