

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS...

(Commercials are funny things.
It all depends where we let them take us.)

There is a tag line in a television commercial that I am sure any of you could provide for me. "What happens in Vegas—stays in Vegas. I have never been to Vegas. I am probably not old enough to go to Vegas. I have been to Atlantic City. I am probably not old enough to go to Atlantic City either. But I have seen enough TV and displays about Las Vegas to think that I probably have a pretty accurate idea of what goes on there. I am intrigued by this commercial because there is this implication that in Vegas we might step out of our ordinary ways and do some wild or crazy things—even some things that we wouldn't want the folks back home to know about.

Now, I am guessing but I do not think that this advertisement is trying to recruit people to enter into serious Spiritual Direction there or to attend a Vegas Retreat experience. I am guessing that they are talking about what we would call today "Adult Entertainment." So, here's a question. Isn't this Ad a pretty unsubtle form of temptation? Inviting you to come to a place where the "ordinary" rules don't always apply? Isn't there something inside of each of us that resonates with that kind of thinking? Don't we sometimes wish that we could sin without the negative consequences that flow from our sin? Or without incurring damnation? My heart sometimes wants that. It is not good.

It is a lie. There are consequences. There are always consequences. Some times right away; some times not for a time but always consequences. When the implication is that you can get off Scott free, it is a lie. But it is a lie that we sometimes want to believe. The readings today reveal two things about God. His mercy to sinners as well as his judgment of sinners. Mercy and Judgment. How to balance? God calls Moses to do something for him. God wanted Moses to be his instrument so God could show mercy to Israel. "Moses, tell them my name. Show them who I am. Reveal to them my heart." The people of Israel had not always been faithful. Neither have we. If we take an attitude of nonchalance toward our sin, toward our lack of integrity, our cheating, our arrogance, our coveting what others around us have, our lust for pleasure—we are in trouble. But if we recognize these sins, own them in contrition, then God is merciful and we get another chance.

But we must make no mistake about it. There is a judgment coming. What we do or what we have done matters. What we have not done matters. Whether we try to justify ourselves or rationalize what we have done, or explain it away—that matters too. It is so easy for us to identify when politicians, sports stars and

celebrities sin. It is not as easy with ourselves. Oscar Wilde once said (in reference to the double lives we sometimes lead by giving in to our sinful tendencies): "He who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one must die." And he would know because he lived a double life. God is going to hold us accountable for our actions—until we are sorry.

Let me return to that Vegas Ad for a moment. It is not true that "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." No it shows up again—on You Tube, Face Book, My Life, Reality TV, Twitter. It almost makes you happy for Confession for that is the truly one place where "What happens in confession stays in confession." Thank God. Maybe there's something to that sacrament after all. Maybe Christ knew what he was doing when he left it to us. My friends, we are the fig trees. We are either bearing fruit or we are not. Time grows short. God is good. God is merciful but God also has expectations of us, legitimate expectations based on the grace that God makes available to us each day. The Day of Judgment approaches. It comes for us all. It is coming soon. Our honesty with our sin before God enables God's mercy to enter our lives