

Reflection Tuesday Week 17 – 2020

It has been claimed that Pope Francis does not believe in hell. Yet he publicly stated that people who do not open their hearts to Christ will end up condemning themselves to hell. He also referred to hell as *"the truth"* and described it as being *"far away from the Lord for eternity."* A female scout asked Pope Francis *"If God forgives everyone, why does hell exist?"* - a question that many ask today. Francis acknowledged it to be a *"good and difficult question."* He then spoke of a very proud angel who was envious of God and who wanted God's place. Although God wanted to forgive him, the angel replied, *'I don't need your forgiveness. I am good enough!'* *"This is hell,"* the pope explained. *"It is telling God, 'You take care of yourself because I'll take care of myself.' You are not sent to hell; you go there because you choose to be there. Hell is wanting to be distant from God because you do not want God's love. This is hell."* Most contemporary theologians would agree with the pope. Hell is not about fire and brimstone; it is about our freedom to say no to God, our freedom to reject love and choose loneliness. If you believe in freedom, you have to believe in hell. When we close our hearts and tell the world to go to hell, we are in fact choosing hell for ourselves. Hell is the absence of love, companionship, communion. We are not sent there; we choose it. God did not create hell; we did. There are some theologians who believe that hell is empty because once we meet God, we will want to choose him. The Angel positively turned away from God. Before Vatican II (in the 60s), preachers often referred to hell-fire and damnation, to frighten people into doing good. Since then the Church has encouraged us to choose good out of love. Love for God; love for our neighbour. **C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity** wrote *"You can be good for the mere sake of goodness; you cannot be bad for the mere sake of badness. You can do a kind action when you are not feeling kind and when it gives you no pleasure, simply because kindness is right; but no one ever did a cruel action simply because cruelty is wrong or only because cruelty is pleasant or useful to him. In other words, badness cannot succeed even in being bad in the same way in which goodness is good. Goodness is, so to speak, itself: badness is only spoiled goodness. And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled."*

By the way . . .

One day at the entrance to heaven, St. Peter saw a New York street gang walk up to the Pearly Gates. This being a first, St. Peter ran to God and said, "God, there are some evil, thieving New Yorkers at the Pearly Gates. What do I do?". God replied, "Just do what you normally do with that type. Re-direct them down to hell." St. Peter went back to carry out the order. All of a sudden, he comes running back yelling "God, God, they're gone, they're gone!" "Who, the New Yorkers?". "No, the Pearly Gates."