

Healing from Shame from Our Sins

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Hi, my name is Reverend Father Jude-Mary Owoh, OP. I am a Dominican and the director of Dominican Media. And I'm excited to be on this retreat with you. Today, we'll be discussing how to deal with shame.

Now, many people find it difficult to heal from shame. And this is for a number of reasons, their past, whatever it is that they have been going through, or something that they have done in the past and that has seemed to be like a stumbling block for them, especially as they're trying to make their inroad into faith, into spirituality, and into a deeper union with God. So this reflection is supposed to be a way of helping you come out of that shame, to understand that there's a difference between shame and guilt, and then to really understand what God is doing with you as your journey along with Him.

Opening Prayer

Let us begin with a little prayer. *In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Holy Spirit of God be with us as we reflect, especially as we speak to you, as we speak to God for our needs, to present ourselves to Him with our challenges. And we pray that we'll be able to distinguish shame from fear and guilt, so that we are able to live more fruitful and harmonious life with you. This is our prayer through Christ our Lord, Amen. Our Lady, Help of Christians, pray for us. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

A Gateway for Mercy and Forgiveness

Feeling ashamed for one sin does not mean wallowing in guilt. Rather, it is the gateway all men and women can use to experience firsthand God's tender mercy and forgiveness. Christians should be grateful for shame, because it means that you do not accept evil, that evil is good. Pope Francis said these words as part of his homily on Divine Mercy Sunday this year. He said, "Shame is a secret invitation of the soul that needs the Lord to overcome evil. The tragedy is when we are no longer ashamed of anything. Do not be afraid of being ashamed." That's what he says. Let us pass from shame to forgiveness.

Are you holding onto guilt that you can't seem to let go of? Maybe the guilt has a grip on you and it simply won't let you be. I have met people, women and men whose heart still ache today from a decision to abort their child years ago. Sometime decades ago, even. Some men carry around the shame and regret of adultery, wishing that they could go back in time and undo the unfaithfulness that eventually ended their marriage. Some young people are bearing the guilt of destructive behavior like alcoholism and drug abuse and sexual sins in their own lives, which they are struggling to overcome.

But we are not designed to wallow in guilt. We are designed to be partners with God, walking hand-in-hand with Him to do away with the shame that we feel and then to embrace God in His

mercy. In this reflection, we will learn how to deal with the shame that results from sin. To do this, we must first understand what shame is and how it is different from guilt. Then we shall highlight some ways to journey on this process of healing from shame.

What is Shame?

So, what is shame? When we take a moment to consider the facts, feeling bad about doing something wrong is normal. If someone never feels bad, if someone never feels bad when they do something wrong, we would consider that person to be a sociopath, one who is void of conscience. However, there are two parts in which our bad feelings can take us. One is from God. The other has its origin in Satan. Guilt is a feeling that is not directed at ourselves, but at the immoral action we committed.

Guilt is able to separate the act from ourselves, not because we have a lofty view of ourselves, but quite the opposite. We don't feel like any less of a person for sinning for we know that we are imperfect, that we have fallen, that we are weak, and that we need to accept God's grace and to avoid sin. We feel guilt for the wrong choices we made. We feel guilt for not relying on God's love for us. And the guilt leads us to make amends. Guilt is what we find and what we feel when we regret our actions, and this causes us to apologize to anyone we may have wronged. We will then proceed to make up for it in any way we can and then ask God for His mercy and forgiveness. Guilt leads us to repentance and reconciliation.

The other common feeling which is so often confused with guilt is shame. Shame is focused on the person. Shame is a liar. Shame tells us we are worthless while everyone else is better than us. It tells us we are unforgivable and unlovable. That's so bad. Shame tells us we are supposed to be able to do anything on our own without anyone's help, not even God's. Shame tells us that everyone else would be ashamed of us as well if they only knew who we really are. Shame never leads us to repentance, reconciliation, or the love of God. Shame is clearly not of God.

How to Relieve Yourself from Shame

Whether we are dealing with the aftereffects of sin from yesterday or years ago, here is how to relieve yourself of the shame from past and start anew. Number one, confess your sin and ask God to feel your heart with love. In scripture, we read of King David, who is described as a man after God's own heart. Acts of the Apostles chapter 13, verse 22. He wrote many songs of love and praise to His God. Many of psalms in the Bible are attributed to him. Yet, during the restless season in his life, he lusted after a woman who wasn't his wife. He committed adultery with her that caused her to conceive a child, then murdered her husband, who was one of his trusted and capable mighty men to cover up his sin. When he was confronted with his sin, he repented grievously and prayed for a new heart.

Psalms 51:10-12 captures the thoughts of that incident. He says, ***"Create in me a clean heart, Oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me by your gracious spirit."*** If such an upright God-pleaser as David could commit a horrible sin like that, any of us can. Romans chapter 3, verse 23 says, ***"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."*** But First John chapter one, verse nine assures us that if we

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confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of our righteousness. If you are still dealing with guilt and shame, it is possible you have never confessed it, as we see in Psalm 32 from verse one to five. Turn the subject of your guilt and shame over to God. Admit you are wrong. Go to a priest and ask for God's grace and forgiveness that He promises to give you lavishly.

The second thing is that shame is not of God. Note that, if you have already confessed your sin whether once or multiple times, and you still feel shame and guilt, those feelings are not from God. Romans chapter eight, verse one tells us, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God convicts our hearts of sin. So we will confess it to God and turn away from it and seek to start anew in His power. But God will not continue to bring back to our mind what you did." He'll never bring back to your mind what you did. If you've confessed, God has forgiven you and you're now in the state of grace.

Psalm 103, verse 12 says, "As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our sins." That means that God does not define us by our sins. He does not continue to see that sin hanging over you every time you try to speak to Him. He does not remember that sin or bring it to mind, or bring it back to you and say, "Look, this is what you did in the past. I forgave you." Rather, He removes it. He has forgiven it. He wipes it away. It is done. It is gone. It is up to you to now let go of it forever, so that you can be free. Can you do that?

Trust God

The third thing is, even though you remember your sin, God does not. This is very important. Because if people say, "Oh, if I can remember it, that means God does." No. Once the priest says the prayer of absolution over you, your sins are forgiven. It is a wonderful thing that God forgives and forgets that the sin that you have confessed. We, however, have a memory, that's us, which stores away the things that we have confessed. This can sometimes come up, especially in our down moments. What should you do at such times? Just because you remember your sins, the sins that you confessed, does not mean that God remembers. Just because you still feel badly about your sin does not mean that God still holds them against you. Trust God that He means it when He says He has removed your sins just as far as the East is from the West. Those two directions, East and West, never meet. They just keep traveling apart from each other infinitely. Your sins will never come back to you. You can never be retrieved. You will not see them flashed up on a big screen when you get to heaven one day. They are gone forever.

When you start to remember your regrettable actions, thank God that you have been forgiven and that God has shown you mercy and has no record of your sins. And from that moment, begin to take a new direction, a new direction on the path of righteousness, far away from sin, far away from your past.

The Cross is Enough

The fourth thing is to reject the lie that the cross wasn't enough for your sin. That is a lie. A lot of Catholics believe in the forgiveness of sins. We even say it in the Creed, I believe in the forgiveness of sins and the cleaning power of the cross of Christ. Until it comes to this particular,

to that particular sin, we always say that, yeah, we believe that God has forgive our sin, until when we come to that particular sin that we are struggling with. As long as you continue to hold onto guilt and believe your sin is unforgivable, you are saying to God that His perfect plan to redeem you from the damaging effect of sin by sacrificing His only beloved son has not been effective in your life. And that is not true. Do you actually think that you are the exception to the redemptive work of Jesus, the work that Jesus did on the cross? He did that for all of us and we have to believe him and we have to receive it. We have already received it in baptism and we also receive it when we go to confession. We receive it when we receive the Eucharist. Do you believe what you're receiving?

Any of us can unknowingly undermine the healing power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ when we believe that something we have done is outside the realm of God's forgiveness. We are, in a sense, saying that it doesn't apply to me. When we have such thoughts, when you have such a thought, remove it from yourself, remove yourself from the equation and focus on the one who so adequately and sufficiently heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds, as we see in Psalm 147, verse three.

Receive Healing Today

Number five, receive the healing power of the cross for today and not just for tomorrow. Receive it for today. Sometimes we remain in a state of hurt and shame because we think of Jesus's death and resurrection in terms of how they rescued us from eternal condemnation. But we fail to realize the incredible significance of his death and resurrection, that his death and resurrection have for us as we continue to live here and now. Christ's death on the cross didn't just provide for your eternal life. It provides healing for you every single day.

In Isaiah chapter 53, verse four and five, we read the prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah. It says, ***"Surely He has borne our grief and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him. And by His stripes, we are healed."***

The fact that each of us, each of those healing statements is given in the past tense, even though Isaiah proclaimed this prophetic word several 100 years ago before Jesus came to the earth, tells us that God saw it as already done. Therefore, the grief you are feeling or suffering as a result of loss and shame has already been borne by Jesus. The sorrows you are feeling from a broken heart have already been carried by Him. The wounds you want healed have already been taken care of. And just as this wounded, Jesus came out of the grave with glorious scars to show us that he could conquer sin and its devastating effect on our lives, you too can experience new life and the glorious testimony of what He has done through you. The sixth thing you must bear in mind is that you have to reshape your understanding of God.

Sometimes we continue to feel guilty about our sins because we see God as a judge waiting with a hammer to knock you on the head. But this is not true. God is not just a judge to those who have surrendered their lives to Him, He is a merciful father who wants to relate with them. To them, He's a loving father who is waiting for his prodigal son to come back home.

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Matthew chapter seven, verse 11 says, "If you, then, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give you what is good if you ask it of Him? If you have asked for forgiveness and for a new heart as David did in Psalm 51:10, trust God to be the good and loving father He described Himself in the scripture to be, and the one who will graciously give you whatever you ask in His name, as we see in Matthew chapter 21, verse 22.

He is also a God who wants to enable you to live victoriously. Not as a victim, not as a violator. He wants you to be free.

Saturate Yourself

The seventh thing to bear in mind is to saturate yourself in the healing power of scripture and the sacraments. A young man who was raised in the illicit drug business and exposed to a number of destructive and sinful behaviors said, he realized the true healing and freedom from childhood hurts and the poor choices he made during his college years when he came to take the study of the word of God very seriously and became close to the sacraments. There, he developed an understanding of the message and power of the cross. He says, "I went through counseling. I saw doctors. I tried medication. None of that was effective for me. I needed the grace of God. A love and insatiable appetite for the word of God began to grow in me. And that is where I found victory, in the message of the cross."

If you continue to feel shame for sin, you have confessed and surrendered to Jesus Christ, stop listening to the voices of doubt, self-condemnation or the enemy's accusation. Immerse yourself in the victorious, life-giving word of the scriptures and begin leaving like a loved and forgiving child of God, because that is who you are.

Jesus told us that we must love one another as we love ourselves. This means we are to love and forgive others and love and forgive ourselves. You need to learn to forgive yourself too. That is what God wants you to do. And so should you.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray. *Almighty and ever living God, you are love and forgiveness yourself, and it flows from you in Torrance. Give us true shame for our sins but give us even more a deeper sense of guilt and sorrow for what we have done. Help us to carry out a proper examination of conscience and confess our sins. Help us to see that sins do not define us. Help me to see that my sins once I expose them to you and I expose my weakness to you will find the need to rely on your grace. Help me to rise from my sins and my feelings of unworthiness and experience the transforming power of your grace through Christ our Lord.*