

A NOTE FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm smiling to myself because this weekend's Gospel brings me back to a homily that I gave in the late 80's, that's 1980's not 1880's. I made the remark that with the command to cut off our hand or foot or to pluck out our eye if any of these or other body parts were the occasion of sin, then heaven must be filled with only "belly buttons." This became known as the "belly button" Gospel by some of the parishioners who heard my homily that day.

There was a couple in attendance that day. The woman roared in laughter at what I was saying. I didn't recognize them but the following week the gentleman was present at Mass. He approached me at the end of the Mass to identify himself as the man who was with the women who had the belly laugh. He shared with me that he was the women's brother and that was the first time she had attended a Mass after many years of simply not coming. Her presence at Mass that day allowed her to make her peace with God. She died peacefully of cancer that following week. He just wanted to say, "thank you," to me for my homily.

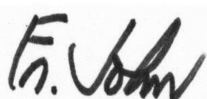
This weekend's Gospel is a clear teaching of Jesus about the reality of sin and the even harsher reality of hell, or Gehenna as he refers to it. We are living in a time of a growing rejection of the notion of sin and the belief that everyone is saved, called universal salvation. This is clearly contrary to what the Scriptures teach, and what Jesus speaks about throughout his public ministry. Pope St. John Paul II once wrote that the greatest sin of our time is the denial to believe in sin.

In order to come to an understanding of personal sin we need to be able to make a mature examination of conscience. What do the Scriptures have to say about sin? What do the teachings of the church reveal to us about sin in our lives? All of us need to examine our consciences, come to an awareness of our personal sins, and approach the sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation to place our sins before the Lord and humbly seek the absolution of the church, to which he gave the power of forgiveness.

When's the last time you went to confession? What do you believe about the reality of sin in your life? Do you approach Holy Communion worthily?

We all need to balance the reality of sin with the great teaching of Jesus and the Church that God is a God of compassionate love and mercy. God is truly just but his mercy is even greater. But his mercy is not to be taken for granted as though it doesn't matter if we sin or not, if we are sorry or not. Rather, his mercy is there in abundance for those who recognize our sinfulness and repent. On-going conversion is a part of our spiritual journey.

If you haven't been to confession in a long time, I invite you to come. If you don't remember how to go to confession the priest will be happy to assist you. But before you come, please make a serious examination of conscience so that you can most fruitfully celebrate this most precious experience of God's tender love and mercy for you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. John". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.