

# Overcoming Habitual Sin

## Objective:

"The devil does his utmost to banish peace from one's heart, because he knows that God abides in peace and it is in peace that he accomplishes great things." – Dom Lorenzo Scupoli, author of *The Spiritual Combat*, one of the great spiritual works of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

We all sin. That's just a fact of life, a consequence of the Fall of Adam and Eve. As Catholic Christians, we are called to avoid sin and to repent from it in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Sometimes, however, we get stuck doing the same thing over and over. We must remember that this is not uncommon. Adam's son Cain had issues with anger and the Lord told him directly that sin was "lurking at the door, its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7b). Cain did not master his anger. It blossomed into the deadly sin of wrath and it changed his life in tragic ways. But God has given us many graces and gifts to overcome sin. One of the greatest is peace: "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7)

**Song Suggestion:** Amazing Grace (Blue 36, Red 586)

## Bible and Catechism Readings:

### Luke 18: 9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

### Romans 6: 5-12

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.

### Catechism 2558

Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.

### Saint: St. Mark Ji Tianxiang

Ji Tianxiang was a Chinese doctor during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was a leader in the Chinese Catholic Community, a well-off man who served the poor for free. He became ill with a painful stomach ailment and

treated himself with opium. He became addicted to the drug, an addiction that was considered especially shameful and scandalous. He fought addiction, praying for relief, but that relief would not come. He would confess this addiction to his pastor, but, after years of no change, the priest believed that he did not have a desire to repent and banned him from receiving the sacraments. But he continued, failing in his addiction but going to Mass and praying, but unable to receive the sacraments, for 30 years. As anti-Christian and anti-colonial sentiment increased in China, Yi prayed for the courage to persevere. In 1900, the Boxer Rebellion came to his city, and he was imprisoned, along with his son, daughters-in-law, and six grandchildren. He never wavered or denied his faith. He begged his captors to be the last person executed so no one else would have to be alone. As he went to his beheading, after seeing his family die, he sang the Litany to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

### **Vignette:**

Will was a habitual liar. He lied to his parents growing up, his bosses at work, and his wife at home. It didn't matter if the issues were as insignificant as who took the last cookie or as significant as lying under oath as a witness in court. Will knew he had a problem. He went to confession a couple times, talked to his brother (who was a "good" Catholic, and even saw a therapist. But he kept sinning and kept feeling like he was a failure to God and to all those around him.

### **Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:**

Is there a sin that I repeatedly commit? Do I feel like I cannot be forgiven from that sin, that it has become part of my identity?

---

---

---

What keeps me from peace? Do I feel like I have to be perfect to earn God's grace?

---

---

---

What is the role of virtue in my life? Do I actively seek for virtue or just try to escape sin?

---

---

---

For those who have dealt with a long-running patterns of sin, what people/books/sacramentals/graces helped you in overcoming it?

---

---

---

### **Action Plan:**

Go to Reconciliation in the next two weeks. Before you go to Reconciliation, do a thorough Examination of Conscience. If you feel that you are having difficulties with a habitual sin, mention it to the priest and ask him if he has guidance as to how to overcome it. Be open to his answer. If this sin is part of an addiction, open your heart to receiving medical help. Ruah Woods is a great local resource.

**Author:** John Murphy, with thanks to Steve Frazer for the opening quote