


A merciless cure – Fr Charlò Camilleri, O.Carm.

While repentant sinners are forgiven, the shamelessly corrupt are not

Community

Religion

27 March 2022 | Fr Charlò Camilleri, O.Carm. | 

 3 min read

Rembrandt's The Return of the Prodigal Son (detail)

Fourth Sunday of Lent. Today's readings: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 34:2-7, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32.

Commenting on the mass readings on February 8, 2018, Pope Francis said that in the biblical narrative of Solomon “we have heard about something a bit strange”. The strangeness lies in the fact that contrary to what is said of King David, who was found guilty of grievous sins, the great and wise Solomon is judged as having a heart “not entirely with the Lord, his God, as the heart of David, his father, had been”. Scripture tells us that Solomon’s heart “turned away from the Lord”, not like his father, who always begged for forgiveness despite being a great sinner.

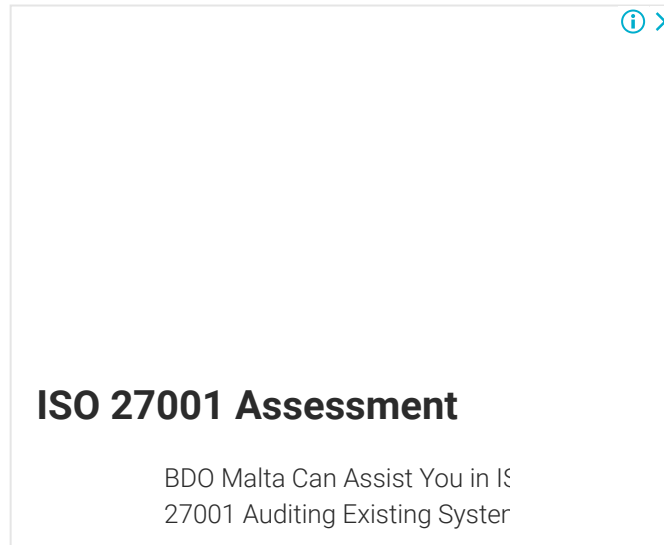
The Pope explains this “turning away” as problematic, a “weakening of the heart” that is worse than committing sins. Substantiating this assertion is the recognition that a “weakened heart” constitutes “a slow journey, that slides along step by step” towards the state of staying “tranquilly corrupt”.

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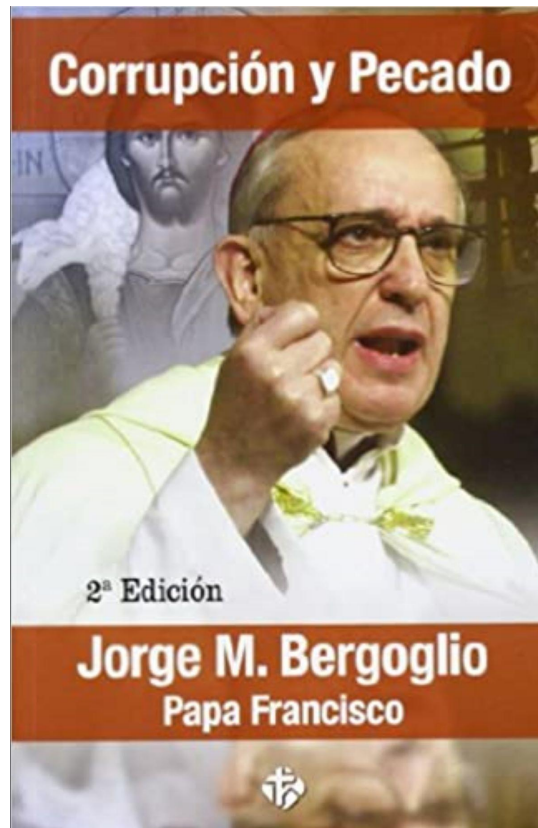
- Pope Francis

Francis, renowned for his pastoral theology of mercy, does not mince his words when reflecting on this “weakening”: “we could say that while sin is forgiven, corruption cannot be forgiven”. Perhaps his most important theological consideration, regrettably relatively

unknown, is the fascinating distinction he makes between sin and corruption, notwithstanding both are undoubtedly related.



A series of reflections on this topic, dating back to his time as cardinal archbishop of Buenos Aires, was made available in 2014 to a wider audience in the publication entitled *The Way of Humility: Corruption and Sin; On Self-Accusation*.



Cardinal José Maria Bergoglio's 1991 reflection *Corrupción y Pecado*

Cardinal
Accusati

Commentators agree that one of Cardinal Bergoglio's finest philosophical and psychological writings on the issue is his 1991 reflection *Corrupción y Pecado*, composed

during the famous Córdoba exile in the context of cases of violence and impunity. In this reflection, José Maria Bergoglio argues that corruption, unlike sin, “is not forgiven, but cured” by mercilessly thrusting into crisis the ones who tend to remain tranquil in their corrupted lifestyle, illuding themselves with self-sufficiency, relishing self-justification, shamelessly believing they do not need repentance, and finally despising others. Since being elected to the chair of Peter, the theme of sin and corruption continuously features in his homilies.

Today’s parable of the two brothers and the loving father provides us with a sinful youngster and his elder brother whose heart has turned away from the father. The former recognises his sinful indiscretions, while realising that his heart, albeit in some imperfect way, was still nigh to his father even though physically afar from home. The elder son reveals that his heart has turned away from his father to be living in a state of someone whose heart has turned away from his father despite sharing the same household.

In forgiving the sinful younger son, the father pushes the elder son into crisis. The younger son is redeemed, forgiven. The elder exposes the weakened state of his heart. Swallowed by self-righteousness, he refuses to partake in the reconciliatory meal, deluding himself that he does not need reconciliation, redemption, forgiveness. The father’s imploration echos that of St Paul in the second reading from 2 Corinthians: “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

The Pope traces before us the way of humble attentive vigilance. This holds us back from falling into the state of a weakened, sick and deviated heart that has lost the capacity to discern good from evil in such a way as to regrettably lie “tranquilly in corruption”; in other words, a heart that has lost its soul.

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