

## 2019 Daily Lenten Reader:

Passages from “*How to Be A Sinner: Finding Yourself in the Language of Repentance*”

by Peter Bouteneff

[Note: This Reader is offered as a resource for reflection during the journey of Great Lent and in preparation for our upcoming Lenten Retreat on Saturday April 6 with Peter Bouteneff on the topic of his book.

The passages were chosen to help in the development of the vocabulary and “language of repentance.” It begins with the special section entitled, “*The Bible on Human Nature: Is It Human to Sin?*” (located towards the end of the book) and then moves back to the beginning.

This Reader, of course, offers just a sampling of the book’s richness and is meant to encourage each of us to read the whole book. Sign up on the bulletin board for a copy (\$15.00).

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### **Reading #1: Monday, March 11, 2019**

#### **What is sin?**

“Sin,” in its Greek translation (hamaria) means “missing the mark,” that is, off target. This matters, because Greek was the language of many of the earliest Church fathers, whose thinking shaped much of our most basic theology. If we are at root good yet broken, it makes sense that this Greek-inflected idea of sin actually presumes our goodness: it presupposes that there is a “mark” to be missed. Hitting the target – not missing it – is truly to be human. Remember, sin does not define humanity; goodness does. Whatever sin is, it does not reside at the root of our nature. Our transgressions result from poor aim, misjudgment, skewed priorities. Sin is failure to be true to what we really are. Which is to say:

- Living beings
- Loving God in freedom
- Flourishing in all good things

Sin is turning away from that. It negates flourishing, loving, being. (175-176)

### **Reading #2: Tuesday, March 12, 2019**

#### **About sin**

Let’s contrast that understanding of sin (from the previous passage) with three of the more common definitions.

1) “All things are lawful...” (1 Cor 10:23a)

There are those who reject a notion of sin, or rules, altogether. In this view, we should travel through life, taking its enjoyments and bumps in stride. We should avoid feelings of guilt and shame as detrimental to a life well lived.

2) “...but not all things are helpful.” (1 Cor 10:23b)

To others, ethics should simply be left to common sense. Your heart knows the right or “helpful” thing to do, so do it. In essence, everything is permitted, other than what your instincts tell you is obviously wrong.

3) “Thou shalt not ...”

Others consider sins as a list of taboos. Do not lie, do not kill, do not fornicate. Although couched in negatives, such lists can be useful. They can act like the rumble strip on a highway, the indentations in the road that cause your car to make a loud “hum” when you veer off course. The Ten Commandments function something like this, since it is mostly a list of “Thou shalt not”s. They played a crucial role in the cultivation of God’s people Israel and they continue to act as guide-lines for a right life. They point to the fact of “God’s law,” which can be upheld or transgressed. Israel knew well that in his love for them God provided these laws so his people – and ultimately all people – might live an abundant, true, healthy life ((176-178).

### **Reading #3: Wednesday, March 13, 2019**

#### **About sin – continued**

But as helpful as “thou-shalt-not” lists can be, they are limited. They can make us feel not as though we are traveling along a highway protected by a rumble strip, but through a minefield paying more attention to avoiding danger than to progressing forward. Such lists also encourage legalism and self-justification. I can say to myself, “Well, I didn’t *technically* commit adultery, because we did not consummate the sexual act (though we did everything short of that....”

In contrast, one of the main characteristics of Christ’s commandments is to make the law into a much more holistic way of life. Let’s explore what Jesus does with commandments, rules, and the concept of sin (178-179).

### **Reading #4: Thursday, March 14, 2019**

#### **Identifying the Mark**

Let’s return to the definition of sin as “missing the mark.” If that is correct, we ought to devote some serious attention to what “the mark” should be. Let us orient ourselves. We might be missing it because we’re not actually aiming right.

There are many ways to identify the target. Our conscience can act as a pointer, but it is not infallible, and sometimes it is fickle. We need a more reliable guide. To the Christian that is Jesus Christ, as we meet him in the Gospels.

Christ *is* the target. He sets the standard, by his life and his death. He also sets some clear, explicit “commandments,” in Matthew 5-7. He not only expands on the Ten Commandments, but he also transforms their proscriptive (“thou-shalt-not”) spirit into a holistic handbook for living (178-179).

### **Reading #5: Friday, March 15, 2019**

#### **Transforming the Commandments in Love**

Jesus begins teaching the commandments, through affirmation, rather than negation. *Blessed* are those, he says, who live in life-affirming ways (peacemaking), or experience these kinds of adversities (unjust persecution), yet maintain these attitudes and dispositions (meekness, purity of heart, the thirst for what is right) – Mt 5:1-12)....

Christ’s teachings do more than merely upgrading the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments). By focusing on the spirit as much as on the letter of the law, his commandments become part of a whole way of life, informed foremost by love. Which is perhaps why Christ introduces a radical requirement almost entirely absent from the Old Testament: love of the enemy. That is the greatest test of love and, therefore, love’s proof (180).

### **Reading #6: Saturday, March 16, 2019**

#### **Teaching the Commandments with Love**

The transition from living the “letter of the law” to living the “spirit of the law” is deeply challenging for Christ’s hearers. So he teaches them as does a true pastor. When different inquirers approach him about the law, he listens carefully to them. Then he tailors his response based on what they may be ready to hear to guide them on their next step towards Real Life. With love, he moves each person, in a different way, from “letter” to “spirit” (181).

### **Reading #7: Sunday, March 17, 2019**

#### **The Mark**

What we learn from the Gospels’ descriptions of Christ – and then from St. Paul, and the Church Fathers and Mothers – is not only that “Thou shalt not” becomes “You ought to.” The commandments become something that people have to discern for themselves and live into, on the basis of something bigger. The root principle is, “Love God and love one another, including your enemies.” With those, the rest will fall into place. You could say that there is barely even a need to explicitly prohibit specific misdeeds such as murder (or even anger), fornication (or lust), lying (or stretching the truth), because none of them satisfies the criterion of love (182-183).

### **Reading #8: Monday, March 18, 2019**

## **Sin as a Condition**

Sin is both an inner disposition (like anger or lust), and an action (like violence or adultery). But throughout the Bible and the life of the Church, sin is also presented as both a condition, as well as a kind of force.

The condition of sin can be compared to sickness. Sickness resembles “missing the mark.” We know what health looks like, and sickness is a distortion of it. Understanding our transgressions in terms of sickness underscores the importance of identifying it, diagnosing it, and taking steps to heal it. Christ is often described as the great physician, with the Church as his hospital...

The condition of sin can also be compared to enslavement (Jn 8:34). In this view, we are effectively bound to patterns of behavior and cycles of obsessive thinking. We are in thrall to our desires for power and gratification. We find ourselves mired in situations where no solution avoids hurting someone. We are subjugated by our rationalizing processes. Moving away from sin moves us toward freedom (186).

Reading #9: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

## **Sin as a Force**

Sin is also a kind of force or power...Genesis shows...that from the beginning there has been a pull towards wrongdoing. Later scriptures and other writings identify that “pull” with the Devil and his demons. But once humanity is under way, it itself becomes a (*or the*) major vehicle in the propagating of that evil. The spiritual forces of immorality, the fear of death, and the sins of others make it virtually impossible for anyone not to go astray. “Sins” are individual actions, but “sin” is a force, a sway, an influence, a power. We ignore it at our peril (188).

Reading #10: Wednesday, March 20, 2019

## **Sin is not the end of the story**

Among us beautiful and good human beings, all created by God in his own image, there is, as we and the Bible have been saying, no one who lives and does not sin.

But—crucially—that doesn’t mean that we *are* sin. Nor that “to live means to sin.” Nor that there is no step that we can take without transgressing. Nor that the true reality of human nature is wicked. What it does mean is that the humanity we experience in this world is inevitably distorted. Humanity, collectively, falls short of itself. It misses the mark. But that is not the end of the story. The beginning of healing, from our side, rests with our recognizing the fall of humanity and our own personal role in that fall. It is our recognition of ourselves as sinners, in need of healing. This opens the door to the saving love of God (190-191).

Reading #11: Thursday, March 21, 2019:

**Everybody sins.**

Everybody sins. We all fall short of the glory of a genuine human life —sometimes in small ways, sometimes in larger ways, sometimes by thinking, saying, and doing, truly terrible things. The Bible in every church service reminds us of this constantly. And I ask myself, “am I really that horrible? “I may think, “this is so negative and judgmental.” Or perhaps, “wait, am I beginning to *like* this language in a strange way? Or else, “I’ve had too many people in my life tell me I’m worthless. I don’t need a book and a church to add to that hateful chorus.”

But if we are going to be part of the Church, we must face up to the scene within us. In the New Testament, we hear Saint Paul saying, “none is righteous, no, not one “ (Romans 3:10). Later, we read, “if we say we are sinless we deceive ourselves “ (1 Jn 1:8). We are meant to acknowledge that everyone transgresses. And that means that I sin. That I am a sinner. More starkly, as Saint Paul says in another epistle, “I am the foremost of sinners” (11-12).

**Reading #12: Friday, March 22, 2019:**

Even though the language of sin can make us uncomfortable, it also acknowledges the world as we know it. It’s not a stretch for most of us to see that the world is broken and that the root of the problem lies in our human inclination toward the wrong. Reinhold Niebuhr famously remarked, “Original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.” People may not accept Christianity or the existence of a personal God. But they generally have little problem believing that our existential situation is dire (12).

**Reading #13: Saturday, March 23, 2019:**

We do not view humans as totally depraved. The image of God propels us to cooperate willingly in the process of our salvation and lies at our core identity, however broken that may be. A central premise of this book is that we human beings are innately good. But from the very beginning we distort this goodness and must recover it. We are sinners who, even as we are constantly being forgiven, must always be in the process of conversion and the correction of our lives. But God’s grace and mercy reaches us precisely *through* our brokenness. In this, we begin to see what lies at the heart of our joy, humility, and inner liberty (20-21).

**Reading #14: Sunday, March 24, 2019**

Knowledge of your self—especially your sins—is vital to your health. A full self-understanding is extremely rare, if not unattainable. According to Saint Isaac the Syrian, seeing ourselves as we really are is a greater miracle than raising the dead. So in this chapter we will talk about how to discover ourselves as sinners. This discovery, not surprisingly, is always a process. Ideally, we are always growing into a deeper understanding of ourselves in relation to God and each other. Self discovery, including that of our sinner identity, is a journey. Most of us don't wake up one day crying out, as the Psalmist does, "For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me" (Ps 51:3). Most of us are able to live into its words only gradually. This voyage, like any other, will take us through peaks and valleys (24-25).

### **Reading #15: Monday, March 25, 2019**

#### **Exposure**

Have you ever found yourself in the presence of someone who fills you with light and good? In that presence, have you perhaps simultaneously felt somehow exposed and ashamed? You don't even have to exchange words with someone like that, to know that you are in the presence of holiness. People—or places—that are pure, transparent, holy can simultaneously inspire and expose us. They give us an inkling of what it might feel like to experience the presence of God. Can we endure that degree of love and beauty? (28)

### **Reading #16: Tuesday, March 26, 2019**

Our exposure to anything that is really true, genuine, beautiful—or to someone who loves us completely, to the core of our being—can be a terrifying experience. When they want to turn tail and run, fast, because we know that to withstand that exposure entails the changing of our life. The pain of this experience is only tolerable when we know that we are being judged by someone who is pure love and mercy. And God is loving and merciful to an extent that is beyond our comprehension (30-31).

### **Reading #17: Wednesday, March 27, 2019**

Sometimes we needn't travel far to experience that kind of exposure. In fact, we can find something of this purity, joy, shaming, and unconditional love, in our relationships with babies and young children. We can also perceive it in our interaction with nature, and sometimes especially with animals. Even there, together with the joy of such encounters, we might feel the pain of being exposed by their un-self-conscious purity. The pain of the experience may be one reason why some people abuse children and animals, whose purity and simplicity can show us uncomfortable truths about ourselves (31).

### **Reading #18: Thursday, March 28, 2019**

#### **Other Ways In: A big failure**

There are, of course, other potential landmarks along the route of our self-discovery as sinners.

One obvious one is **a big failure**. Suddenly we wake up to the realization that by saying something or not, by taking a course of action (or not) we have done great damage either to ourselves, to someone else,

or to the world. The mistake might have taken one second, perhaps when we impulsively press send on a really bad email. It might have taken years of festering in a toxic relationship. But certainly we realize that we have totally blundered, and are filled with regret. Such failures can lead us into vain replays of our mental tape-loops, about how stupid I sounded when I made that remark about my colleague. But compunction over our serious errors can sometimes serve as a promising lead-in to a more thorough and constructive inventory of our lives (32).

### **Reading #19: Friday, March 29, 2019**

#### **Other Ways In: The fallenness of the world**

Another entry can come from contemplating the **fallenness of the world**. We can observe society's subtle failures in mediocrities, or dwell on especially horrible events, and find inklings of those tragedies in the depths of our own hearts. Sometimes we step into a realization that—because we are all so thoroughly interconnected—something exists within each of us that contributes to the disastrous state of affairs. Once in the aftermath of a series of arson attacks against black churches in the south, I was part of an ecumenical committee drafting a prayer service. The other participants mostly proposed prayers that lamented or condemned other peoples racism in anger. I suggested a prayer of personal confession, identifying the anger, pettiness, and prejudice that dwell in our own hearts. To which most of the committee replied, “Why? We’re not the angry racists. They are.” But the ones who took a deeper look inside themselves were markedly uncomfortable with what they saw there. Taking responsibility for the ills of the world can seem like she her vanity—as if I am personally so consequential!—but it should actually stem from a deep sense that we are all in this together. And wouldn’t it seem that our primary duty should be amending our own lives rather than pointing fingers and blaming others? After all, we can take total responsibility for and actually change only ourselves. (33).

### **Reading #20: Saturday, March 30, 2019**

#### **The Thought of our mortality**

A final point to consider is the thought of our mortality. We’re going to die. The older we get, the idea of our death arrives more frequently as the years speed up and our bodies and minds begin failing us more. We may have to confront it after a near-death experience, an accident, a heart attack, preparation for serious surgery, or the purchase of a burial plot. The realization that we will inevitably die has a way of cutting through some of our self-justification. It may even lead to a liberating spontaneity (34).

### **Reading #21: Sunday, March 31, 2019**

#### **Practical Suggestions —Pray**

Pray for the gift of self-perception—specifically for the gift of the awareness of your own sins, of your particular passions. Asking God to show you the extent of your sin may seem dreadful, dangerous. Can you bear it? Yet you must trust God that he will give you only what you can bear. All your prayer does is to indicate to God and yourself your readiness to take a tiny step closer to him. You were stepping

infinitesimally closer to an awareness of your brokenness, and you're under a contingency upon God and his mercy. "Lord, as you will, as you deem it fit, bring me to an awareness of my sin." If you are ready for a more sustained meditation read from the Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete, chanted during Great Lent. Putting us before examples of sinners and saints, it is full of prayers for the recognition of our countless sins, in the sureness of God's love and compassion (36-37).

### **Reading #22: Monday, April 1, 2019**

#### **Examine**

**Examine** yourself, consciously. This one is tricky too, because looking at yourself can become a kind of vainglory. What you might do is examine yourself every day as if you were preparing for confession. I once asked the monk how to prepare for the confession of sins. He advised me to set a goal to be prepared for confession at every moment of my life. That means if someone were to say, in the middle of my morning coffee or while I'm binge watching a TV series, "Right now! Here's your chance!" that I'd be totally ready. Think of how it is with your physical health: attention, diagnosis and healing are most effective when they are ongoing practices, not rare event set aside for once or twice a year. So examine yourself, as a regular discipline. Know and name the passions that you struggle with (37).

### **Reading #23: Tuesday, April 2, 2019**

#### **Be Involved**

As much as you can, **be involved** in the Church's worship, its daily, weekly, and annual rhythms. That would also include observing its cycles of fasting, which are designed to aid in repentance, together with the confession of sins. These disciplines have been tried and tested for ages, guiding us by exposing our vulnerabilities and dependencies. Place your self consistently within the cycles, ideally without interruption: regular regularity it's important. If you have a bucket of dirty water, and keep a constant, regular drip of pure water, the bucket will gradually become purified. Keep showing up (37-38).

### **Reading #24: Wednesday, April 3, 2019**

#### **Purity**

Put yourself in situations of **purity**, goodness, holiness. Read good books, of all kinds. But yourself in the presence of good people, especially ones devoted to the pursuit of purity. Learn from time spent with young children and animals, who in their absence of self-consciousness can be profound truth tellers. Behold beauty and goodness consciously. Expose yourself to their benefits: edification, compunction, tears, love, joy, gratitude (38).

### **Reading #25: Thursday, April 4, 2019**

#### **Crisis**



Be alert in times of **crisis**. They may give you a particular insight into your shortcomings. The truism that “Our problems are actually opportunities,” is not an empty one, if you use such challenges as times to reflect on yourself, remembering that you will die (39).

### **Reading #26: Friday, April 5, 2019**

#### **Perception of Reality**

Being able to view our faults, passions, misdirected thoughts and deeds unclouds our perception, not just of ourselves, but of everything... Fr. Sophrony stated that: “True contemplation begins the moment we become aware of sin.” True contemplation, that is, of other people, of the created world, and of God—of everything—is contingent upon our awareness of sin in ourselves. We cannot see things as they are if we don’t see ourselves as we are.

St. John’s First Epistle (1:8-10) states unequivocally, “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say we have not sinned, we have we make [God] a liar, and his word is not in us (43).

### **Reading #27: Saturday, April 6, 2019**

#### **Freedom**

I was standing outside a church many years ago when a boy who had just been to confession came out the door. He immediately started running, waving his arms, calling, “I’m flying I’m flying.” He embodied the purpose of confession, the unburdening of the soul so that it may fly. Would that our every confession of sin had that effect upon us! But we are all familiar with the feeling—sometimes even physiologically—of the lifting of burdens when we have acknowledged a wrong, whether before a friend, a spouse, an authority, or a child. The problems don’t necessarily evaporate. There may still be reparative work to do, behavior to change, and feelings to heal. But we can now address these with a clearer conscience, possibly with the committed cooperation the person that we trespassed against (44-45).

### **Reading #28: Sunday, April 7, 2019**

#### **Assurance**

This freedom is also liberty from fear. Once we perceive and acknowledge our faults and surrender them to God, we have the deepened assurance of being loved and forgiven. This is not a simple dynamic. Rowan Williams expresses it well in describing the ancient desert monastics:

The desert fathers and mothers are [...] sure that God will forgive, but they know with equal certainty that for us to *receive* that forgiveness in such a way that our lives will be changed is the lifetime’s work requiring the most relentless monitoring of our selfish and lazy habits of thinking and reacting (47-48).

### **Reading #29: Monday April 8, 2019**

## **Non-judgment**

“People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.” This old adage points out that if I am aware of the depth of my vulnerability and weakness—my glass house—I will be less likely to denounce others. After all, as we sometimes say casually, “Who am I to judge? Or more seriously, “How can I condemn someone else when I am myself to worse?”

This can be taken to extremes. I once went to a confession to a priest who, at every wrongdoing that I mentioned, would say, “Don’t worry, I do that too!” A sweet and kind person, maybe his pastoral sensibilities dictated that this was what I needed to hear in the moment, as a comfort. But in principle his good nature misapplied the sin/confession dynamic. The commitment not to judge any person doesn’t mean that we should not call out sin for what it is, in ourselves and others. This is true especially if we’re in the role of hearing about people’s faults and helping guide them. We are supposed to discern sin as part of a genuine perception of reality. Sin exists. Evil exists. When someone does evil, it may be entirely appropriate to hold them responsible. But we are not to judge the person, or worse, condemn the person—only the actions. We cannot claim to know the inner reality that compelled them to act wrongly. Friend or foe, we can only and trust them to the loving, merciful God: “God loves your enemies as much as he loves you” (49-50).

### **Reading #30: Tuesday, April 9, 2019**

## **Compassion**

We should not judge others. If we see ourselves as we are, we will find it simply impossible to. Self-understanding yields mercy, empathy, tolerance, love of the other. St Seraphim of Sarov, who lived at the turn of the 19th century, observed, “We condemn others only because we shun knowing ourselves.” Our deepening realization of our own sin coupled with our increasing experience of God’s mercy will fill us with compassion for others. We will begin to realize that no one is beyond redemption. We will rejoice in people’s small and great acts of kindness. We will cheer their successes. We will experience empathetic sorrow at their struggles and failings. We will not pretend to know or fully understand the intricacies of the internal and external factors in their hearts. We will fervently wish for them nothing but God’s abundant grace, blessing, and love. We will pray that they increasingly come to a conscious knowledge of that love (52).

### **Reading #31: Wednesday, April 10, 2019**

## **The Worst**

While I was living in Japan in the 1980s, I’ve visited Hiroshima. I spent hours wandering through the memorials and exhibits that recount the events and aftermath of August 6, 1945, when the US dropped an atom bomb on the city in one of the last events in World War II. I came across a life-sized replica of the bomb that laid waste to the city and destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives. As I looked at that murderous piece of metal, I had a sudden, momentary vision of that bomb, in a tiny form, inside my own heart. I saw the specter as a gift from God, a fledgling insight that there is no sin that I am not capable of doing or rationalizing. There is no sin that I am not capable of committing within the recesses of my heart

or potentially in reality. It is still hard for me to say, with complete commitment, that I am the foremost of all sinners. But I know how it is possible to say it and mean it (58).

### **Reading #32: Thursday, April 11, 2019**

#### **The Door to Mercy**

It behooves us, in all this, to recall that self knowledge, and even self-abasement before others are not a destination that we ever fully attain. They are something to be constantly sought. Nor are they ends in themselves, but a means to a genuine and liberating humility. The process is in no way automatic. In fact, it is something of a mystery. Dorotheos of Gaza sums the matter up perfectly:

Seeking to know oneself and to put oneself below everyone else and praying to God about everything: this is the road to humility, but humility itself is something divine and incomprehensible (62).

### **Reading #33: Friday, April 12, 2019**

#### **Know yourself**

In many ways, knowing yourself is like knowing anything. A lot of it comes naturally, just by living an increasing number of days. Some might be deliberate and cultivated, in the sense that you might make a conscious decision to study your inner patterns and tendencies. Some might involve discussing your impressions with a trusted advisor. Different kinds of insights, perhaps overlapping, may come from intentional and possibly confessional conversations with a friend, a spiritual father /mother, a psychologist, psychiatrist, or even a child. I wouldn't necessarily place these all on a par with each other. But each in its way has the potential to yield powerful insight. "Advisors" to avoid are those who claim spiritual or psychic powers, especially through Tarot, crystals, or other such means, as their insights may be deceitful, even demonic (69).

### **Reading #34: Saturday, April 13, 2019**

#### **The Power of Naming**

The necessity of naming her condition is all the more important when it is a malady. In order to heal a sickness, you have to diagnose it, so that you can understand it in its context. In order to transcend a condition, you have to recognize it. The principal very much applies to the condition that we name as sinner. Transcending sin begins with identifying it. Maybe the sin: claim it. Now, work on it: confess it. Repent. Surrender it to God on your own as well as in community with other transgressors (75-76).

### **Reading #35: Sunday, April 14, 2019**

#### **Identifying My Self—or Selves**

Am I somehow composed of two selves, the sinful want to be denied and hated, and a God's-image-bearing self that needs to be encouraged and loved? Are there parts of myself to love, cherish, and be true to true

too, and parts to be ignored, denied, hated even guide to? Further, are these my only two components, or are there more? In which case, how many people am I? (81).

### **Reading #36: Monday, April 15, 2019**

#### **Self or Selves**

St. Paul also faced a conundrum of conflicting parts of himself in a steering confession in his Epistle to the Romans:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Virtually all of us can empathize with his inner conflict. Who of us hasn't said, "I know the right thing to do, but I don't do it. It almost feels like there's something foreign living in me."

St. Paul continues his lament:

I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want to, but the evil I do not want to guess what I do. Now if I do what I do not want to, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

He sees sin as a force, sort of like we view a virus. In pursuing the idea, he recognizes a pattern in his thought and actions (81-82).

### **Reading #37: Tuesday, April 16, 2019**

Since knowing yourself involves studying what you do, what you think, what you want, many of us find it helpful to keep a journal. The discipline of writing a daily chronicle of your actions, thoughts, and realizations—sometimes shorter, sometimes longer, sometimes insightful and sometimes totally banal—can be part of a program of mindfulness and self-understanding.

As with all of the endeavors within this book, self-knowledge is a gift as much as a process. Pray about it and for it:

O Lord, in your time and as you will, open to me the mystery of my innermost self, created in your Holy Image. Teach me too about the tendencies in me that distort that self. May my self-reflection be neither vain nor perfunctory. May it orient me all the more to your glory (89).

### **Reading #38: Wednesday, April 17, 2019**

#### **Summary**

These are some of the toxic tendencies to beware of when taking on a sinner identity:

- Reactivating old abuse/victim language about yourself.
- Exacerbating a genuine clinical depression.
- Descending into shame-spirals over things you can't control.
- Obsessing over past sins that have already been forgiven.
- Thinking that you are sin, your shame, your guilt.
- Becoming maudlin or self-pitying.
- Trying to "out-unworthy" other people.
- Allowing it to prevent you from living a fully realized life (150).

### **Reading #39: Thursday, April 18, 2019**

Here's what you might discover in yourself as symptoms or consequences of understanding yourself properly as a sinner:

- Living in truth
- A right stance before God and your fellow humans.
- Freedom from enslavement to self-justification.
- Freedom from care about what others think of you.
- Freedom from taking offense.
- Freedom from judging others.
- Love and mercy for others.
- Love for your true, innermost self.
- Taking responsibility for wrongdoing.
- Addressing your attachments, compulsions, and passions.
- Experiencing forgiveness and love.
- Knowing the sweetness of unearned love.
- Inner peace.
- An appreciation of beauty and goodness in the world.
- The discernment of evil in the world.
- Closeness to Christ.
- Greater knowledge of Christ, who saves the world, overcomes evil, and forgives sin (151-152).

### **Reading #40: Friday, April 19, 2019**

Coming to understand yourself as a sinner heals you because it lets you acknowledge a truth about yourself. It bolsters your consciousness of goodness, beauty, and God. It breaks the logjams that separate you from your true self, from your fellow humans, from God, and from the created world. It is the beginning of your inner acceptance of God's all-encompassing and unconditional love it sets you free (152).