



*Opening Ourselves to the  
Mercy & Healing of God*

**For almost fifty years people have come to me weighed down by the sins that all of us experience in our lives. They admit their sinful choices and attitudes with humility and openness. We have talked about the reasons why they might have made those choices. We talk about the process that might lead them back to the wholeness they seek. Throughout the years I, like so many other priests, have been inspired by the humility, goodness, and trust of those who have come.**

**After they have expressed their sorrow to God and opened their hearts to His mercy, it is my privilege to confess with them the great prayer of praise for the gentle forgiveness of God. These words are always a source of joy.**

**God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

**It is with admiration and great respect for all those good people that these reflections have been written. May these words help us to open ourselves to the healing mercy of God.**

**Monsignor William Hitpas**

## *Opening Ourselves to the Mercy*

### *& Healing of God*

All parents have dreams for their children. God is no exception. God has a dream for each of us from the time we are growing in our mother's womb. His dream is that we will be self-assured, that we will have a deep quiet respect for ourselves, a pride that we are made in His image and likeness. His hope is that we will be assertive, expressing our needs and hopes to those who walk with us on the path of life. Knowing that we are made in the image of the Trinity, He knows that we will only grow with intimate relationships, marked by trust and an ability to entrust ourselves to others. God's dream is that we will enjoy the good things given to us by His goodness and that we will share those things with others, helping all His children enjoy the gift of life. God's dream is that we will be able to share food and drink with others in friendship and communion, hoping that His gifts of food and drink will not only nourish us in body, but will nourish our spirit. Because God loves each of us, His hope is that we will always rejoice in the good fortune of others, celebrating His goodness to them and His goodness to each of us. Finally, God's dream is that each of us will participate in the adventure of life and invest our energy and skills to make life fair and just for everyone.

One way to reflect on our lives is to ask ourselves how closely we are living up to God's dream for us. Sometimes we are not able to live up to the dream. Sometimes we are too fearful to live part of the dream. Sometimes we do not have the courage to follow the dream. Sometimes we just find life too difficult and don't want to put that much effort and energy into the dream.

We call this failure to live the dream sin. We miss the mark. We settle for things that look like the dream, but are really just substitutions.

All sins are substitutions for a real need that was placed in us by the God who created us and dreams bigger things for us.

Let's look at some of those sins that cheapen the dream of God. When we can't find that quiet self-respect, that quiet pride in ourselves that He hopes for us, we substitute pride in the wrong sense, an arrogant pride that makes us judgmental and demanding. When we don't learn to be assertive and able to express our needs and wants, we become aggressive and angry at ourselves and others. When true intimacy which brings joy and growth in all of us seems like too much work, or is blocked by fear, we substitute something that fakes intimacy called lust, which turns us inward rather than in true relationship with another. God dreams that we will enjoy the things of life and share them generously, but when we grow selfish or fearful we keep all God's good gifts to ourselves, ignoring the cries of those in need. This sin of greed causes so much pain and division in our world. One of God's greatest gifts, food and drink, should always lead us to shared good times and stories. Some misuse these gifts, eating as a way to solve the problems of life, or drinking to run away from life. Gluttony and drunkenness are sometimes about eating or drinking too much, but often are more about using food and drink to avoid dealing with life in a healthy way.

When we cannot rejoice with others for their good fortune, as God dreamed we would, we turn to jealousy and envy. These sins make us smaller and keep us from the joy of life. Finally we betray the dream of God when we refuse to give the energy to be involved in life. The sin of sloth is not about taking a nap on the couch, it is about our unwillingness to participate in life, when we withdraw into our own world and refuse to make the effort to make our lives and the lives of others meaningful.

These seven “capital” or “deadly” sins to some degree are shared by us all. Each of us betrays the dream of God for us, some in bigger ways, some in smaller ways. Sometimes we are motivated by fear, sometimes by lack of courage, sometimes, painfully, we have to admit by selfishness. Reflecting on our lives in the light of the dream for God, and in the light of our substitutions, help us to see where we are missing the mark. These reflections show us our need for God’s mercy and His healing.

### ***The Value of Examining Our Life***

Reflecting on our lives, especially in the light of the dream that God has for us, helps us to leave the surface of life, the everyday running that we often do. It puts us in touch with the deeper, more spiritual side of ourselves. We used to call this an “examination of conscience”, but that often became a fifteen minute exercise, making a list of things we did wrong. That certainly is a poor substitute for the quiet reflection on our life that is so necessary for growth. Our lives are more important than that. We deserve better than that.

Some people take the six weeks of Lent, a gift from God each year, to do this reflection. But this hard look at life and how we are doing can be done at any time. Reflecting on the seven “capital sins”, those areas where almost all of us drift from the dream of God, can be a good starting point. They show us areas where we might challenge ourselves. They reveal areas where we need the forgiveness, the mercy, and the healing of God.

Because God’s call to come back from our substitutions is almost always a difficult and painful journey, most of us need the grace and courage of God to go through this dying to the old and rising to the new life of growth and grace. As each of us begins this reflection, we might ask God for the gifts of honesty and courage.

## *The Seven Capital Sins*

### 1. *PRIDE*

when we-

fear that we do not measure up

fear that we are not as good as others

fear that we will be found out

fear the brokenness that is in us and have

never learned to forgive it

fear the weakness that is in us

we choose false pride and arrogance

we substitute false pride for the quiet

love and respect for self

Symptoms of false pride are:

—we demand too much of self and others

—we give in to the “tyranny of the should”

always saying what we or others should or

should not have done

—we judge ourselves and others too quickly and

too harshly

—we are vain about appearance or a particular

gift

—we have to be first

—we are too opinionated

—we believe our way is the only way

—we exaggerate too much

—we dominate and need to control

—we forget to be grateful to God and others

Lord, for sins of pride we ask forgiveness.

## **2. ANGER**

when we-

give more nurture than we receive

feel controlled

fear not being liked

fear being judged

we judge ourselves too harshly

feel being taken for granted

we turn to anger at self, others and God

Symptoms of anger are:

—we are impatient with self

—we are impatient with others

—we are unforgiving

—we are unable to pray

—we lack gentleness

—we feel that we have been gypped

—we have an impetuous spirit

—we curse or use bad language

—we use God's name improperly and without  
respect

—we are impetuous on the highways

—we can become cold and cynical

Lord, for sins of anger we ask forgiveness.

## **3. LUST**

when we-

give in to the self-pity & self-medicating

fear being intimate in the true sense

fear to trust another

fear to entrust ourselves to another

fear the hard work of being truly intimate, we substitute lust, we give in to lust

Symptoms of lust are:

- we turn people into objects
- we use people
- we lie to ourselves about relationships
- we focus on pleasure rather than joy
- we substitute physical intimacy for real  
loving intimacy
- we turn to adultery or fornication
- we turn to pornography
- we allow sexuality to turn us inward  
rather than to relationship
- we never learn to trust

Lord, for sins of lust we ask forgiveness.

#### 4. **GREED/COVETOUSNESS**

when we-

- fear that people will not love us for who  
we are
- fear that we will be judged
- fear that we will not be safe
- fear that God will not provide
- we give in to greed and covetousness,  
we cover our insecurities with  
material possessions

Symptoms of greed are:

- we do not hear the cry of the poor
- we become selfish
- we become too attached to possessions
- we allow our possessions to own us,  
not us them
- we work too hard
- we keep too fast a pace

- we do not keep holy the Lord’s Day and do not make room for God in our life
- we hoard money
- we do not share enough with those in need
- we might give in to stealing or dishonesty
- we have no time for God or prayer
- we have “strange gods before us” as the first commandment warns can happen
- we do not have time for parents or family

Lord, for sins of greed we ask forgiveness.

## 5. **GLUTTONY/DRUNKENNESS**

when we-

fear to face ourselves

fear to face problems

fear dealing with others

feel overwhelmed

we turn to gluttony/drunkenness

Symptoms of gluttony are:

- we eat too much
- eat too often
- we eat to solve problems
- we misuse liquor
- we turn to drugs
- we commit “adultery with the bottle”

gaining strength, courage, and meaning of life, in food or drink or drugs rather the

Lord, for sins of gluttony or drunkenness we ask for forgiveness.

## **6. ENVY/JEALOUSY**

when we-

fear not looking good

fear being judged

fear we are missing out

fear life is passing us by we turn to envy or jealousy

Symptoms of envy are:

—we have a suspicious spirit

—we criticize too much

—we entertain sinful desires

—we feel gyped

—we “covet” neighbor’s success

—we put others down

—we gossip too much

—we give in to slander

Lord, for sins of envy we ask forgiveness.

## **7. SLOTH/LAZINESS**

when we-

want to avoid the cost of trying

fear hard work

fear the cost of relationship

fear failure

fear being hurt we turn to sloth

Symptoms of sloth are:

—we will not put out the effort to belong

—we withdraw from life

—we set no ideals

—we quit before we finish

—we set no goals

—we never reach out

—we do not use talents for God or others

Lord, for sins of sloth we ask forgiveness.

As we conclude the reflection on the seven capital sins, it is important to note that sometimes two or more of the capital sins join together to undermine God's dream. Pride and anger, together, often lead us to seek revenge, keeping us from the reconciliation that God dreams for us. Sometimes pride and greed keep us from hearing the cry of the poor. God not only has dreams for each of us but for the world. When we do not share our blessings with the poor, His dream of justice, making the world more fair, can never happen. Sloth and greed can join forces to keep us from the hard work of making the world more just. Self-pity and lust often team up. We begin to feel sorry for ourselves because we work so hard and no one seems to appreciate it, so we withdraw to self-medicating, turning to pornography and self-gratification rather than doing the hard work of true intimacy. What appears to be a sexual temptation is often tied to the self-pity that comes from one of the other capital sins. This self-pity also leads us to eating or drinking too much. The more honesty and courage we bring to our self reflection, the more we will see the temptations that undermine God's dream for us.

### ***The Value of the Sacrament of Reconciliation***

The Sacrament of Reconciliation can be one of the most important paths to growth in our lives. But all of us know that the Sacrament of Reconciliation has been misused and celebrated in ways that were not very conducive to true growth in our lives.

Sometimes we have experienced what felt like control or judgment rather than an offer of mercy, forgiveness, and healing. Sometimes it felt like we were a little child going in to the authority figure to admit our sins. We seldom were reminded that the priest, himself an ordinary man with his own sinfulness, was also in need of God's mercy and forgiveness.

At its best throughout history, this sacrament was meant to be a means of returning to God and to the family of God's children, people trying to live His dream for them. In the early church the celebration of this sacrament welcomed those who had drifted away back to the community. In the Middle Ages those reflecting on their lives would meet with what the Irish monks called an "anamchara", a soul friend. The soul friend would listen carefully to the person's story and help them grow back, through a penitential process, to the person God dreamed they would be.

When it is celebrated well the Sacrament of Reconciliation invites us to be honest, first with ourselves, then with another. This open admission of our sinfulness is so important because it keeps us from hiding like Adam and Eve did in the story of their sinfulness. Coming out of hiding and secrecy into the merciful arms of God is a crucial part of all growth. It demands great courage in the penitent. It takes great compassion and care on the part of the priest. This ability to be open sets the stage for God's reconciling action. God uses one of his priests to speak the comforting words of forgiveness. This is a most important part of the healing process. Many say, "Why can I not just tell God my sins directly?" No one would dispute that we can do this. Although God hears us very well, we do not always hear Him so well.

Sometimes the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be experienced at a time when the priest and penitent have the necessary time to reflect on the penitent's story, when there is time to help

the one seeking forgiveness to choose a road back to wholeness. Sometimes, though, it is important to gather with the whole community, to admit our common sinfulness, and, together, to celebrate the joy of receiving God's mercy. Both experiences of the sacrament can deepen our personal journey back to wholeness.

At the end of our life, each of us hopes that we will be the person God dreamed we would become the day we were born. May He give us the grace to begin that journey.

**PRAYER OF RE-DEDICATION AND**  
**COMMITMENT OF GROWTH**

God, Father of Mercies, I trust in your understanding, your acceptance, and your love. Thank you for the gift of forgiveness. Teach me to be as forgiving of myself as you are of me. Teach me to be as gentle with me as you are with me. I commit myself to allowing your healing power to work in me. Help me to be open to your grace. I ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen