

“Repent (—i.e., reform your lives—) and believe in the Gospel”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, there was a fellow by the name of Piri Thomas. Piri Thomas was an ex-convict, a drug addict, and an attempted murderer. Piri Thomas wrote a book called **Down These Mean Streets**. The book describes how Piri Thomas became an exemplary Christian.

You see, one night Piri was lying on his cell-bunk in prison. Suddenly, it occurred to him what a mess he'd made of his life. For the first time in years, he felt an overwhelming desire to pray. BUT, and there's that proverbial **BUT** in life again, he was sharing a cell with another prisoner called the 'Thin Kid.' So, he waited.

Once he thought the 'Thin Kid' was asleep, he climbed out of his bunk, and knelt down on the cold, concrete, prison floor and prayed. Of the prayer, he said:

“I told God what was in my heart.... I talked to him plain--no big words.... I talked to him about my wants and lacks, of my hopes and disappointments.... I felt I could even cry...something I hadn't been able to do for years.”

After Piri had finished his prayer, a small voice said:

“Amen.” It was he 'Thin Kid.'

“There we were,” said Piri, **“he lying down, head on bended elbow, and I still on my knees. No one spoke for a long while. Then the Kid whispered, ‘I believe in ...Dios, also.’ ”**

The two men talked a long time. Then, Piri climbed back into his bunk.

“Good night, Chico,” he said.

“I'm thinking that God is always with us—it's just that ...we aren't always with him!”

I share that true story with you, as it is a beautiful illustration of what Jesus means in today's Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Mk. He says, **“Reform** your lives/**believe** in the Gospel.”

Upon inspection, we see that Jesus' instruction contains 2 points:

1st is the **“reform”** of lives; the **2nd** is to **“believe in the Gospel.”**

1st, to reform our lives: means to recognize the evil in our lives **and** to turn away from it.

Like Piri, we too, are aware of evil tendencies that, occasionally, mess up our lives.

For example, we are aware of selfishness that puts our comfort ahead of others' needs.

For example, we are aware of pride that keeps us from admitting to our faults.

For example, we are aware of laziness that keeps us from helping others.

To reform means to **face up to evil tendencies** in our lives & **DO SOMETHING** about them.

2nd, to believe in the Gospel: means to believe that Jesus is the Son of God **and** that he came to save us. It means to seek out Jesus, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, & to receive from him forgiveness and healing. He gives us the grace to **start ‘fresh.’** to **start ‘anew.’**

In essence, it means to do what Piri Thomas did after he saw the evil in his life. He turned to God for help. He believed in the Gospel, the “Good News,” i.e., that God sent Jesus into the world to save sinners like himself. So, very clearly, the story of Piri Thomas illustrates the 2 points of Jesus' instruction in today's Gospel. **He reformed his life by recognizing the evil in his life and he believed in the Gospel, that is, that Jesus came to save him...and us, for that matter!**

Now, I think one or two observations need to be made here ...to 'qualify' some things. Exactly, what **observations** need to be made here, you ask.

–of course, **I am glad you asked that question!**

1st observation: many people do not recognize Jesus as an important part of their lives. Actually, they could take him or leave him. And for the most part, they 'leave' him. This is because they do not recognize any sin in their own lives ...present **OR** past. Since they are, basically, sinless, they have no need of Jesus.

Consequently, no such person will celebrate the mystery of Christ, in joy, since that person does not first recognize, in sorrow, that he/she is a sinner. And if this IS the case, how can such a one ever come to appreciate the **Sacrifice** of the Mass and the **Sacrament** of the Mass? Communion, simply, isn't important at all! ...nice, maybe for Christmas or Easter, but otherwise:

"Thanks but no thanks; I'm just too busy for all that... 'stuff!'"

2nd observation: today's Gospel lesson, or invitation, makes a perfect introduction to Lent. Down through the centuries, Christians have found the Season of Lent to be a time of special grace, especially for reforming one's life.

If we are looking for a special way to celebrate Lent this year, that is, to grow closer to our Lord, aside from joining the **Discovering Christ** program, we could do no better than to use Lent as an opportunity to rediscover **the power and the peace** of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Additionally, we could enjoy the beauty of the Eucharist, even more than usual. For having encountered Jesus in his sacrament of forgiveness and healing, how much more graceful will it be to encounter him, again, in Holy Communion.

He died so that sins could be forgiven! Experiencing the two sacraments is our response to his words at the consecration of the Mass: "Take this all of you and eat of it, for, this is my body which will be given up for you" and "...for the forgiveness of sins!"

I close with these words of St. Paul:

"I do not understand what I do; for I don't do what I would like to do,

BUT, instead, I do what I hate to do...

For even though the desire to do good is in me,

I am not able to do it.

I don't do the good I want to do;

instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do...

What an unhappy man I am!

Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?

Thanks be to God... (it is) Jesus Christ." Romans 7:15-25

May that very same, ever-loving, perfectly consistent God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.