

could see the state of his? We have a tendency to sublimate our faults and sins, pushing them down into our subconscious, in order to achieve self-acceptance. It takes intellectual and spiritual integrity to look into the mirror of truth. We must have the courage to examine the innermost recesses of our souls and not be afraid of what we may find. Sin is like a deep abscess that must be opened and excised in order for healing to take place.

Prior to participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, go before the Blessed Sacrament and ask Jesus to show you your soul. Bring paper and pencil to write down the sins He will bring to your consciousness. Every sin corrupts the soul to some extent. The more sin, the less God's grace can be active in our lives. When you have confessed these sins, received absolution, and completed the penance, burn the paper as a gesture of renunciation of future sins.

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul speaks of being slaves to sin: "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (6:16-18).

Unlike Dorian Gray, we must not be slaves to sin. We must be willing to look at ourselves as we really are, and not pretend that we are sinless and without spiritual blemish. We can only be free when we are in submission to Christ. If and when Jesus dwells within our souls, Satan is powerless to evict

Him. Where God is, sin cannot dwell. Only we have the power to cast Jesus out and we do that when we knowingly and willingly commit serious sin.

God also understands our weaknesses and is willing to strengthen us in a most intimate manner, by also dwelling in us through the worthy reception of His body and blood in the Eucharist. Christ alone, who is perfect love, can perfect our love. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

What will be the state of your soul at the moment of death? Will you be like Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray and forfeit redemption or will you have the hope of salvation? Working out our salvation in "fear and trembling" begins with an in-depth examination of conscience. The choice is yours.

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Redemption

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In the book and movie "The Portrait of Dorian Gray", by Oscar Wilde, the main character offers his soul in exchange for a youthful appearance. After admiring the beauty of his features in a portrait Dorian makes a frivolous statement, "If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that--for that--I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!" Dorian's wish comes true. Dorian's picture grows aged, vile, and corrupt while he continues to appear fresh and innocent down through the years.

Dorian became involved in the death of Sybil, a young woman who committed suicide after he cast her aside. Dorian knew that he was responsible for Sybil's death, "as surely as if I had cut her little throat with a knife," and his lack of remorse began his downward spiral into hell. Although his soul begins to corrupt, he is surprised to find no difference in his vision or surroundings. "The roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden." Everything appeared to remain as it was; yet, a profound change had taken place in his soul.

Over the years Dorian continued to live a life of sin and perversion, including the murder of the artist who painted his portrait, and yet, his outward appearance never changed. The effects of his lifestyle were captured on the portrait, which he had hidden in his boyhood study. The portrait changed over the years, at first imperceptibly, then more and more dramatically, as he continued

his life of debauchery and murder. Dorian realized that the changes in the portrait mirrored the changes in his soul. Finally, after many years, the portrait was hideous and grotesque beyond imagination! Dorian realized that the painting was an indictment of his life and sought to destroy it.

At the end of the story, Dorian uses the knife he used to murder to destroy the painting and as he plunged the knife into the heart of the portrait, he mortally wounded himself. Dorian is found “withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage” with a knife in his heart, and the portrait is found in its original state.

There is a slight, but significant, variation in the concluding scenes of the movie and the original manuscript. In the film version, as Dorian lay dying, he cries out for redemption saying, “Father forgive me, Father forgive me, I have sinned grievously against you.” This plea is absent from Wilde’s original text. I suppose the screenwriter desired to end the movie on a note of hope, rather than one of despair.

The redemption of Dorian Gray in the movie is the desired outcome. Do we not all hope for redemption at the moment of our death? Do not our hearts, emulating the love of God, go out to the worst of sinners, even to the likes of Dorian Gray?

Even recognizing that it is a physical impossibility, who would not want to go through life remaining youthful and attractive? Do we not endeavor to present a most favorable image to those with whom we come into daily contact? Every person desires acceptance and recognition and some go to great lengths to hide what they consider their faults. Each person presents a façade, depending upon the circumstance of the

moment and our level of confidence in others’ acceptance. Many hesitate to be open and honest with others because of the fear of rejection. I do not say that just showing your best side, so to speak, is necessarily wrong, but there is one relationship in which it is impossible to deceive. I speak of our relationship with Almighty God. Our lives are an open book before Him.

God looks upon us as a loving Father who desires the absolute best for His children. That best is our deification within Him for all eternity. God wants to absorb us into Himself at the end of our earthly lives. What could be more rewarding than to spend eternity enveloped in God’s infinite, perfect love and getting to know Him more and more intimately?

What happens to us at the moment of death depends upon the state of our soul at that instant in time. If our love of God is perfect (Matt. 5:48), we enter into heaven (God). If we have rejected God, we spend eternity in everlasting agony. If we have not rejected God, but still have vestiges of the self-love and pride that caused us to sin, we will enter purgatory and remain there until our love has been perfected. When we love God fully and completely, as we ought, we will then enter heaven.

Many have resigned themselves to spending “some time” in purgatory. Purgatory is not a state, which should be acceptable to anyone. The rich man in Saint Luke’s Gospel describes his situation in purgatory as one of “anguish”, “torment” or “agony”, depending upon the Bible translation (16:19-31). It is the greatest of understatement to say that purgatory is not a nice place! One must never be willing to settle for anything less than heaven.

Is perfection possible while living? Certainly! Jesus would not set an impossible goal for us or ask us to run a race without the hope of crossing the finish line? The Light has to be at the end of the tunnel?

The key is in understanding what Jesus meant by perfection?” In Saint Luke’s Gospel a lawyer, “stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? How do you read?’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have answered right; do this, and you will live’” (10:25-28).

If perfection is the only acceptable state, then we must ask, “How can we be perfect in our love of God and love our fellow man as ourselves?” God provides the answer by offering the sanctifying grace of the sacraments. Through the worthy reception of the sacraments we are made holy and strengthened for the journey.

Baptism makes us sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, and entitles us to His inheritance, which is eternal life. Salvation is a free gift, there are no strings attached. Yet, we can forfeit our inheritance by the rejection of God’s love. Even then, God does not cast us aside; He reaches out His hand through the Sacrament of Reconciliation in order to once again unite us to Himself. We have only to reach out and grasp His offering.

God sees the deepest recesses of our souls; nothing can be hidden from Him. We must be willing to look at our relationship with the Almighty objectively and honestly. What if we could see the state of our souls as Dorian