

Homily—23rd Sunday OT; B-cycle

“Thus says the Lord: Say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong, fear not! Here is your God. He comes with vindication: with Divine recompense he comes to save you.”

Pope Francis has declared the new liturgical year we are beginning in just a couple months during Advent as “the year of mercy.”

You may have seen Pope Francis made big news this week when he declared priests could now absolve the sin of abortion in the confessional.

That confused many American’s because priests here have been absolving this sin for years. So what’s going on?

First we need to understand what “excommunication” means.

Excommunication means you are no longer in union with the Church. You’re cut off.

So if you’re excommunicated you can’t validly receive sacraments in the Church.

If you’re excommunicated, and you still go up and receive communion, it does you no spiritual good whatsoever. MOST excommunications are pronounced.

That means the Bishop has to give you three notifications that you are in danger of being excommunicated; one can be a verbal warning, but at least two have to be written warnings.

An automatic excommunication means you’ve cut yourself off the Church and the Sacraments even if there is no pronouncement from a Bishop.

It means you’re excommunicated even if no one ever finds out about it!

You know it, and God knows it, and that’s enough for the excommunication.

Whether an excommunication is automatic or pronounced, it can only be absolved by a Bishop. A priest does not have the authority to lift an excommunication penalty.

In the old code of canon law, there were over 200 automatic excommunications.

When Pope John Paul II ordered the Code of Canon Law revised in 1983, they reduced the number of automatic excommunications to six.

The purpose of an excommunication is not to kick people out, but rather to shock the person into seeing the seriousness of what they’ve done.

The six automatic excommunications are; desecrating the Blessed Sacrament.

Pretty straight forward. If you deliberately destroy or disrespect the Eucharist, you cut yourself off from the Catholic Church.

Years ago, John Cardinal O'Connor was celebrating Mass in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York, and a few homosexual activists slipped into the Mass, got in the communion line, and after they had received the Eucharist, spit the Blessed Sacrament back in the Cardinal's face to protest the Church's position on homosexual behavior.

If any of those activists were Catholic at the beginning of that Mass, they weren't Catholic by the end of that Mass. They desecrated the Blessed Sacrament.

Attempting to assassinate the Pope; also pretty straight forward.

So that Moslem terrorist who shot Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981 was excommunicated? No, because he was Moslem.

You can't kick someone out of the Catholic Church if they're not Catholic.

If a priest breaks the seal of confession; also pretty straight forward.

The seal of confession is absolute.

A priest cannot break the seal of confession even to save his own life, and if he does, he's automatically excommunicated.

If a priest attempts to absolve an accomplice of a violation of the sixth commandment.

So if a priest has a sexual relationship with someone and then attempts to absolve the person they're involved with of that sin, that priest is automatically excommunicated.

Apostasy; that means you start your own religion, or join another religion.

You can't belong to two religions at the same time.

If you join another religion you can no longer receive sacraments in the Catholic Church.

And finally procuring or providing an abortion, because nothing justifies the taking of an innocent life.

Sometime in the late seventies, the American Bishops petitioned Rome for permission to delegate priests to absolve people guilty of having abortions and having the excommunication penalty lifted in the context of confession, without a Bishop being involved. That permission was granted.

Bishop's in several other countries also petitioned Rome for the same delegation.

To my knowledge every country that asked, was granted that permission, but not every body asked for it.

What Pope Francis did this week, was to extend this delegation to absolve the sin of abortion, and lift the excommunication penalty in the context of the absolution, to all priests in the universal Church, all around the world.

So if you confessed the sin of abortion in the past and got absolved, you do NOT have to confess again. Your standing in the Church is good. You don't have to do anything. You're OK.

And if you have had an abortion and haven't confessed it, come see us.

We can help relieve you of the guilt and the pain you've been suffering silently with all this time.

I applaud Pope Francis for doing this, even though it caused some confusion here in America; I was confused!

Because I assumed this had already been done in the Universal Church years ago.

I love Francis because he's calling us back to our most fundamental calling from God...

Mercy! Mercy is our first vocation. Mercy is our universal calling.

Why do we have sacraments? So we can have constant access to God's mercy.

Why do we raise money in the Church to feed the poor, house the homeless, heal the sick? To in some small way share the mercy with others that God has shown us.

Why do we pray and try to grow in virtue; patience, peace, gentleness, kindness...?

To mold our hearts to be like God's who is mercy itself.

From beginning to end we are called to be a people of mercy.

And mercy also means letting people know when they're doing something wrong.

It is my prayer today that we truly become that people of mercy, in all our thoughts, in all our words, and in all our deeds. Lord Jesus, we beg you to speak this Word...AMEN.