

PARISHES OF
ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH
AND
SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW
WEEKLY REFLECTION

Sunday 22nd February 2026 First Sunday of Lent
Err.... How can Jesus have said that? (5)

In Matthew 12: 31-32, Jesus says: *"...every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.."*

How do we reconcile this statement with paragraph 982 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church which says: *'There is no offence, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. "There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest."* '?

The answer is that the Catechism is correct, and the statement of Jesus needs explanation. Shortly before Jesus made the statement, He had healed a blind and dumb demoniac. The response of some Pharisees was that He had done this by Beelzebub, prince of demons. After further discussion, including Jesus clearly implying that He cast out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit, He makes the statement that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. Therefore, the specific blasphemy Jesus had in mind was that of attributing to Satan the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

Even then, Jesus did not accuse these particular Pharisees of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. His words were in the nature of a warning. The import of that warning can be understood as follows: A person who attributes to the power of evil something which has been done by the power of good suggests that that person is so influenced by evil as to be closed to goodness and mercy. If so, then repentance and forgiveness will not ensue. Since repentance will not be forthcoming, the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Doctors of the Catholic Church have interpreted the passage in this way. Absence of sorrow and repentance is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit since, as St Augustine tells us, God forgives us through the Holy Spirit. Rejecting repentance is rejection of the Holy Spirit such that forgiveness is excluded. It implies that a person's heart has become so hardened to God that they will reject Him permanently

The permanency of the following of evil rather than good helps explain the next words of Jesus that *"...whoever says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven..."*. Even when the Son of Man was being crucified, St Luke (23:34) tells us that He said: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* His mercy and forgiveness were available to those who committed this most heinous sin.

St Thomas Aquinas (1) synthesises the position in these two short extracts: *“Therefore we must say simply that, in this life, every sin can be blotted out by true penance..”* and *“The word or blasphemy spoken against the Holy spirit is final impenitence...which is altogether unpardonable, because after this life has ended, there is no pardon of sins...”*

(1) Summa Theologica Pt III Q86

Stephen S.