

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Associate Rector

Scripture: Matthew 6:24-34

"Split Personality"

Jesus told His disciples *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other."* Serving two masters was not something that was solely for the first century Jew – but I believe it is something of a way of life today in the twenty first century. Jesus had just finished explaining to them that *"where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Two questions that lie at the heart of the matter – **"what or who is the master of your heart?"** The second question that needs to be honestly answered is **"who are you when no one is looking?"**

It would seem that you cannot escape the fact that there are many who are living as more than two different people; like a split personality: one person at church, and then an entirely different person under other circumstances. Think about it for a moment – a person's behavior at church and their behavior behind the wheel; or with old friends, or after a few cocktails, or alone with a bottle, alone in front of a computer – where and what sites are they viewing? Their behavior might be taking drugs to escape, or possibly their sexual behavior with another person. Old habits and addictions can easily rule the roost. The very best laid intentions can be thrown out the window because of fleshly desire. Why can this happen? The reason is simple – when you were conceived you were given a human nature and a sin nature. Isn't it ironic that parents don't have to teach a child to be selfish or to lie – but yet they spend hours trying to teach a child to share and to always be truthful? Those traits are ingrained in the sinful nature – inherited since the "fall of mankind."

The good news is that when you accept Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, when you are saved – the sinful nature is not removed – but is defused, becomes dormant, or ineffective – and another nature – a divine nature, through the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you– a nature of righteousness – not your righteousness – but the righteousness of Jesus Christ, crucified. Here comes the hard part: **we need to be aware of the fact that our sinful nature is not gone** – and that temptation can rear its ugly head at any moment.

At the moment we, through faith, accept Jesus Christ as Lord, a wonderful transformation begins – changing the way you talk, your desires, your goals, your priorities. This transformation is through the Holy Spirit – and is not by what we do - but what we believe! Please don't get me wrong – I am not trying to stand here and be self-righteous; but instead I am telling you that **no one is immune**. Every one of us has this sinful nature within us – Scripture reminds us of this: *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) If anyone of us thinks or tries to convince you otherwise – just listen to the Apostle John's take on this: *"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."* (1 John 1:8-10) We are not bullet proof; we still have our free will – God does not make us into mindless robots!

Our human nature (the ability to feel love, joy, pain and suffering) and our sin nature (our ability or desire to rebel against God) remain with us until we are called home to the Lord. By accepting Jesus as Lord - we have changed masters – and a new nature (a divine nature) is received from the Holy Spirit – a nature that is completely righteous. Our sin nature is not gone – but you might say it is neutralized. *"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body*

*so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:12-14) We don't deserve grace – but God gives us that precious gift. Sin **was** our master – but Christ is now on the throne of our lives! (I strongly recommend that each one of us spend time reading Romans Chapter 6!)*

The typical sermon on this Gospel usually takes on the subject of money – serving God and serving money. I don't think it is necessarily about money alone - I believe it is about the absolute and unqualified nature of sin in our lives. We have to identify that sin exists and that we are all sinners and that repentance is the only way. The love of money, it happens, is only the most conspicuous example of that which can distract our focusing on - and following Jesus. Where one's heart lies - what controls their interests, energy, and commitment is what is important. Jesus asks for unbending commitment to God's will and purposes. If one chooses to follow Jesus, the commitment and service demanded are absolute. It is impossible to be a partially committed Christian or a part-time disciple of Jesus; it is impossible to serve two masters, whether one of them is money or anything else, when the other master is meant to be God.

Where is your focus? **Who are you when no one is looking?** Please listen to these words from Deuteronomy 6:4-6. These are words that have lived in this building since its beginning! *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart."* I want us to examine the very first words of this prayer called the "*Shema*" which is ingrained in the hearts and minds of every Jew. Jesus made reference to it when asked "*what was the foremost commandment of all?*" His response: *"The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* (Mark 12:29-31) *"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!"* Did you hear what was just said? ***The Lord is our God, the Lord is ONE!*** What I want to suggest to you is that not only was God asking His followers to be worshipping ONE God – and He must be that God, but that ONE must be His position in our hearts and minds – in our lives. He **MUST** be first! Only you can answer where He fits into your life and busy schedule. **He must be first!**

When we put Jesus first - at the moment of our salvation – transformation begins - it is a process – like a flower opening! Jesus – who gave Himself to the world as fully man and fully God was a clear example of living with two natures. He "*emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* (Philippians 2:7-8) The Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about – having experienced the risen Jesus face to face on the road to Damascus. He was knocked down, he was changed – it changed his name from Rabbi Saul of Tarsus – the chief persecutor of Christians, who wanted to obliterate belief in Jesus Christ; it changed his name, it changed him to a Christian, it changed his life – it changed his perspective – it changed the master of his life; it was no longer the Law – it was the Lord. He wrote to the Romans "*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to*

God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18) We serve the Master – Jesus, because we are given a new nature – and **want to serve Him** and we **truly hate sin** and we **want to stay away from it!** No one ever said it would be easy – and we cannot do it by ourselves. Paul told the Colossians *"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him."* (Colossians 2:6) Each and every day of our lives – we need to re-up with Him, to re-commit to Him – through relationship, daily faith and repentance. Jesus said *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and **take up his cross daily and follow Me.**"* (Luke 9:23)

How many times have you heard someone say – "I know I will go to heaven – I am a good person?" They may be living strict moral lives on the outside – but their hearts on the inside can be filled with lust, greed, jealousy, anger, envy, hatred and more. **Who are they when no one is looking?** They may be able to fool others, but they cannot fool God! This is where repentance comes in – acknowledging our sins against God and desiring to **turn away from that selfish disobedience.** This can only be done through the Holy Spirit – and the Holy Spirit only comes through accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life. Let me put it this way – **if we could get to heaven by being good – why would God send His Son, Jesus to suffer and die?** Jesus' sacrifice on the cross – and our belief in His sacrifice is key: *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* (Galatians 2:20)

Our split personality constantly wants to look for ways, for shortcuts, for things we can do to get to heaven. Remember this: **there is nothing you can do to gain heaven – it has already been done** – that is why Jesus said on the cross *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30) And let me say this – what He did cannot be improved upon – His sacrifice is perfect – we only have to believe! People love to quote John 3:16 and they stop right there – feeling that it is not politically correct. Please open your pew Bibles to page 1061. There's more – and it needs to be read! Jesus said: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."* (John 3:16-18) If you believe in Jesus Christ and you stand before the Father for judgment – it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ that will be seen – not your wretched, sinful righteousness, not my wretched sinful righteousness. That's what John 3:16-18 means!

The Apostle Peter knew something firsthand about his natures – about his split personality. He denied Christ – but when he received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost – he spoke with such authority that 3,000 souls came to Christ that day. He and the apostles were totally transformed; they were changed men. He wrote in his second letter: *"He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."* (2 Peter 1:4) It is the answer to sin. On the day of Pentecost he proclaimed: *"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."* (Acts 2:39)

Eighth Sunday of Epiphany, February 27, 2011, Year A

The believer, the follower of Jesus Christ must yield his will to God every single day relying on the Holy Spirit – to live life through Him. Jesus said "*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*" (John 15:5) WE are powerless! Only through Him and the Holy Spirit do we have strength, do we have power. That's why being in relationship with the Lord is vital to our survival – abiding means to stay in relationship! It also means staying in God's Word, staying in the community of believers – the Body of Christ, and looking to Him, who loves you enough to die for you!