

Sin

Grace: *Ask for the grace to be honestly aware of your sinfulness.*

Introduction:

You have looked at God's presence in your life. You have reviewed scenes from your life where God has shown his loving presence. You may also have started to become aware that at times you have not been very appreciative to God. Perhaps there are even times when you worked against God by turning away from God's love.

The reality of sin in your life is uncomfortable and perhaps even painful to look at it. It is important to realize that reflecting on your sinfulness is NOT about feeling guilty and it is certainly NOT to make you feel depressed or sad even though you may find yourself feeling down when you think about how many times you have missed the mark.

This reflection is primarily about honesty. It is important to be able to be honest with yourself, and with God, about your entire self. God does not just love you when you are good. The Spiritual Exercises challenge you to understand that you are a loved sinner. God chooses to love you despite the fact that you sin.



Allow yourself to go back and look at moments in your life that you recognize as being sinful. What images come to mind?

How do you feel when you sin? Share those thoughts and feelings with God. Similar to the words of the Psalms, can you have a conversation with God about the times when you have not acted as you would have liked? What do you say to God and perhaps more importantly what does God say back to you?

Sin includes the things that we have done and the things that we have failed to do. You have sinned and you have also experienced the sinfulness of others. When you sin, it impacts your life and the lives of those around you. What personal experiences have you had of sinfulness (both your own and that of others)? Who are the people that have sinned against you? How did you respond to their sinfulness? How has sin affected your life? How might God desire to respond to the reality of sin in your life?

Read through the readings and select the one that most seems to speak to you about the role of sin in your life. Re-read the Scripture passage slowly and underline any words that stand out to you as being significant or meaningful to you. What images or stories come to mind as you hear those words? What feelings do those words produce inside of you?

After spending some time reflecting on the passage read the reflection. What feelings do you have after reading the reflection? You may wish to compare and/or contrast your feelings from the reading and reflection. Ultimately, what is God saying to YOU about sin? Are you really listening?

Psalm 130 - Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption. He Himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

John 8:1-11 Women Caught in Adultery – But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Romans 7:14-25- We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Psalm 51 – Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

For the Journey:

Praying with sin, whether it be our own or of our world, does not invite a joyful response from us at first. As someone once said, "There's nothing original about sin." None of us likes to consider the damage of hurricanes, nor the destruction of wars. The more sensitive one is, the more he or she shrinks from viewing or imagining the ugliness of violence and hatred.

In praying about sin in the Exercises, the main question is whether guilt is a grace or a tangent. Perhaps I could put it this way. Does a painting receive anything from its frame? The frame should lead the eye to what it frames, obviously. In considering the rebellion and ingratitude of sin, what is the picture and what the frame? For most of us, our participation in the sin of the world and our own personal sins, fill the whole canvas, and the surrounding frame is the somewhat arbitrary love of Jesus for this world and for us.

The opposite is true for those praying these considerations of the Exercises. Always the main central picture is the love of Jesus Christ for us and our world. What highlights this love is the deep reality of our resistance to live in and trust that love.

Our sin is why Jesus came to take His place in the center of the canvas of history. My father was a lawyer and his firm's motto was, "The worst injury is the one not properly represented." Our worst sins are those we hold to ourselves, refuse to recognize and do not allow Jesus to take into the center of His cross.

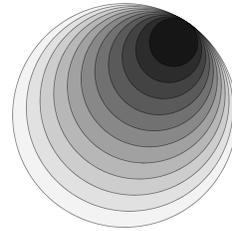
He does more than represent us; He re-presents us back into the world which He loves and offers us as a healing gift. There is a proper grace of guilt when it remains the frame and leads us to consider and then receive the freeing forgiveness of Jesus.

Guilt is a distracting tangent when considering it leads us to put ourselves at the center of our unforgiveness. We can spin our spiritual wheels in the muck and mire of our own self-destruction and in doing so, we hope that God will see how much punishment we are inflicting on ourselves and so God just has to have pity on us.

That puts God not at the center, but far outside the framework of our lives. God is not a spectator, nor an art critic. The real freedom to which the Spiritual Exercises call us, is the freedom to let God be God and allow us to be loved not only as we are now, but as we will be.

In praying this week, can we be honest, but not negative?

In these or similar words ... I've begun to think that sin is not a big deal anymore because it happens so much in my life. When I sin, I feel different, not necessarily that I have done something wrong. But I get a small feeling wondering if that was the best option. My biggest sin is lying. I always feel that when I'm stuck in a situation I should lie, and because I do that, the lies keep building up, until I start to feel bad about myself. For example I always tell my mom I have finished my homework, so I can play a videogame. It affects my relationship with God; I always wonder how He feels when I sin. I realize it's not right by when it says in Romans 7," Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." I really feel that that is a perfect phrase for my life, it makes me wonder why I let sin take over my life. I sometimes lie to myself, to make me not think that I just sinned, by saying I did the right thing. I need to realize that everyone is a sinner, and that no matter what God loves me and always will. When people sin against me I tend to respond harshly I become angry with them. It's the wrong thing to do, because when I sin and people find out I want them not to treat me harshly. I feel that when people sin God looks down and shakes his head. It's hard but I need to realize that God will love you no matter what.



Practicing What You Preach ... To increase your awareness of the impact of sin in your life and to help free you from being a “slave to sin”, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Hopefully, you will be able to hear the loving voice of Jesus saying to you "Go now and leave your life of sin."