

# Live in love, joy and peace

Years ago a Jewish friend said to me, “We Jews invented guilt. You Catholics perfected it.”

While a lot of kidding has gone on over the years about guilt, in truth much pain has been inflicted on people in the name of God. Scrupulosity, irrational guilt, has been a plague on many good Catholics.

I’ve known priests, whose lives were worthy of canonization, who worried on their deathbed that they would not hear Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

I’ve known equally holy lay people whose lives would rival any saint, who fear that at the last judgment they will be among the goats at God’s left hand rather than with the sheep at God’s right hand.

Many young Catholics today suffer from no such guilt. As a vocation director once said, “Today’s seminarians suffer from none of the guilt we suffered with.”

What caused such guilt? Surely there are many reasons. The church of the “old days” was a church marked by rigid conformity. We went to Catholic grade schools. We went to Mass during the week as well as Sunday. We went to CYO, Catholic Youth Groups as teens. We went to Catholic high schools and Catholic colleges. In short, we could have grown to adulthood without ever hearing any religious teaching other than a rigid Catholic teaching.

True, not all Catholics were scrupulous. Scrupulosity has much to do with our personal psychology as well as family upbringing.

More importantly, how do we heal scrupulosity? Certainly, personal therapy and spiritual direction can help. We need to understand ourselves and our own vision of life.

Perhaps even more importantly, we need to develop a healthy understanding of God. Here is where we need to turn to the saints and the mystics. Those who know God personally understand God personally. One particular saint who offers great insight



is the recently canonized St. Padre Pio. Let me share one of his beautiful quotes:

“The spirit of God is a spirit of peace. Even in our most serious failing, he lets us feel a pain that is tranquil, humble and trusting. And this is due precisely to his mercy.

In contrast, the spirit of evil excites, exasperates and makes us feel a kind of anger against ourselves when we fail.

And yet it is toward ourselves that we should exercise charity first of all.

Thus, when you are tormented by certain thoughts, this agitation never comes from God, but from the demon. For since God is the spirit of peace, he gives serenity.”

Wow! How different my life would have been had I heard that quote 60 years ago. But, as the saying goes, “Better late than never.”

That we should feel bad, feel guilt, after a sin, is a good thing. It means that we have a conscience. We’re not psychopaths or sociopaths.

However, as my much admired friend, Father Denny O’Donnell, from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia often said, “Yes, you should feel guilt if you’ve sinned. However, if it lasts more than 15 minutes it’s neurotic.”

Fifteen minutes? How about 50 years?

Yet, the saints get what we humble mortals often forget. Pain, suffering, anguish are the works of Satan. We don’t have to die to go to hell. We can live in hell right here on earth. The devil enjoys nothing more than disturbing the peace of mind of the true believer.

God, however, wants us to live in love, joy and peace. Peace was Jesus’s farewell gift to us. Worry, fear, self-recrimination, self-doubt, self-punishment and scrupulosity are the eternal gifts of the devil.

Let’s resolve today to trust the voice of Christ not the voice of the evil one. God is interested in us using our energies to love each other rather than to torture ourselves.