

Homily

On Hatred of Sin as an Act of Charity

In the Book of Proverbs it says: “My mouth shall meditate truth, and my lips shall hate wickedness” (Prov. 8:7 DR).

Fear of the Lord is one of the seven gifts of the Holy spirit, given in Baptism and then strengthened and perfected in the sacrament of Confirmation. What does it mean to fear the Lord? According to the book of Proverbs: “The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate” (Prov 8:13).

In the current situation in the Church, which is reeling from the recent exposures of truly scandalous behavior amongst the clergy and the episcopate, by those who committed sexually abusive acts and by those who covered them up, we desperately need to rediscover the fear of the Lord, which is absent in so many ways and at so many levels of the Church. And the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10), is the hatred of evil.

As I pointed out in a recent letter to the faithful of my diocese, the hatred of evil actually belongs to the virtue of charity. It is an act of love to hate sin; and it is a work of mercy to admonish sinners to turn away from their sin.

But how can it be that hatred, which is the opposite of love can also be an act of love? Hatred is a movement of the will away from the object that is hated. When we hate something we internally reject that thing as an evil; just as when we love something we internally affirm that thing as a good.

Hatred of Good is Evil

So in one way, hatred is directly opposed to love, and that is when love and hatred are directed at one and the same object. In this way, hatred of God is opposed to love of God. And hatred of a human being is opposed to love of neighbor, and therefore likewise opposed to the love of God. For as it says in the First Letter of St. John, “if any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (I John 4:20).

This kind of hatred is gravely sinful. Indeed, hatred of God is the greatest of all sins because it is opposed to the greatest good and the greatest commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

This is the hatred with which the world hates Jesus Christ, as he himself said, "the world hates me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil" (John 7:7). Hatred of Christ extends to hatred of God the Father, as Christ also said: "He who hates me hates my Father also" (John 15:23); and it extends to those who follow Christ: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18).

But what should be our response to those who hate God? Not hatred, but love. For the second commandment is like the first: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Indeed, we should be moved with compassion for the enemies of God, for he who hates God injures himself rather than God (cf. Prov 8:36). And Christ also commands us to love our enemies, as he says in the Gospel: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44).

So that's one kind of hatred, which is opposed to love of God and neighbor.

Hatred of Evil is Good

But there is another kind of hatred which actually flows from the virtue of charity, and that is hatred of evil. Love, which is a movement of the will toward the good, by that very fact includes at the same time a movement of the will away from whatever is opposed to that good. Just as the love that parents have for their children necessarily means that they will hate any kind of sickness or anything else that is harmful to their children. Or just as looking to the East implies turning your back to the West, so love of God requires turning your back on sin.

The phrase "Love the sinner, hate the sin" is often invoked as if it meant something like: "If you really must hate the sin, at least remember to love the sinner." Whereas in fact, it ought to mean: "If you really love the sinner, then you must hate the sin."

As St. Thomas Aquinas says, "Now it is part of our love for our brother that we hate the fault and the lack of good in him, since desire for another's good is equivalent to hatred of his evil" (ST 11-11, q. 34, a. 3). Love- genuine love- desires the good of another. If we truly love our brother, then we will desire his good, and that means especially the good of his soul, which is his salvation. There is no temporal or material good that counts for anything in comparison with the surpassing worth of eternal life with Jesus Christ; everything else counts as rubbish by comparison (cf. Philippians 3:8). "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and

forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). And so if we truly love our neighbor as our self, then we will also hate anything which hinders him from attaining salvation, and that is his own sin. The greater our love for our brother, then, the greater will be our hatred of his sin as well as our own.

So the hatred of something (or someone) that ought to be loved is opposed to love and is a great sin. But the hatred of that which is opposed to love is itself a part of love and also a work of mercy. Genuine love is not a sentimental affirmation of anything and everything. Genuine love discerns between good and evil; as St. Paul says to the Romans: "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good" (Rom 12:9). Or in the words of the Psalms, let us "love righteousness and hate wickedness" (Ps 45:7); let us "hate and abhor falsehood, but love the law of the Lord" (Ps 119:163); for "the Lord loves those who hate evil" (Ps 97:10).

As I said in my recent letter, what the Church needs now is more hatred – hatred of sin. The intensity of our hatred for sin is directly proportionate to the degree of our love of God and neighbor. If we do not hate sin with a "perfect hatred" (cf Ps 139:22) it is because we have allowed the fire of charity to cool in our hearts.

Conclusion

Let us, therefore, take heed to recover a greater fear of the Lord, which is "hatred of evil" (Prov 8:13). For the fear of the Lord is "the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10) and "the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). The fear of the Lord comes to those who receive the words of God and treasure up his commandments, who make their ears attentive to wisdom and incline their hearts to understanding: "yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Prov 2:1-5).

Although we may be tempted to despair in a time of such grave crisis as we are living through, yet our hope is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Those who fear him shall live. For "the fear of the Lord leads to life; and he who has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm" (Prov 19:23). Let us, therefore, fear the Lord with a holy hatred of sin and we shall have nothing else to fear.

Praised be Jesus Christ now and forever. Amen.