

The Will to Do Good

Pope Paul VI delivered the following address at his general audience Nov. 16.

It is clear, we think, that in an environment such as this, at a moment such as this, in a social atmosphere such as ours is today, a forceful question must rise in the conscience of everyone: What must I do? Am I on the right way? What is the dominant trend in my life?



Such a question is raised with decisive necessity when the circumstances of life confer a flash of light on the mind and impose a choice that can subsequently govern one's way of thinking and acting. Remember Saul (who will later be Paul) on the way to Damascus, surprised by the dazzling vision of Christ who reproves him; "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? and Saul asks: Who are you, Lord? and the answer was, as we know: I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting! And then Saul asks trembling: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22, 10). Here we have the great question of salvation: what are we to do?

It must be remembered then, that there are two

fundamental questions for the guidance of our lives: one concerns being, what is it? It springs from our capacity of knowing, and raises for us scientific and theological problems, the problems of culture and of conscience; a fundamental, indispensable, priority question, but a speculative one, which is not decisive for the supreme destiny of our existence. The other question concerns human activity, it is addressed rather to the will, and is expressed precisely in the question: what to do to give life its full meaning, its deepest significance. It concerns the moral aspect, that aspect which is also indispensable, and, from a certain point of view, to a higher degree than the speculative one.

The fate of human life will depend finally on the answer we have given to this question concerning the activity in which our life has been engaged. We will not be judged by what we are, but rather by what we do. The Gospel is very clear in this connection: read the "Magnificat", read the Beatitudes; remember Christ's parable of the talents: it is not the fortune of having them that counts, but the fruit we have succeeded in obtaining from the talents themselves which constitutes their real fortune for us. Doing, doing things well, doing good, prevails in the final judgment on the value of our existence, on being and on knowing.

And so what is important above all is the use of our will.

This involves a complement in our modern education, in which freedom has rightly a first subjective place, of which we must all be jealous custodians and defenders; (see the declaration of the recent Council on religious freedom). But freedom is called objectively to exercise itself in seeking and choosing good, it is called to make duty its own. Moral obligation calls freedom, which then appears with its face illuminated with divine light when it chooses the law of duty, and is not dissolved into arbitrary caprice which debases freedom itself in submission to blind passions or to lower interests.

For us believers faith will be our norm and support both in speculative and in practical guidance of our lives, always remembering the vital statement of St Paul, who repeats to us: he who through faith is righteous shall live (1 Rom 1, 17).

Christian life calls for a complete use of the will. This gift of the heart is what characterizes it. It is love, it is happiness, it is sacrifice, it is communion with the Christ of our faith, the guide and source of our operating. It is something that is worth experiencing.

THE OPEN WINDOW



Dear Father Hohman,

Is missing Mass a sin? If so, what kind?

(Signed) S.A.

Dear S.A.,

There is no possible way of answering your question as it is put down. Church law indicates that it is a serious matter to miss Mass on Sundays and Holy Days and therefore objectively speaking it would be a serious sin to miss Mass. However, that is a very simplistic approach to the

whole question. I would much rather put it in the framework of a relationship. The reason we go to Mass on Sunday is basically to worship—to establish our dependence upon God, our need, for Him and our love for Him. Because Eucharist means thanksgiving, we are there to render our thanks to God for all His blessings. So the quality of the relationship would be of much more importance than the simple fact of being present on a given occasion or not. We know in our human relationships that if we love someone and then do not pay attention to them or neglect them we indicate by that sign a lack of love and, sooner or later the relationship will be broken. It is much the same way with God. We might miss on a given occasion and there be no sin at all. But if we miss consistently and thereby indicate our disinterest in God and showing Him reverence, worship and thanks, we begin to disrupt the relationship which should

be there. That would be a serious matter. How serious it would be to miss on one particular occasion depends on our attitude. If one were simply spurning God then it would be serious. If it were a question of having a reason, even though it were not a serious one, or missing on one occasion, then the matter would have to be judged accordingly. It would probably not be a serious matter. Even the Church of pre-Vatican II indicated a possibility of someone having a vacation out in the woods where no church was immediately available and it would be perfectly legitimate to miss Mass. So you see the Church itself is rather indulgent as far as isolated situations. It is when we indicate that we are ready to disrupt our relationship with God in worship that we begin to get into the serious matter. The trouble with missing occasionally is that it's an easy step to getting into the habit

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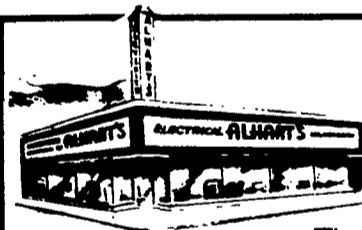
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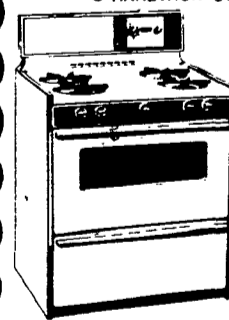


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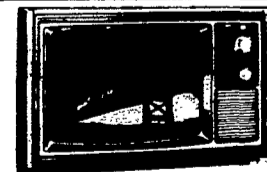
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