

Imagine watching parents with their toddlers around a campfire for the first time. You can probably get a pretty clear picture of what that would look like: mom or dad constantly swooping in and saying, “Whoa, ok little Bobby (or Suzie) we don’t go near those flames!” It is almost like a dance where one partner is unaware that they are dancing. Kid goes for fire, dad intervenes, kid goes for fire, mom intervenes...and on and on it goes. As amusing as this little dance might sound, to some extent we all go through it in our lives.

We hear those hard words from St. Peter today: “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.” These two things, repentance and conversion, are so central to our Christian lives. If they are not part of who we are, then we aren’t really living out our call from Jesus.

The trouble is that we don’t like to be told we have to repent, and we fear what it might mean to be converted. When we resist repentance and conversion, whether we realize it or not, our lives start to look like that dance between the parent and child. Jesus tells us, “Don’t go near that.” But we keep walking toward the flames, thinking, “But it looks so good, what could it hurt, it can’t be that bad.”

When we say these lies to ourselves, we spiritually break away from the loving arms of our Heavenly Father, who through His Son is trying to pull us away from the flames, and we reach out and touch the flame. Then we go from, “It’s so beautiful,” to BAM! A burned hand!

Over and over we seem to repeat this cycle in our lives, but it doesn’t have to be that way. Jesus didn’t rise from the dead so we could just be caught in the vicious cycle of constantly returning to the sins that burn and disfigure us. The good news is just what we hear from the first letter of John in the first reading: “If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.”

This is really good news! Jesus died and rose so that we can have the remedy for sin, which makes us die a little inside each time we commit it. If we have completely killed ourselves inside by mortally sinning, even then Jesus holds out hope and healing to us through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sin should never have the final word in our lives.

So our call is to embrace repentance and conversion. Repentance means literally turning the other way when temptation starts to come our way. The Greek word that is rendered “repent” is *metanoia*, which literally means to turn around. If we let God, He will help us turn away from whatever temptations are coming our way. Remember: every temptation is also a moment of grace. Whether we realize it or not, when those flames first catch our eyes, God’s grace is present in the depths of our hearts, waiting there to help us turn away and avoid getting burned.

The more we avoid the fire, the more God’s grace does its work of transformation. This is what conversion means. When we allow God to do His work in us, we become new people. But for some of us, this prospect of conversion, becoming a new person, might be off-putting. We fear becoming somebody new because we have convinced ourselves: “I am just fine right now, thank you! I’m a good person. If I let go of this, won’t I be missing out on something?”

This way of thinking disregards the fact that God’s grace makes us more perfectly who we are meant to be. It is as though we have burned ourselves so many times that our face has been disfigured, and we get so used to that face that we decide it is normal. But nothing could be further from the truth!

The Saints, those who let God do much conversion in their lives, weren’t a bunch of space aliens; they were more fully alive than most of us! Jesus reminds us of this in His appearance to the disciples in the Gospel today. After appearing to them out of thin air behind locked doors, He asks them

for something to eat. It's almost as though He is saying, "Look, I'm still human! Just because I have conquered sin and death, doesn't mean I don't still enjoy the simple, good things of the world."

This is how it will be for us as well! The more we repent and are converted, the more we will be those joyful disciples that this world so desperately needs. Those I have met in life who are open to the life-changing grace of Jesus have been the most influential people for me. Why? Not because they were distant and holier-than-thou, but because they had a zeal for living that I had not encountered in others before.

So let us open our minds and hearts to Jesus' call for repentance and conversion in our lives during this great Easter Season when we remember the newness that the risen Lord calls us to. I pray, *Jesus, open our hearts today to the work of the Holy Spirit. If we have avoided you in Confession, help us to courageously return. Let us break those habits of sin which have bound us for too long. Come Holy Spirit, let us cooperate abundantly with the grace You give so, that more and more we will be converted from sin, sadness and isolation to holiness, joy and true communion with others.*