

FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

God's unsurpassed love teaches us to surrender

"I give up."

Depending on our circumstances and tone of voice, that phrase can mean a variety of things. If we've been stumped by a series of good-natured questions from a friend, it can mean, "I don't know. Tell me." If we've exhausted the possibilities of a search, it can mean, "I haven't found it yet. I'm going to stop the search for now." If we feel utterly overwhelmed and beleaguered and have neither the will nor the energy to continue, it can mean, "This thing has beaten me. I cede victory. I have been defeated."

Similarly, "to surrender" can connote a variety of things: To stop fighting because we are unable to win. To give up possession of something — "He surrendered his wallet to the thief." To let go of an idea or desire — "They surrendered the notion that they would ever hike the Appalachian Trail." To yield to a strong emotion, influence or temptation — "He surrendered to his grief and wept bitterly." To abandon one's rights to something — "She surrendered the lease to the apartment though she had paid three months' rent in advance."

Infused with hope

Once I used the phrase "cry uncle" in a conversation, and I was surprised that the people with whom I was speaking had never heard it. To "cry uncle" is to admit defeat, whether the game is arm-wrestling or poker.

By and large, we assume that at least implicitly all the above phrases imply

that someone other than I, something other than my goal, has won. And that means I have lost. And no one likes to lose.

Christian faith evokes a particular perspective toward the dynamic of surrender and infuses it with hope. As Lent begins, it would be helpful to explore one aspect of that perspective as it relates to sin.

The catechism defines sin as "an offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth, and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed or omission contrary to the eternal law of God."

In the experience of temptation, a war is waged, even if briefly, within us. Temptation creates tension and dissonance within because

we instinctively recognize that something significant is at stake. We might argue, rationalize or even lie to ourselves in the process. Will

I give in to the temptation? Will I let it overpower me? Will I cry uncle, lay down my defenses and let myself be defeated? Will I sin?

Sin is surrender to the deceptive wiles of the Enemy, the devil. And that is defeat.

Surrender to God

Repentance is surrender to the faithful love of the Friend, God. And that is victory.

There might be times when we have not only sinned but also find ourselves stuck and paralyzed in defeat, times we are tempted to give up and stop trying.

To repent is to surrender even my defeat to God, whose love disarms the power of evil and the damage it has inflicted and strengthens me to go on. To repent is to admit that on my own I cannot be victorious, but when I cling to him I am always victorious.

The good news of Christianity is that sin — the sin of Adam and Eve and our personal sin — is not the final verdict. Sin has not won, and God has not been defeated. To the contrary, on the cross Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice of atonement and reparation for our sins.

He made amends for our sinful disobedience and reconciled us with our heavenly Father. By his selfless obedience and love he was victorious over sin and its most horrific damage — death — and through faith and baptism he extends his victory to us.

Surrender to God is not something to undertake only at times of temptation. The entire goal of the Christian life is to surrender everything to God. In fact, faith itself is an act of surrender.

In "Mercy in Weakness," Cistercian Abbot André Louf writes:

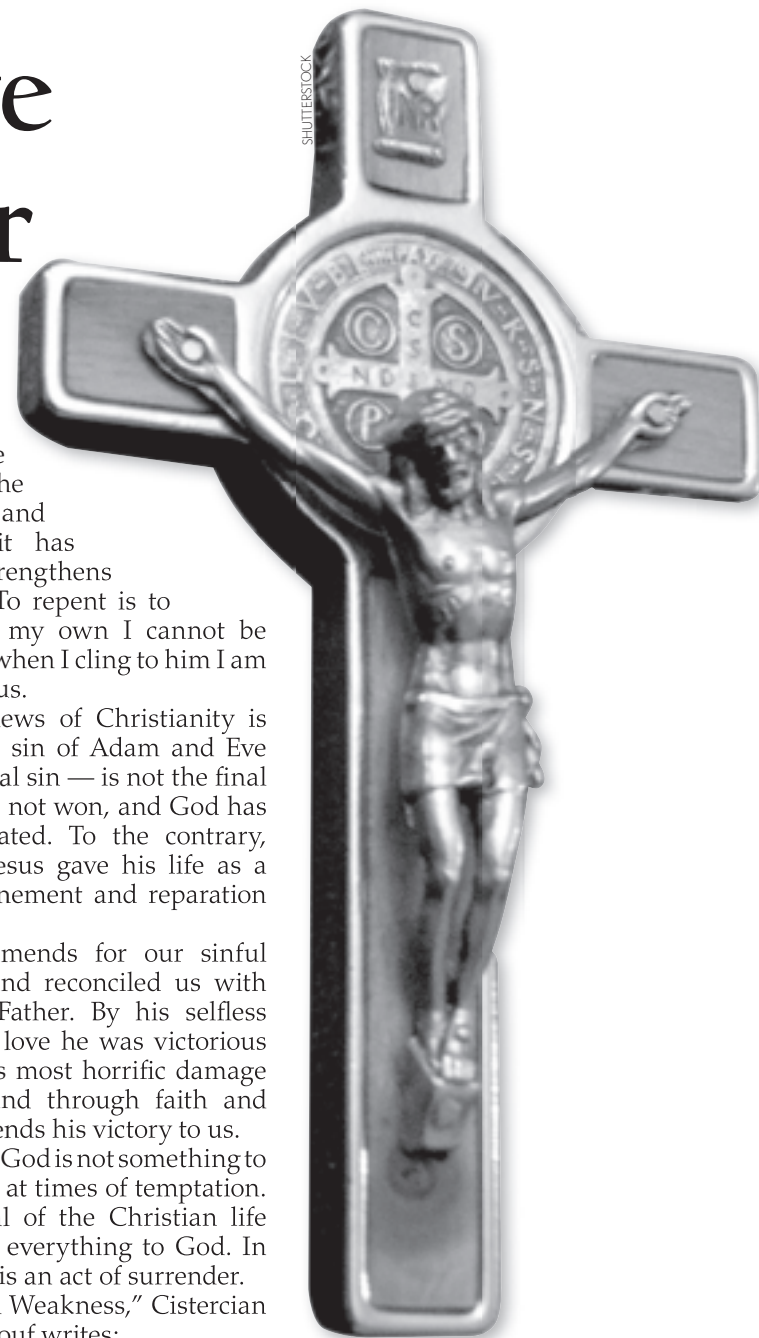
"It is not the person who knows and is able to do things, who judges and condemns, who practices faith. By believing, a human being yields and surrenders, lowers his arms and drops his weapons; with his whole body and all his possessions he delivers himself up to love."

God's unsurpassed love teaches us that it is always too early to give up. It is never too late to start again. It is always time to surrender to God.



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DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN'S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.