

3rd Sunday after Pentecost
July 03, 2011

This Sunday is the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost and for some reason this week I thought about the book, Catch-22. It was written by Joseph Heller and published in 1961 by Simon and Schuster.

Have you read it?

Catch-22 is about the U.S. Army Air Corp in World War II, around 1944. The B-25 bomber crews are on the island of Pianosa, in the Mediterranean Sea, west of Italy.

Some of the characters in the book are a pilot named Orr, a mess hall officer named Milo (he operates a syndicate on the side for his own financial gain), a Major in the group whose name is Major so he is called Major Major, and a bombardier named Yossarian who is a member of a crew in the 256th Squadron.

When Major Major asks Yossarian why he won't fly any more missions, Yossarian says:

"I'm afraid."

"That's nothing to be ashamed of," Major Major counseled him kindly, "We're all afraid."

"I'm not ashamed," Yossarian said, "I'm just afraid."

If you have not read the book or if you have forgotten, here is how Catch-22 works.

Concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that are real and immediate is the process of a rational mind. So pilots and crew members could be grounded if they were crazy.

All they had to do was ask; and as soon as they did, they would have to fly more missions.

So a bomber crew member would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, **but** if he were sane he had to fly more missions. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; **but** if he didn't want to he was sane and therefore had to.

Later in the story, as Catch-22 became known around the base, victims of harassment by those in charge would state provisions of Catch-22, such as: "Catch-22 states that agents enforcing Catch-22 need not prove that Catch-22 actually contains whatever provision the accused violator is accused of violating."

Another character in the book put it forth this way: "Catch-22 says they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing."

The author, Joseph Heller, is suggesting that bureaucrats often lead organizations, especially those run by bad or insane people, to trivialize important matters (such as those affecting life and death) and to grossly exaggerate the importance of trivial matters (such as spelling and other clerical errors in paper work).

In addition to Catch-22, throughout this story, when ever a crew or members of a crew approached the magical number for required flown missions over enemy territory, mysteriously the number would be raised so they had to fly more missions over enemy territory.

As Christians we are engaged in battle also, but the battle is different.

Let me read to you the verses of a hymn, I am sure you will recognize it.

Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before.
Christ the royal master, Leads against the foe; Forward into battle, See, his banners go!

Like a mighty army Moves the Church of God; Let us boldly follow Where the saint have trod.
We are not divided; All one body we: One in hope and doctrine, One in charity.

Crowns and thrones may perish, Kingdoms rise and wane, But the Church of Jesus
Constant will remain; Gates of hell can never 'Gainst that Church prevail. We have Christ's
own promise, And that cannot fail.

Onward, then, you faithful, Join our happy throng; Blend with ours your voices In the
triumph-song. Glory, laud, and honor unto Christ the king. We through countless ages
With the angels sing.

Refrain:

Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war, With the cross of Jesus Going on before.

As Christians, our battle is with the persistence of sin in our lives.

God clearly lays out what sin is, and yet in our cleverness, as Religious Bureaucrats, we
employ the circular logic of a Catch-22 to negate what God calls sin.

We chose to use circular logic to negate what God calls sin so we can continuing doing
what we want, and in the process add God's blessing to it as well.

In Romans, chapter 7, St. Paul clearly lays out the battle that we all face.

I do not understand my own actions. For I don not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Paul has sinful desires, he can name them, he knows that they go against God's
commandments; he knows that they are wrong, and yet at the same time he feels driven to
do them.

Paul tries to avoid the sin, he does not want to fall back into sin once again, but inevitably
he fails in his efforts.

I think we would all admit with Paul that often times when we want to act as God wants us
to act we discover that evil lies close at hand, ready to convince us that since so many
others are doing the same thing, why shouldn't we?

I think we would all admit with Paul that often times our internal sinful desires can
eventually lead us to act on those internal sinful desires with the results of hurting and
harming our relationship with others and even with ourselves, let alone hurting and
harming our relationship with God.

We can not save ourselves from these internal evil desires, no matter how hard we try, as St. Paul says: **“Wretched man that I am! Who will save me from this body of death?”**

Then St. Paul gives us the answer: **“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

Jesus is the Answer!!!

Though we continue to sin daily, Jesus continually comes to forgive us our sins and to restore us to a right relationship with God.

In Matthew’s Gospel lesson for today Jesus says:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.

Yes we all grow weary of the labor of carrying around with us the heavy burdens of our sins and because of them the knowledge of our separation from God.

To **come to** Christ Jesus is to believe that our sins are truly forgiven by God, the Father, for the sake of Jesus, the Son, and when we believe that, our hearts are brought back to life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray:

O’ God, lead us to daily repentance of our sins. Forgive us when we continue to fail to follow your commandments. Strengthen each one of us in our faith so that we can fulfill your great commission to us. We pray this in your name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.