

**Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time C - *Jesus, I believe in your love for me. Have mercy on me, a sinner.***

October 23, 2022.

**Jesus went after big sinners - not to destroy them, but to convert them, to win them over to his friendship.** St Luke, in this Sunday's Gospel reading (18:9-14) tells us that Jesus "**addressed this parable, (the parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector went up to the temple area to pray) to those who were convinced of their own righteousness and despised everyone else.**" Those are big sinners, because their hearts are poisoned with arrogance. They look down on other people and consider themselves superior, which is exactly what the devil does. And what's worse, they don't even recognize their sinfulness. This is the kind of person that we usually try to avoid. **Are we this kind of people ourselves? Are we humble enough to admit our faults and ask for forgiveness?** Jesus tells this parable to reel arrogant sinners into his heart, to make them see the folly and ugliness of a self-centred lifestyle. He reaches out to sinners because he cares for them. Jesus wants absolutely everyone to come to his Father's house. The Catechism summarizes this truth with a beautiful sentence: **"Although man can forget God or reject him, He [God] never ceases to call every man to seek him, so as to find life and happiness"** (CCC #30).

In 1945, C.S. Lewis published a fascinating and disturbing novel called, **"The Great Divorce."** It's about a middle class Englishman who has a dream. In it, he travels first to Hell, which is depicted as a boring, grey, and unpleasant suburb where the neighbours are always gossiping. Then he gets on a bus that drops him off on the outskirts of Heaven, which is depicted as a beautiful countryside with a gigantic, magnificent castle way off in the distance. When he gets off the bus, he is met by a guide, who explains the place and the meaning of the journey. While they talk, they see many different people, and the guide explains who they are. At one point, they see a queen and her entourage. The queen herself is ravishingly beautiful. Her face glows, her movements are as graceful as a deer's, her smile is as bright as snowflakes in the sun. And she is surrounded by a crowd of admirers dressed in finery and filling the air with laughter and song. The group is heading towards the distant castle. The narrator thinks that she must have been a famous prime minister or empress. But his guide explains that on earth she was actually a very poorly educated, plain-looking maid. She spent her life scrubbing floors, washing dishes, serving everyone around her, with never a moment to herself. But through all those years, she stayed close to God in prayer, and she always looked for ways to help ease the sufferings of those around her. Like the tax collector, she accepted her humble condition, acknowledged her need for God, and trusted that in his mercy he would take care of her. And he did. She humbled herself, and, as Jesus promised, she was therefore exalted. (You can read it free if interested, only 51 pages.

<https://ia600101.us.archive.org/11/items/ebook-lewis-c-s-the-great-divorce/ebook-lewis-c-s-the-great-divorce.pdf>)

No one did more to legalize abortion in US than the famous Dr. Bernard Nathanson. In the 1960s, he and a handful of collaborators set to work to legalize abortion. They fabricated statistical studies, leveraged mass media, lobbied in Washington, and mounted a legal strategy that manipulated abused women. They used every means available, moral and immoral, to create the climate in which the Supreme Court could make its infamous "Roe vs. Wade" decision, opening the door to more than 40 million abortions that have been performed in US since 1973. Dr Nathanson tells how it happened in his 1996 book, **"The Hand of God."** And he also tells what happened after his campaign succeeded. The invention of ultrasound enabled him to see what happens inside the womb during an abortion. After that, he stopped performing abortions and became a pro-life activist. But he still couldn't sleep at night, haunted by the lives he had ended, directly and indirectly. He began to think about following in the footsteps of his grandfather and sister by committing suicide. He just couldn't live with himself; he needed to wash away his sins. At that point, he witnessed a pro-life demonstration outside an abortion clinic in New York City. It was a

moment of grace. He saw the people praying; he saw their faith and peace, and he began to think there might be some hope for him. Dr Nathanson in his book also describes how he, being Jewish, and an "atheist" for more than ten years after he became anti-abortion, converted to Catholicism. He was baptized and confirmed on the Feast day of the Immaculate Conception by John Cardinal O'Connor in St Patrick's Cathedral in New York City 1996. Preceding the sacraments, Cardinal O'Connor remarked that **the lack of respect for life is rooted in a lack of self respect which is a consequence of sin.** How fitting it was that Dr. Nathanson should enter the Church on the feast of the new Eve. One of his God parents is Joan Andrews Bell, a renowned pro-life activist. Upon confirming Nathanson, His Eminence proclaimed "*Now you're as Catholic as I am!*" Later, when asked why he converted to Roman Catholicism, Nathanson stated that **"no religion matches the special role for forgiveness that is afforded by the Catholic Church"** His sins were forgiven. Jesus loves going after big sinners.

Three Sundays ago, our city pro-life group, Life Wood Buffalo, had a peaceful demonstration standing up against abortion in downtown holding banners and signs starting from St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and ended outside the municipality building. It is part of the Annual Nationwide Life Chain. It reminded me of a 2006 movie called, "Bella", a beautiful movie. (Free on YouTube. <https://youtu.be/Gq1SLbxNdww>) It was listed by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office for Film and Broadcasting as one of the top ten films of 2007, noting that *Bella* presents an **"affirmative pro-life message,"** along with **"themes of self-forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption that should resonate deeply."** It is about an international soccer star on his way to sign a multimillion-dollar contract when a series of events unfolded that bring his career to an abrupt end when he meets a beautiful waitress struggling to make ends meet in New York City and is preparing for an abortion to end her unwanted pregnancy. In one irreversible moment, their lives are turned upside down... until a simple gesture of kindness brings them both together, turning an ordinary day to an unforgettable experience. It also has an interesting history. It was produced by a new production company called, "Metanoia Films" started by Eduardo Verastigui just a few years ago. When Eduardo was 19 years old, he was already a famous celebrity in Latin America. He began as a lead singer for a popular Mexican rock band. From there he broke into television and movies, with phenomenal success. By the time he was in his mid-20s, he had money, fame, and all the pleasure and power. At that point, he moved to Los Angeles. Huge opportunities presented themselves, and he was still living a fast-lane lifestyle that would qualify him as a "big sinner" in anyone's book. But Christ was after him. His agent arranged for him to take intensive English lessons for six months to improve his pronunciation. It turns out that his English teacher was a faithful Catholic woman. She recognized that although Eduardo seemed to have everything, he was missing the most important thing. She began challenging him during their lessons, asking tough questions about life and encouraging him to look for the answers. At the end of his last lesson, Eduardo broke down in tears. God had showed him that his path of self-glorification was leading to emptiness. It was the beginning of a conversion that brought Eduardo back to Christ and the Church, and inspired him to put his talents, money, and connections at the service of truth. Millions of people are reaping the benefits by movies his company produced. Jesus loves going after big sinners.

Brothers and sisters, it's not easy to admit that we are sinners and we all need redemption. We're sinners infinitely loved by Christ, who offers us redemption and a new life. Have we admitted to Christ that we're sinners? Have we asked forgiveness from others and from God? It's a wonderful experience, because it frees us from the burden of thinking that we have to be perfect, and that we have to have it all together. It's what allows God's power to begin to change us, fill us, and make us truly happy and whole. Today, let's just silently say to Jesus, **"Jesus, I believe in your love for me. Have mercy on me, a sinner."** Are we tired of asking for God's mercy? Sometimes discouragement sets in when we see that we're not where we wanted to be and slowly drift away from God. But **when we remember how much we need God, and how much he loves us, the natural response is to say, "Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner."** Let's ask Christ to

show us where we may be a bit tired. Maybe our mercy valve is getting a little bit rusty because we haven't used it in a while. But now is the moment to ask. Now is the acceptable time. Christ is about to come down on and into our hearts. God bless.