

### ***Is it a sin to miss Mass if you're on vacation?***

Short answer: Yah, sure. You betcha. So, thinking about packing the clan into the family truckster and heading to parts unknown, are we? Great idea, seeing as how you live in the greatest part of the greatest state in the Union.

Not only is skipping Sunday Mass a sin, but it's one of those big daddies known as a "serious" or "grave" sin. This means that, if I know it is a serious sin and freely choose to do it anyway, I have turned away from God to such a degree that I am no longer in communion with Him (see last month's column). One of the consequences of this "turning away" is that I may not attempt to receive Holy Communion until I have been reconciled with God and the Church through the Sacrament of...drum roll please...Reconciliation. In other words, I need to get to Confession before I receive the Eucharist or else I have just committed another grave sin: sacrilege.

**"But WHY is skipping ONE Mass considered enough to separate me from God? It's not like I killed somebody!"** You are right. No one died. No one is physically hurt. But remember, following God is not about breaking (or not breaking) a bunch of rules. It is fundamentally about a relationship. It is about becoming the kind of person who belongs to God.

What we often forget is that God is the primary person offended in every sin. Ultimately, it really doesn't matter if I say, "Oh, this is just a private sin." There is no such thing as a private sin. There is always someone who is rejected/betrayed/denied in each sin. His Name is "God". But isn't that funny that we don't really "count" God? As if a choice against Him was imaginary. And yet, that choice does something to **us**.

We need to realize that sin changes us...just like virtue changes us. The spiritual death that can come from something like skipping Mass isn't because God feels the need to beat us up. It comes because we have just hardened our heart to God in a significant way.

He asks me to serve Him in this way → I say no → Hard heart. Hard heart = Dead heart.

Remember Moses in the desert? He had been chosen to be the leader of the Israelites from slavery, through the desert, and into the Promised Land. And he pretty much did an awesome job. But there was this one point where God told Moses to speak to a rock which would then bring forth water. Instead, Moses **struck** the rock with his staff. Because of this (this *little* thing! He hit a *rock*, for pete's sake!) Moses was not allowed into the Promised Land. Why? It was because Moses *knew* what God wanted, and he chose to do something else. He had total insight into God's will, but rejected it. In doing so, he rejected God. We know that God's will is that we attend Mass every Sunday (Saturday night). The choice is now ours: do we want to belong to God or not?

**But we're going to be out of town!**

I've been out of town. They have churches there. You may have to re-arrange your schedule, but realize that it is an act of love toward God on your part.

**But I'm going camping! There are no churches up in the BWCA.**

No problem, Daniel Boone. Talk to your pastor before you head off. He can grant you a dispensation from your Sunday obligation in those circumstances.

**Argh. This sounds like legalism.**

This is so far beyond legalism. This is deep into the realm of relationship. It is not about following rules, but really is the answer to the question: "Do you love me? Will you obey my commandments?" If you choose to not request a dispensation from your pastor and just completely skip Mass, what are you saying to God? "I am going to do what I want to do." If you ask for a dispensation, you are simply saying, "I want to obey God. I will therefore ask for permission to be excused." It is a terrific posture of humility and love before our heavenly Father.

I know now. We can use this knowledge to grow in love, by obeying Jesus: "Those who love me are the ones who keep my commandments."