

# *Alter Christus*

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

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## *The Effects of Venial Sin*

**By Saint Peter Julian Eymard**

[From the Book *The Divine Eucharist*]

It is very certain that the love of God supplies for everything, suffices for everything”. But when it does not purify from sin, it is not true, or not yet very strong. The first effect of love is to purify.

For this reason, we must go on examining sin, its fatal consequences, to awaken horror for it.

Whence comes it that we have so little horror for sin, that we remain in it without fear, that we know of its being in us, and yet take no care to shun it or to correct ourselves? It comes from bad will or negligence, from want of delicacy of conscience, or from our little love of God.

If men did for the good God and for their soul what they do to succeed in business affairs or in any other state in which they are, they would soon

become saints. God has to pay us for what we do for Him and for the care we take of our soul, but He is badly served in spite of that!

Some say: "But what is it, after all, but a venial sin? It is only a little fault which does not kill the soul." And on the score of venial sin, they no longer disquiet themselves. Oh, what purgatory will teach us I But now, see what are the effects of venial sin, and you will comprehend how much you ought to shun it.

I am not speaking of those faults of weakness and frailty, against which

we are on our guard, which we commit only through surprise, and of which we get rid at once as soon as committed, but of the affection to venial sin, which makes one commit it easily, little sensitive to the wrong that he does, taking no care not to expose himself to it again in a word, I am speaking of venial sin which is committed through affection and which has become habitual.

**I. Venial sin paralyzes God's power over our soul.** When God encounters venial sin on His way to

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Peter Julian Eymard was born on February 4, 1811 in La Mure, France. He grew up in a poor family after the French Revolution, at a time when Catholicism was not looked upon kindly.

It was clear from an early age that Peter wanted to be a priest, although his father was not happy with that idea. After he entered the seminary, illness forced him to leave. But he persisted and was finally ordained for the Diocese of Grenoble when he was 23. A few years later he heard some Marist Priests preach. The Marist order is dedicated to Mary, the Blessed Mother. Their message appealed to Father Eymard, and he eventually joined their congregation. He traveled through Europe, giving retreats and missions.

As time passed, he felt very drawn to Jesus through the Eucharist and decided that there needed to be priests who urged devotion to this. In 1856, Father Eymard founded the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. The men who joined the congregation guarded the Blessed Sacrament 24 hours a day and soon attracted lay persons to do the same. This practice of prayer and devotion before the Blessed Sacrament became known as Eucharistic devotion.

In 1868, at the age of 57, Father Eymard died. He was canonized 1962 by Pope John XXIII. He has been referred to as "the Apostle of the Eucharist."

the soul, His power is arrested, it can do nothing.

In the other world, justice is indemnified without needing the consent of the culpable. But here below, liberty is always granted us. God can do in us only what we consent to allow Him to do, and the perverse will of man, in repulsing God's power, is stronger than God's will. Yes, indeed! God can do nothing with one whose conscience is taken up by an affection to venial sin. It is impossible for Him to unite His power with ours, His action to ours. Sin is by its very nature, a turning away from God, It constitutes an opposition between essence and essence, between nature and nature. What would you have God do? He cannot destroy us. He has given us a certain time to live and to enjoy our liberty, and He respects that decree.

Venial sin arrests the course of God's goodness. Grace is the effusion of the divine goodness. Now, God is absolutely unable to give His grace to one who says by act: "I do not

want it." He cannot render good an act bad by nature. Venial sin is refusal opposed to the grace that solicits. It annuls its action. God, not being able to force the door of the heart, withdraws. He does not violently force an entrance. The Scripture so often shows Him present to the soul as a friend demanding entrance with His graces, supplicating Israel to hear Him. Our Lord, also, during His life asked men to receive Him well. They would not, and He was obliged to retire.

I am speaking only of venial sin which, not entirely destroying the state of grace paralyzes its action. It is not opposed to the habit of charity, but to its efficacy and its acts.

Venial sin is opposed to actual grace, so necessary to him who would act supernaturally that without it we can absolutely do nothing for salvation. Actual grace is a light, an inspiration. It is the action of Jesus Christ and His Spirit in us. Now, venial sin destroys or hinders its effects. It obscures the soul, it limits its gaze,

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it envelope it in darkness. The light of grace presents itself incessantly to enlighten our intelligence, to show it supernatural motives, the divine good; but if we close the entrance, it cannot penetrate. This sun of love will light up the stone of our tomb, while we ourselves remain buried in darkness.

In this venial sin corresponds to a secret instinct of our fallen nature. Man fears God's light more than His goodness itself. Light remains, it stays. The Jews did not want even to listen to Jesus Christ, and they stoned Him when He wished to tell them the truth. So some do not want to listen, to a beggar relating his misery. They give him an alms at once in order not to have to look upon what might too deeply touch them. And so we, too, do not like to see ourselves, nor to see God and His will and what He demands. But the light that we reject accuses us,

and this so much the more as it is greater. What will it be for us who live in the darkness of sin before the brilliant light of the Eucharist? We can, indeed, say that we sin in the light. Our sins are all the more serious, and we shall be punished more severely.

Grace is, also, a vivifying heat by which God desires to touch our will, exciting it sweetly in order to bend it to what He is demanding of us. But sin is the cold, the icy coldness of the tomb. It prevents the divine heat from penetrating to our heart, for fear of our being awakened from our torpor. And yet the heat emanating from the Blessed Sacrament is so powerful, so sweet, so beneficent! There is the furnace of the living Heart of Jesus Christ. But sin makes us flee from it. If we feel that Our Lord is presenting to us His Heart in order to gain our love, we flee. We are afraid of His saying to us: "I love thee!" for we

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should then be obliged to respond: “And I, also!” They say it, indeed, on the tip of the lips and while retreating, but they do not want to be taken at their word. When an enemy allows himself to be embraced he is disarmed, he becomes a friend. It would be the same with us, but we fear the duties of friendship.

Grace is, again, the action of the Holy Spirit by which He renews and continues in us the life of Jesus Christ. He says to us: “Take My grace, and perform this good action, make this sacrifice, labor with Me. I will supply the funds and the means, you shall have the merit and the fruit.” But sin prevents our accepting this loving proposal, it rejects it, and this contract of

companionship becomes impossible, for Our Lord cannot join His action to sin, which is opposed to Him. So venial sin is the destruction of actual grace, preventing and destroying its action. It binds Jesus Christ at the gate of the soul. Little by little, it

ruins sanctifying grace which, like stagnant water, becomes corrupt, because no living source feeds it, no movement purifies it.

Venial sin destroys the glory that we ought to render to God by our actions.

God is the Owner and Master of our life, and we are His tenants and servants. He intrusts to us talents to be put out at interest.

It is a rigorous obligation for us to procure His glory on earth. Recall how the servant who neglected, who buried his talent, was punished.

By sin we cease to recognize God as our Master to whom we owe everything. We take His place, and we act for ourselves.

What glory remains

for Him from actions performed through self-love? Sin destroys all that could elevate toward Him and glorify Him. It annihilates God’s glory in His creatures. Behold the conflict mortal sin wages against God and His attributes!

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**II. Considered, besides, in its effects on us, how sad is venial sin!**

See what it did in the Apostles. For three years they had lived with Our Lord, seeing Him, listening to Him, rejoicing in His miracles and in His particular and private explanations. Did they profit by them? Not at all. They did not even go so far as to correct themselves of their defects. Their ambition, their jealousy, their self-love still domineered them. What, then, was the obstacle? Venial sin, for the Gospel records their faults, and they were but venial faults, only venial faults. But see, whither they conducted. Behold them fleeing from the Garden of Olives, and Peter denying his Master. Judas, also, had lived with Our Lord, and his infidelity began with only small faults of cupidity.

I assure you, one may, in fact, live

in the holiest vocation, may spend his lifetime before the Blessed Sacrament, and yet for all that not be a saint.

Oh, have pity, at least, on Our Lord, do not insult Him to His face! People do not chase away a beggar with injuries although they can not give him anything. Jesus is begging for our heart. They do not return rude words to a benefactor who has bestowed a gift upon them. With how many benefits is not Our Lord incessantly loading us!

And that is not all. Venial sin, which paralyzes God's power, delivers us into that of the demon and of corrupt nature, which he governs. Then we act by the instincts of nature, by self-love,

and we succeed and are satisfied, for nature is very skilful when it acts for itself. But what is there for God in these works?

***Lastly, venial sin makes us unhappy. The tepid religious is the most unhappy of men. He labors as much as his brethren but, unlike them, he does not receive those heavenly consolations that sweeten labor. He refuses them. On account of that obstacle of sin, which is an insurmountable barrier to His goodness, God cannot make him taste His peace.***

In effect, annulling actual grace by venial sin, all that we do under its influence remains. God offers us His grace, but we refuse it, we reject His guidance in order to depend on ourselves, and that is an infidelity.

I know that all a man's actions performed purely from nature are not sins, and that he, can, even without Supernatural grace, perform some acts of the moral virtues that are both good and honorable. But that is not mounting on high. For an action to reach the throne of God there to be crowned, it must be borne up by grace, which alone has the power to carry it on to eternal life.

And then, if this is true in theory, it is otherwise in practice. I do not believe in the moral virtues of men who have not the divine virtues. He who refuses the grace of God which is offered to him, in order to act by nature, acts perversely.

But how much truer is that for us! We fall not from graces as great as ours, without breaking limbs.

We deprive ourselves, in consequence, of merit. He who labors in sin wears himself out without gaining anything. Still more, he will be punished for what he ought to

do, since he has the grace for it, and does not cooperate. Our good works then become our condemnation, for all that venial sin touches, it renders useless. It is the worm at the root.

If what you have commenced well by grace you finish by self-love, it becomes worthless as far as recompense is concerned. So, venial sin renders good things bad. It looks out for them in order eventually to destroy them. We are then, like the laborer who sees the hail destroying in the twinkling of an eye the hopes and labors of a year. A little sin of self-love, a look upon self, is sufficient for that.

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He no longer tastes the joys of a good conscience, for they flourish only in consciences that God illumines and visits. His own, instead of being this perpetual feast, is dark and

breathes of brimstone. It is tortured by remorse and fear. It is always trembling and carrying around with it perpetual chastisement.

He has not even the consolations that the world gives to its servants. The world cannot come to him with its pleasures and, should, he abandon his vocation to go demand them of it, it does but increase his unhappiness, for he drags after him everywhere the chains of his vows and obligations.

Oh, how dear one pays for venial sin! It enters by flattering, and it remains to bite. It is a swarm of ants that eat away the heart. No more pleasure, no more joy in prayer, the soul no longer wants to see God! Do you not know this from experience?

Come, now, let us lave Our Lord so much at least as not to offend Him any more and, above all, not to remain in sin. May love and repentance raise us out of it at once!

How we pain the good God. It would be easy during the retreat to add up our venial sins for a day. You would be frightened to see the sum

total. What would it be, could you count all you have committed in your lifetime? One minute is sufficient to commit a sin, and interior sins call for still less time. Our venial sins are incalculable.

Some think themselves responsible for only those that they know. Let us say for those that they commit, for that is another thing. To know and to commit, are two things.

Our Lord says we shall render an account for every idle word. If an idle word forms a subject for judgment, count, if you can, your sins of sloth, of sensuality, of vanity, of self-love. You will have to see them in purgatory, and expiate them to the last farthing.

Be, then, very scrupulous about the least faults, about everything that concerns your conscience and the Rule. Take care! They who abandon their vocation for crimes have begun by nothings. When a stone becomes detached from a mountain, we know not how far it may fall. We know only that the greater the height from which it falls, the deeper will be the descent.