

2B 2021

When scribes accuse Christ of being in league with Satan, Christ responds to the gathered crowd that the only eternal sin is blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

What does he mean by “blaspheming the Holy Spirit” and what makes this an unforgivable sin?

First of all, blaspheming means slandering God, so Christ is saying that we can be forgiven for slandering God, but not for slandering the Holy Spirit.

In other words, we can be forgiven for saying that God does not love us, but not for saying that the Holy Spirit leads us to do evil.

The scribes are guilty of the latter.

In calling the Holy Spirit an unclean spirit, they are decrying what is good as evil.

This is not just a mistake about a characteristic of God, like someone who claims that God hates the Dutch.

It is an error about the very nature of good and evil.

If we think that evil is good and good is evil, we are not merely stumbling along the path (which happens to all of us).

We are entirely lost.

When we fail to recognize the goodness of God, we will not go to God even when we have the ability.

The scribes, for example, are so invested in power that they are simply making things up to get their way while claiming that they are on the side of God.

The first step towards following the lead of the Holy Spirit is not to be controlled by what others think.

We can either serve God or concern ourselves with social standing.

There is no compromise.

Even the philosopher, Martin Heidegger, recognized the importance of not being controlled by what others think.

He explained that many people live their lives according to *das man* or “everyone,” as in “Everyone is doing it.”

The problem with Heidegger is that he thought that those who did *not* live according to “everyone” were superior.

Once we think we are superior, we can justify horrible abuses.

Christianity, on the other hand, holds that not living according to everyone means recognizing that we are all equally human, all equally loved by God.

As we are already loved, all efforts to be admired or superior are wasted.

Following “everyone” at best provides a comforting illusion.

It may temporarily make us feel secure, but the crowd turns readily because it has no anchoring morals, no fixed direction.

The least provocation and it will reverse course.

One day you are admired; the next day, circumstances have changed, and you are reviled.

One day, the crowd is saying “Jesus, heal me!” and the next day, “Crucify him!”

Those who realize this volatility give up trying to follow the crowd, trying to appeal to everyone, trying to be admired, and simply are.

Once we achieve this, we are free, free to serve God.

We can be in the moment rather than worried about what others are thinking.

There is no longer anything preventing us from following the nudging of the Holy Spirit in each situation.

I recall my freshman year in college.

I lived in a section of a dorm that was dubbed “loser hall” because its residents were such avid devotees of partying.

I was the only person on the hall who did not enjoy getting high or drunk.

At the end of the semester, I moved to a much quieter, upperclass dorm.

A friend of mine who had a car helped me to haul my things to the new dorm six buildings away.

When people in my former dorm discovered what he had done, they criticized him sharply, so he later explained to me that, though he liked me, he could no longer be my friend because the others would not like it.

He was young, afraid to appear “uncool,” lost in the shifting sea of “everyone.”

I doubt any of them would have been there for him had he truly needed them, and I imagine he eventually learned that lesson.

In fact, maybe that was the very thing that he came to earth to learn.

That is, when we are not grounded in the Holy Spirit, “friendship” is a matter of convenience that can be cast off as soon as it becomes inconvenient.

When we are grounded in God rather than in “everyone,” of course, we may appear *foolish* to those who value what others think, who live their lives according to everyone.

When crowds started gathering around Christ, his family wanted to restrain him because people were saying “He has gone out of his mind.”

His mother and his brothers come just outside of where he is teaching and call to him.

“Come away. You’re causing a disturbance,” I imagine they said, but Christ is undeterred.

He ignores his family and says that only those who do the will of his father are his mother and his brothers.

He does not promote, in other words, the much-romanticized Christian family, which is a product of western civilization and not Christianity.

As Christ later says, “I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

Christianity is not about making nice, but about being honest, seeing things as they are rather than through the eyes of “everyone,” and developing compassion.

When we succeed, we are available to people, present to them in ways that others cannot be.

Others are too distracted by “everyone” to be planted where they are and see someone.

Many will be suspicious of us when we do not play the game, do not follow along with everyone.

If we are *not* controlled by what others think, then we come across as unpredictable, as a threat to the fragile stability of what “everyone” is doing.

People become anxious about the outsider because, at some level, they realize that the crowd is necessarily ungrounded, temperamental, and may suddenly shift.

What they do not realize is that it is not usually outsiders who cause that shift, but a fear that rises internally and sends the crowd off in a new and often contradictory direction.

Not realizing the source but only the presence of instability, people may even treat us as if we are evil, just as the scribes did Christ.

They may look very hard to find the source of our evil, and, by hook or crook, will identify something.

There are, then, those who are looking for our mistakes and those who appreciate us for being who we are, mistakes and all.

Like Christ, we need not be discouraged by those who cannot see us for who we are.

We need not be demoralized by those who accuse us, who find fault as the scribes found fault with Christ for casting out demons.

Our stable witness as children of God will be evident to those who are seeking.

Our availability will be clear.

The less we are controlled by what others think, the freer we are to follow God, and the more it will show in our every behavior.

It is the difference between someone who *is* compassionate and truthful and someone who wants to *be seen* as compassionate and truthful, between the person who is and the person who seems.

Know who you are; know where you stand, and dwell there in humility and openness.

Only then can we sense the guidance of the Holy Spirit.