

Let me ask you,

"If God were to withdraw His Holy Spirit from you would you notice the difference?"

It's an uncomfortable question...but one which our texts today challenge us to ask ourselves in the context of our discipleship.

A story was told of an evangelist who was preaching on an unnamed native American reservation. As he was walking down the street, he met one of his recent converts who had had a reputation as the reservation drunk, tough guy, and womanizer. When the preacher inquired how the new Christian was doing, the Indian replied, "I don't know. It's like there is a big dogfight going on in my head. My old, bad dog that wants me to go back to the bars, is fighting with this new good dog that wants me to go to church, love my wife, and tell others about Christ." The evangelist smiled and asked, "Which one is winning." The Indian replied, "I guess the one I feed the most!" In each of us there is a battle going on between the flesh (the bad dog) and the spirit (the good dog). To be victorious in the daily battle we must starve the bad dog, and feed the good one.

Amen

**St Mary's Sanderstead/ St James Riddlesdown Trinity 2 - 'Being a disciple'
Fr. Grant Cohen**

Galatians 5:1. 13-25 Luke 9:51-end

It took Leonardo Da Vinci seven years to complete his painting of the last supper and all figures representing the Apostles and Christ were painted from living people and the life-model for the figure of Jesus was chosen first.

Hundreds and hundreds of young men were carefully viewed in an endeavour to find a face and personality exhibiting innocence and beauty, free from the scars and signs of dissipation caused by sin. Finally, after weeks of searching, a nineteen-year-old man was chosen. For six months Da Vinci worked on the production of this leading character of his famous painting and for the next six years he painted....

One by one people were chosen to represent each of the eleven Apostles – s space being left for the painting of Judas Iscariot.

For weeks Da Vinci searched for a man with a hard, callous face, with a countenance marked by scars of avarice, deceit, hypocrisy, and crime, a face that would delineate a character who would betray his friend. Da Vinci then that a man whose appearance fully met his requirements, he had been found in a dungeon in Rome, sentenced to die for murder. Da Vinci made the trip to Rome at once, and this man was brought out from the dungeon and led out into the light of the sun.

There Da Vinci saw before him a unkempt, dirty man whose face portrayed a character of viciousness and complete ruin.

At last he Da Vinci had found the person he wanted to represent Judas in his painting. By special permission this prisoner was carried to Milan where the picture was being painted. For months he sat before Da Vinci, this base character representing the traitor and betrayer of the Lord of life. As he finished his last stroke, he turned to the guards and said, I have finished. You may take the prisoner away. As the guards took him he broke loose and rushed up to Da Vinci, crying "Da Vinci, look at me. Do you not know who I am?" Da Vinci, had carefully scrutinized the man upon whose face he had constantly gazed for six months and replied, "No, I have never seen you in my life until you were brought before me out of the dungeon in Rome." Lifting his eyes, the prisoner said, "Oh God, have I fallen so low?" and turning his face to the painter he cried, "Leonardo Da Vinci, look at me again for I am the same man you painted just seven years ago as the figure of Christ."

In the book of Hebrews, we read

"... let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

In our gospel reading we hear Jesus' words telling us that those who put their hand to the plough and look back are not worthy or fit for the kingdom of God... we have Paul's list of sins and the phrase "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God....

Pau isn't writing to non-Christians, in the previous verses he talks about them being brothers and sisters who have begun a Christian journey.

So what does it mean to inherit the kingdom of God, and why is Paul saying that if we do what's on his list we won't.

Let's look at Jesus' words first

"Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father." A man says to him

To which Jesus replies *"Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but you go and announce the Kingdom of God."*

Jesus wasn't and isn't saying that we can't attend to the funeral of our loved ones....When someone in Jesus' day said they wanted to go bury their father, it didn't mean he was already dead. It was phrase which meant they wanted to stay with their father until he died—something that could be years away. This man was simply looking for an excuse to avoid becoming Jesus' disciple, which is why Jesus refers to the act of ploughing and looking back its about having a divided loyalty which Jesus says isn't good enough.

In Matthews gospel he says *"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

God doesn't want half-hearted followers....and it's a lie if you've ever been told that God doesn't mind it if you sin.... because it's our sin that killed his son...

In Luke's gospel he says *"The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."*

The kingdom of God is about a heart transformation, it's something that is given to us as a response to God. When we become followers of Jesus were told that God sends the Holy Spirit to live inside of us. He makes us his Sons and daughters and heirs to his kingdom. And because of this we have the same position before God as Jesus, and we cannot lose that sonship or inheritance by what we do or don't do because it was a gift in the first place. That said, when we choose to follow Jesus we can't sit on the fence, we are either his children or we are not....and if we are then surely our behaviour will reflect it...There are many lists of things in the bible that God's people are told not to do, but the reality that most of us have done at least one of the things in Paul's lists and some of us have feasted on them all, and Paul knows as does Jesus that as human beings we fall prey to sinful behaviour from time to time. But he also challenges such behaviour as being uncharacteristic of who we are in Christ and as God's children.

What differentiates a Christian's life from that of a non-Christian is not that we don't sin, but that we actively engage in a struggle against those things which lead us away from God towards a behaviour that honours him.

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second, he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "ssssopp!" Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie -- still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the tap, and held Chippie under the running water. Then, realizing that Chippie was soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do . . . she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him. A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore and every time I go near him, he bites me."

Sorcery and licentiousness, might not be a problem for any of us...but anger over the stuff that happens to us often is.

It's what we do when bad stuff happens and our feathers get ruffled that really shows who we are and who we belong to.

Paul isn't reducing the Christian faith to a list of moral imperatives that he knows none of us are able to fulfil because it is by grace that we saved....it is a gift. One preacher put it like this; 'the entrance fee into the kingdom of God is free but the annual subscription is everything' and that's why Paul continues with another list, a list of the fruits which are the expression of living in grace.

"You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command:

"Love your neighbour as yourself."

If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh."

I have been an exorcist in 2 dioceses' and in my experience of the paranormal I have seen some physically unexplainable and demonic things and people have often asked me doesn't it frighten you, isn't it scary dealing with the devil? The answer is yes sometimes it is

But I always say to people "never think for one second that the devil isn't a formidable enemy and never underestimate his ability to deceive you and lead you places where you will fall into temptation. The scriptures talk about him being an angel of light, the "prince of the power of the air" the devil's greatest deception is that of making people believe he's not real and his second is that can do what we want because God won't really mind...he's a forgiving God who will open the door to everyone....but God does mind and it matters to him how we behave...

Paul's warning that those who practice the things on his lists and that they won't inherit the kingdom of God refers to a settled choice and principle of life rather than a moment of weakness because none of us are sinless.

As disciples we bear a responsibility to each other to help one another to continuously and actively walk in the Spirit so that the list of the flesh is replaced by the list of the Spirit.