

Whoever acknowledges me before men I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. Whoever disowns me before men I will disown before my Father in heaven. (Matt 10:37-28).

This would seem to be a foreshadowing, if not a warning, to Peter and the Apostles. They disowned the Lord when He was arrested. This is most typified by Peter's vehement, threefold denial of ever having known Jesus. This brings home to us the gravity, the seriousness of this particular passage. It is even worse, however, in the case of Peter and the Apostles. What makes their sin of denying the Lord even more grave is that they had spent three years with Him as His closest friends and collaborators in His ministry. Think of all the amazing miracles they witnessed, including the raising of the dead. The Apostles themselves went about casting out demons in Jesus' name. Perhaps, one should expect them to say to Jesus, "We will never deny you; we will die with you". But

when it came down to it, they fell away without even the slightest hesitation. Prior to this, they had acknowledged Him as Master and Teacher. They once told our Lord, "You have the words of eternal life". They believed Him then. Why did they not believe Him now, when He told them that they would fall away? It was nothing more than their pridefulness, which meant that they could not bring themselves to admit that they were not who they believed themselves to be.

The Apostles thought far more of themselves than they should have. This was the reason that their abandonment of Jesus took them by surprised. Although it is not in Scripture, you can be sure that Peter and the Apostles were later saying to themselves, "I never thought I would ever do anything like that".

As a result of their pride, they were not only surprised by their sin, but were overwhelmed by their sorrow as we see

in Peter. The stark contrast between who they believed themselves to be, and who they really were, was extremely difficult to take. It was their pride that made the Apostle's sorrow all the more painful. Imagine the guilt and shame involved, particularly, when it all ended in Jesus' crucifixion. How could they face the Lord's mother, since they had abandoned her son? Mary remained with Him at the foot of the cross, but where were they? At least, the Apostle John, who was but a youth at the time, returned to stand with Mary, in what was the most painful and agonizing moment of her life.

What happened to the Apostles is what pride does to us. It deludes us into thinking more of ourselves than we should, which leads to our downfall. This is what Peter and the Apostles did. They insisted that they would follow Jesus unto death. If they had understood the truth about

themselves, as Jesus tried to tell them, they would not have made such bold claims. If they had been humble, they would have believed Jesus and begged Him not to let them abandon Him. This, however, was not the case.

Pride deludes us, leading to our fall, but pride is even more dangerous than this. When we fall, pride can lead us to despair. This is what happened to Judas, who, after betraying our Lord, went out and hung himself. In the book of Proverbs it says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov 16:18).

It is, then, only the humble who are able to acknowledge the Lord before men. There are two reasons for this. The humble know, quite clearly, their place before God. Knowing their place before Him, they can, in truth, acknowledge Him as He is. In the worst case, the prideful person cannot acknowledge the Lord before men because that

would require him to admit his nothingness before God. The proud neither acknowledge the Lord, nor do they seek Him. In the words of the Psalmist:

In the pride of his countenance the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God" (Ps 10:4).

If we are to acknowledge the Lord before men and not deny Him, we must give up our pride. Pride puts ourselves above God, whom we should love above all things. Have we not, at times, maybe hid the fact that we are Catholic? Perhaps we have not stood up for the Lord, or have failed to do the right thing because we wanted to be accepted or to avoid being criticized. It is not that we are to love no one else but God, or that we should not love ourselves, properly speaking. We are to love God, to love Him in others, and love others in Him. It is the first and greatest commandment. In the words of our Lord:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind". This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself". On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Mt 22:37-40).

And so, in our Gospel reading, our Lord goes on to say:

Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, *more than me* is not worthy of me. He who will not take up his cross and come after me is not worthy of me.

Our Lord does not forbid love of one's parents or of one's children. Rather, He forbids us to love them *more* than we love Him. This seems simple enough. Every believer would say that they love God more than these, but how many actually do? The Apostles would have said this, but we know that was not entirely true, at least, not early on in their relationship with Jesus. Should we claim that our love is greater than that of the Apostles before Pentecost? Perhaps, but it is far better to remain humble about this, while continually begging the Lord to give us unflinching, sacrificial love for Him. Do we, in

truth, love the Lord more than our family, relatives and friends, more than ourselves?

What about a son or daughter living with someone outside of marriage? What if a son is involved in a homosexual relationship or transgenderism? Perhaps there is a relative who is outspoken in support of abortion. These are very difficult and painful situations for those who are committed to living out the Catholic faith, that is, to being faithful to Jesus. This difficulty is, perhaps, most acutely felt, at family events and gatherings. A son or daughter may wish to bring their partner to such occasions. On the one hand, we love them. On the other hand, we cannot accept how they are living or their behavior. Some of you may be thinking, “Fr. Tom, then, what am I supposed to do in such situations?”

We must never do anything that would affirm them in their behavior or suggest to anyone that we agree with it. At

the same time, we must never mistreat anyone, no matter their moral problems. Either of these things, affirming or agreeing with their immoral behavior, or mistreating them, is to fail to acknowledge the Lord before men.

Should one tell a son that he cannot bring his partner to one’s home or to family holiday gatherings? Should you talk to your son about what he is doing and explain why it is immoral? It is not wrong to do either of these things. It would not be unkind and it would ensure that no one is of the impression that you support or agree with the behavior. This is, however, not really the question here. It is, rather, a matter of prudence or good judgment as to what is the best thing to do.

If someone is unwilling to hear us, if he digs in his heels in anger, then, trying to speak to that person is impossible. It may even make things worse. But failing to speak because of

our fears of being rejected or criticized is not a matter of prudence. Insofar as we are able, we must do what is best, we must do the right thing, even when it is very uncomfortable and difficult. Our intention must always be to help someone see what is true and good, and lead him to a change of heart and give up sin. Deciding what is the right thing to do in a given situation can be daunting, and it is always possible for us to make mistakes. But here are four things that can help.

First, be humble. Whatever we think is the wise thing to do in these situations, we must be guided by the truth and by a genuine desire for what is truly good for the person involved. Pride will destroy any good intention that we might have and make the whole matter about us and what we want. It is always good, then, to keep our own sinfulness in mind when trying to help a fellow sinner.

The second is, again, be humble. Get advice from others whom you believe to have good judgment in these matters. Pride makes us think that we know it all.

Third, again, be humble. Accept whatever outcome results from your efforts. Pride makes us think that this is about our success or our achievement in persuading a person to change his life. Indeed, the life that most needs to change is our own.

Finally, pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to give you wisdom, to inspire and enlighten you to do the right thing. Pray fervently for the person you are trying to help. I mean, beseech the Lord, beg Him, persistently. The Lord often tells us to persevere in prayer. Recall those people in the Gospel accounts who kept at our Lord until He granted their requests. And there is the parable of the widow and the unjust judge.

He cared neither about God nor man. But the widow nagged him so much that he finally gave into her.

In all of this, remember the mercy of God toward you.

How many times and in so many ways, have we failed to acknowledge the Lord, and denied Him? In His infinite mercy, the Lord always seeks to bring us back to Him and heal the wounds we have caused in our relationship with Him. The model for us is the Apostle Peter. Scripture says that Peter denied the Lord with an oath (Matt 26:72). When asked a third time, it says, "He began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man" (Matt 26:74) But later what does our Lord do? He offers Peter a threefold mercy for his threefold denial.

Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him,

"Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep (Jn 21:15–17).

This should greatly console us in those moments of weakness when we too have denied the Lord. The Lord always offers us the grace to repent, to turn back and be healed (Matt 26:69-75). We must seek the truth about ourselves, embracing humility, however difficult or painful that may be. For only then, can we acknowledge the Lord before others as did the Apostles.

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