Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7).

St. Paul was keenly aware of his human weaknesses and failings as he carried out his apostolic ministry. He preached mercy because he knew firsthand the power of mercy. He had persecuted the church before his conversion. He counted himself the least of the Apostles. Yet he boasted of his weakness and his inadequacies as evidence that it was only by grace that he was able to carry out his work. Paul

described himself as an earthen vessel, a simple clay pot into which the treasure of Christ had been poured. He was living proof that it was the grace of God that was accomplishing everything he was doing.

Matthew makes the same case for grace in today’s Gospel by giving us some extraordinary examples of how hard, if not impossible, it is for anyone to achieve holiness. He contrasts the letter of the law to its spirit. Even if someone could keep the sixth commandment by refraining from adultery, who can honestly claim they have never fantasized about sex or had lustful thoughts? No one. Purity of heart is possible only by the power of grace.

Matthew offers two extreme examples of someone avoiding sin by plucking out his eye or cutting off his hand. Who could do such a thing? No one. Again, only by grace is holiness possible. Matthew then adds another challenging example. By placing it here, we may ask if Matthew didn’t regard indissoluble marriage as another impossible ideal. Only by God’s grace can marriages stay together. Only with God's help can couples endure life's troubles with steadfast love and fidelity.

Even our desire to be holy is the result of mercy. If we succeed, it is because of mercy.. If we fail, mercy picks us up and renews us. We are only earthen vessels, but we are filled with the treasure of God’s unconditional love. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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