

Exercise vigilance, repentance during Philip's Fast  
By Bishop Milan Lach

We all heard about the tragedy in Pittsburgh, the killing of 11 innocent Jewish people by a gunman in a synagogue Oct. 27. It's so relatively close to us.

We can ask ourselves why this man, with so much hatred toward the Jewish people, sought to kill. This tragic event leads us to reflect on the meaning of life and on the question of evil. To kill people, who are simply praying to God, is a terrible thing. Innocent people are dying because of their faith: this is hell.

We cannot say, "It's not our problem, they were Jews." No. We cannot hate each other nor can we support hatred or be indifferent to it. Hatred is a sin that begins in our hearts and it can kill. For this reason, dear brothers and sisters, we are invited by the Word of God to change our lives, to make penance.

The Philip's Fast will begin soon (Nov. 15). During this time, the church asks us to pray for grace to change our lives through prayer and fasting. We must pray for the grace to change our lives. The church gives us the sacrament of confession to help us do this. I urge you to go to holy confession during the Philip's Fast. We need this. Do not hesitate to ask your priests to listen to your confession. Priests are servants of the people and they are waiting for you to give you this sacrament.

Sin is a problem, a cancer, that can destroy your life completely. We need God, we need Jesus Christ, just as the poor man in the Gospel of Luke needed Jesus to heal him and to cast out the demons that possessed him (8:26-39). All of us are this poor man, when we are living in sin. In western society, we are sinful, yet we think we have no sin. Many Catholics do not even believe that hell exists. Dear brothers and sisters, hell exists. This is our faith. This is the teaching of the Catholic Church. It is clearly explained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which you can read for yourselves. Hell is where there is the absence of God and his love.

After this encounter with Jesus, the poor man in the Gospel returned to his human dignity and became a disciple of Jesus. This happens to us, too, in confession; everyone today is invited to become a disciple of Jesus.

This Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is the Savior above all creation, even over demons.

People are not devils; the shooter in Pittsburgh was not the devil. But the human person, in his or her sinful nature, decides independently and in freedom to follow the temptation of the devil and commit evil. This is why, in the spiritual life, we must be vigilant; this is why I encourage you to pray in your families every day. Do you do this? Because, without prayer, we cannot survive against the schemes and temptations of the devil.

Pray for the grace to change your life, to weed out hatred from your heart, and to seek the sacrament of confession during this period of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord, so that Jesus Christ can restore our human dignity and call us to greater discipleship. Our world needs this change today.

God bless you,  
+ Bishop Milan

*Based on a homily Bishop Lach delivered at the cathedral Oct. 28.*

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