

TITLE: “The Mind of Christ”

“The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vanity” Psalm says. Lately, we’ve all seen terrible things in the news. The kinds of things that, once you’ve seen them, it becomes to think about anything else. How do you rid your mind of such thoughts?

Recent psychological surveys show that 30 to 50 percent of people regularly think to themselves in internal monologues. It might come as a surprise to you that the people around you are regularly talking to themselves in their minds. Or, if you’re like me, it’s more surprising to learn that over half of the people around me are *not* regularly talking to themselves. It seems that for those of you who do not have internal monologues, your mind is occupied more with images, like a picture of a ‘to-do’ list or the actual form of words and letters than it is the internal sound of your own imaginary voice. Those who have the internal monologue find great value in having an ability to hear words before speaking them. But, it can also prove dangerous. Once the internal monologue turns on, and the words turn negative, or worse, destructive of self or others, how do you then turn it off?

The truth is, whether we have an internal monologue or not, our thoughts have a tendency to turn to vanity, to futility, to revel in what is not real. We frequently find ourselves meditating on evil things, whether it’s the evil of others or the evil that we might desire. In a world such as ours that demands to know whose side we

are on, no matter the issue, an opinion is required of everyone, all the time, how do we overcome the vanity of our own thoughts? The only answer is that we must fill our minds with the goodness of God, who knows our vain thoughts, but comes to dwell in our thoughts to bring us rest and peace. As the hymn goes, “Thou my best thought, by day or by night / waking or sleeping, Thy presence, my light.”

In our Gospel lesson, we learn that there is a God who knows the thoughts and intents of the human heart. “3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!” 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?” The scribes were those who had the duty of being keepers of God’s holy word. They were the writers, the secretaries of the Sanhedrin and of the rabbis. They knew God’s word, and yet they thought evil in their hearts about Christ. There’s no indication in the text that Christ saw any expression on their faces nor that he read their body language. Rather, St. Matthew clearly records: first, that when the scribes said ‘This Man blasphemes’, that they did not say this out loud but that they said this ‘within themselves.’ This makes you wonder, how did Matthew know that they said this, if they didn’t say it out loud, if it was only a thought in their minds? At this point in Christ’s ministry, he had not even met Matthew. That happens in the next chapter. This means someone who witnessed this event was told, perhaps by Christ himself, what the scribes were thinking internally, secretly.

Apparently the scribes heard that internal monologue, and it was the voice of evil. The voice they heard within was like the voice of Satan in the Garden. Whispering softly to them in the familiar sound of their own voice, saying, “This man blasphemes. This man. Surely a man is all he is, just a man like you. And yet, not like you, because you are righteous. This man is a blasphemer of God. He thinks that he can forgive sins, but only God can know the thoughts of the heart, to forgive them. Who does he think he is?” Of course, Satan knows exactly who he is, and he trembles in his presence, the cowardly devil that he is. So, the scribes spoke evil to themselves inwardly. A second important point to note here, and the only reason given in the text by which Matthew would be able to record the specific words that the scribes said in their own hearts, is that Christ “knew their thoughts.” In the Greek it says, “and seeing their inward deliberations, he said, why do you think evil in your hearts.”

The Greek word for “think” means “the process of considering something.” There are different kinds of thoughts. There are impulsive thoughts that come to you out of the blue, and you don’t know if they are true or false. You see a familiar face in the crowd, and you think to yourself, “Hey, there’s my friend Victor,” and as you raise your hand to wave at Victor, you realize “no, that’s not Victor” and you quickly pull your waving hand through your hair and you walk away from the person that you now know is a complete stranger. We sometimes have impulsive thoughts that

we know could be wrong. But, the Greek word that Matthew uses in this passage indicates that the scribes had gone through all of the steps in the reasoning process. Based on their training and education, they had acquired the skill of logic, whereby they could discern true thoughts from false. In this instance they used that skill. They considered the premises, based on the evidence presented, and they quickly came to a professional conclusion based on their trusted expertise in scribal knowledge. So they issued this verdict in the courtroom of their minds: “This man blasphemes.”

Christ is foolishness to the Greeks, and a stumbling block to the Jews, precisely for this reason, that neither the Greeks nor the Jews were willing to admit even the possibility that God might become man. And yet, he knew their thoughts, that they were vanity. How could he know their thoughts, unless he were God? And that is exactly why they thought evil in their hearts, because they did not want him to have the ability, like a spiritual physician, to open up the hidden chambers of their hearts and minds, to expose that inner monologue to the listening world and to the high court of heaven. But, as the Psalm says, “he who made the ear, does he not hear” and “he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?” There is no thought that you or I can have or have ever had that God does not already know. And Christ is God, the very mind and heart of the Deity itself, in human flesh, Christ our brother.

We all know what a great comfort it is to have a friend who comes to us in the hour of grief, who knows just what to say, or doesn’t say anything at all, but simply

lends us a hand or shoulder to lean on. Who is a better friend to us than Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulder, if we simply lean upon it by faith, we lean upon the shoulder of God, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. Christ knows our thoughts, because he has a very human mind, and yet he is the Mind of God. He knows that our thoughts are vain. As Genesis says, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” God saw that, and yet in his great mercy, and his great love for you, he chose to subject himself to the power of darkness, to the evil thoughts and intents of the human heart, and yet he was without sin, pure, unspotted, unaffected by that very evil, not so that he might prove himself to be unlike us in every way, but that becoming like us in every way, except for sin, he might save us from the terrifying thought that we deserve an eternal death penalty as a result of our sins.

Christ knows your thoughts, the thoughts that you have about your friends, about your enemies, your thoughts about him, how often you think of him with joy or with contempt in your heart. Today he wants you to share in his thoughts. The Scriptures say that “we have the mind of Christ.” Why else did Christ ascend into heaven if not to pour into your heart and your mind, his own Spirit, which is the Spirit of Holiness, so that your thoughts may be one with his thoughts, so that by the administration of the angelic hosts of heaven, God might touch your mind, and that

by that sacred and almighty touch, you might have a new mind renewed after the image of God. The very first experience that we have of that heavenly touch, that holy breath of God, is in the forgiveness of sins. As our lesson says, “Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”

What are the most oppressive thoughts that a person can have, the most destructive thoughts that lead us to despair, if not the memories, the regrets of some evil deed done in the past, the guilt that we carry with us? What is just as dangerous about the evil that we have done, is the evil that it does to us. There are many people in our world today, many in our community, and even some in the church, who cannot believe that God would ever forgive their sins or be their friend. But, the reality is, they don't want God to forgive them, because it seems too simple, too easy, and even unjust. “How could I get away with what I have done, the evil things that have hurt other people, and perhaps even ended lives? I deserve to suffer, and I won't accept any easy religion that tells me that I do not deserve to suffer for what I have done.” And so, by a righteous indignation, they make themselves the judge of themselves, and they become their own worst enemy. They paralyze themselves, so that their spirits can no longer move. They let the evils of the past control them, paralyze them.

But there is good news even for those paralyzed with oppressive thoughts. Notice what Christ does. Because he is God, looks into the hearts of the friends who bring to him this paralyzed man, and it does not say that he saw the paralyzed man's faith. It says, "and Jesus, seeing their faith" looks to the paralyzed man and calls him "son". What does this mean? Is it possible for those who are paralyzed by evil and oppressive thoughts to be called "sons", "children of God?" How is it that the faith of this man's friends brought forgiveness of his sins? In the other Gospels, it tells us just how determined these friends were, to bring this man to Christ, so that he might be healed. They couldn't get into the house where Jesus was, so they climbed up on the roof, and dug through the mud tiles until they tore a hole in the roof, big enough to lower their friend through it. What amazing friends these were, selfless, tireless, unafraid of the consequences.

And Christ said to the scribes, "which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?" 6 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." 7 And he arose and departed to his house." Beloved, have you considered just how powerful your faith is? I know that you often feel weak, your faith seems small. But, have you considered that your small faith will save the world? Your simple belief and trust that Christ has the power to wipe away the sins, the thoughts of sins that oppress the soul, so that you can say to your friend,

“friend, look at the evil things that I have done, the wickedness of king David, who was guilty of murder and adultery, the constant rebellion of the Israelites, the three-fold denial of Peter, and the sins of Christ’s own people that nailed him to the cross, of whom he prayed, ‘Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.’ If God was willing to forgive all of that, surely he will forgive you, no matter what you have done. He forgives you, and not for nothing, but in exchange for your soul, for your devotion, and for your life, a divine life, for a sinner’s life, nailed daily to the cross, as you count yourself unworthy to die upon it like Christ did, being more like Peter, requesting that you be crucified upside down, that you might not be gazed upon for your glory. To those who are willing to die and put their old self in the grave so that it might rise again in glory with Christ, Christ says, “arise, take up your mat, take up that record of what you once were, the guilt, the evil thoughts, so that all may see it, and go to your home, for your sins are forgiven.”

As St. Ambrose says, “Hear me, you earthly men, who in your sins bring forth drunken thoughts. I have found a Physician. He dwells in heaven, and distributes His healing on earth. He alone can heal my pains, Who Himself has none. He alone Who knows what is hidden, can take away the grief of my heart, the fear of my soul: Jesus Christ. Christ is grace, Christ is life, Christ is Resurrection. Amen.” What a friend we have in Jesus, and what a friend Jesus makes out of you. That little bit of faith that you have, Christ gave it to you not just for your own salvation, but for others



too. How are you using it? Who are the paralytics that you are bringing to Christ? What lengths will you go to to bring them to him? Will you bring them here to the communion of saints?

As one theologian says, “O what glorious assembly is the Church of the first-born, how blessed and divine! What perfect lovers! How sweet and delightful! Every one being the end, every one the King of heaven; every one the Son of God in greatness and glory; every one the entire and perfect friend of all the rest; every one the joy of each other’s Soul...every one [God’s] only friend, yet loving each other as [God]’s only friend...O my god, make me one of that happy assembly. And let me love every one for whom Christ died, with a love as greatly and lively as His. That I may dwell in Him, and He in me.” As we come to Holy Communion, to share in one life with Christ the Son of God, to feed our souls on his body and blood, let this be our one and only prayer, that we might be drawn further into the communion of saints, and by being drawn in by faith, that we might also draw others into this mystic sweet communion. In the name...