

April 28, 1925.

Building a Solid Character. IV.

7. Tolerance of Venial Sin.

"He that despiseth small things shall fall little by little." "It's only a venial sin." How often do we not salve our consciences by that reflection! The Moral Theology of the Catholic Church is a wonderful thing; but in the hands of thoughtless people it is sometimes misapplied. While it gives the solid groundwork of virtue upon which ascetical theology is built, it also deals with sin, and a great many people regard sin as its exclusive field.

How many people there are who feel content to keep out of hell by avoiding mortal sin, never giving a thought to the matter of building up virtue! How many pikers there are in the world! How many pikers there will be in heaven if these people fulfill their petty ambition to get through by the skin of their teeth!

Preach on virtue and a faithful congregation falls fast asleep. Preach on vice and they are all ears. And the chief interest of the majority of a congregation, and of a class in moral, is to find out just how far you can go without committing a mortal sin. Don't say that this is harsh and unjust criticism. It is the result of long observation in ~~pew and bench~~ as well as in the pulpit and behind the desk of the classroom.

The fact that venial sin is not an obstacle to daily Communion is taken by many as a license to commit venial sin. Such people must remember that venial robs their reception of Holy Communion of much of its fruit, kills their fervor at times, and predisposes them to mortal sin. Failure to persevere in daily Communion is due, in most cases, to tolerance of venial sin.

How may this weakness be eradicated? The following means are offered:

1. Spiritual reading, particularly on the love of God, which teaches the meaning of venial sin;
2. Meditation, particularly on the inherent malice of sin;
3. Daily examination of conscience, with systematic endeavor to kill off venial sins one at a time;
4. Constant striving to make acts of perfect contrition.

What venial sins are most common? The bugbears for the student are: 1) coming late to Sunday Mass; 2) insufficient preparation and thanksgiving for Holy Communion; 3) profanity; 4) cribbing in work; 5) half-hearted tolerance of bad thoughts and their occasions; 6) dull sense of duty to parents and superiors; 7) callous disregard for the truth; 8) idleness; 9) uncharitable conversation; 10) gluttony; 11) disrespect in church and chapel; 12) petty vanities and bad temper--which usually shows itself when vanity is injured.

8. Stagnation of Mind.

Education doesn't offer much in the way of material reward, but it has its rewards just the same, and not the least of these is discovery, now and then, of a real thought in the mind of a pupil. (And now, before you read further, go back and re-read the last line in section 7 above. The "bright" boys will resent this, for they imagine that they think. Imagination is not thought; memory is not thought; knowledge is not thought; emotion is not thought. True thought implies understanding, which is the grasp by the intellect of an idea with its implications, plus wisdom in choosing best means to attain the best end, and prudence in the application of such means to their end.

Thoughtlessness is our commonest alibi for sin; but while it exclaims, it does not excuse. Meditation upon the eternal truths gives us a proper sense of values, gives us understanding, wisdom then comes through prayer, fasting and counsel.