

**“For nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered,  
and nothing secret that will not become known.”**

Matthew 10: 26

On Sunday 22nd June, 2008, Neil preached a sermon about sin. Afterwards, several people talked to him about the sermon, asking that it be made more widely available, but one person challenged his credentials and demanded to know what qualifications he had which enabled him to speak with any authority on the matter.

Neil admits that although he has no academic certificates to demonstrate his expertise, he has a lifetime's experience and could demonstrate 60 years of constant and effective practise.



How do you react to the idea that all your hidden faults and failings will one day be revealed and become known?

At one level, it is indescribably frightening.

After all, we are all prone to the worst despite desiring and seeking the best.

We all have secret thoughts that if others knew, we would be deeply embarrassed, at least. We all say things which we later regret and we all do things which we would prefer to be uncovered because in our private moments, we are all capable of doing despicable and anti-social things which we would, in our normal public state, heartily condemn in others.

I sometimes play a cruel joke on those who bring their children to Baptism at Holy Cross. At the preparation meeting, held in the Rectory, I ask them to consider the meaning of the phrases which they will say in church:

- ❑ I turn to Christ.
- ❑ I repent of my sins.
- ❑ I renounce evil.

When we come to the I repent of my sins bit, I ask them to consider what sins they have committed recently.

It is an edgy moment. The look in their eyes is awkward. I can see that the people in the room are looking at least uncomfortable. They are thinking: Is he going to ask me to say what my recent sins are? What will I say?

But no, I hasten to re-assure them that they will not be asked to make a confession there and then, and the laughter this brings on has more than a tinge of relief about it.

Of course, I am not going to ask anyone to make a public confession of their wrong thinking, speaking or doing during the course of a Baptism Preparation meeting.

There wouldn't be enough time, would there?

However well-ordered and together our individual lives are, the truth is that we always find time and opportunity for thinking, saying and doing things we know we shouldn't.

However close we are to a spouse, parents, partner, friends, children, there are always areas, sometimes large areas of our inner and private lives which are hidden from view. This is, actually, a human necessity.

We need privacy and secluded parts of our lives to develop and flourish, providing us with space and time to recreate ourselves and discover who we are and what we can do. This necessity is a constant through life and should be honoured by family and friends to the very end.

But the privacy we need also offers us the possibility of negative and unfortunate activity.

In truth, we are all hiding something. This truth is not always palatable for our friends, family and especially for ourselves.

And so it is somewhat traumatising to imagine that the truth, all the truth about us will one day become common knowledge. The only relief we may feel is that the same is true for others.

And yet, there is a level at which this prospective ultimate revelation is also deeply comforting.

Human beings are largely recidivists, continuing offenders, returning again and again to the same sordid sins and short-comings which we seem to need, seem to be unable to shake off, seem to be unwilling to seek to shake off. We are adept at providing an intricate web of untruths and half-truths which cover up our tracks and we even find time and energy to lay false scents to confuse and distract those who are following our progress.

Sometimes we may experience getting in to wrong-doing so deeply, that we may also feel that the trail of falsification and false-scents has so dragged us down that we are, at last, pleased to be finally found out so that we are released from the tangled web and seen as we really are.

The end of this process was captured by a six year old girl in assembly at Coston School, on a recent Wednesday. The theme was "Being Honest" and when I posed the question "Why should we be honest and tell the truth?"

I was impressed by her answer- she said "Because if you tell the truth you will be forgiven."

I immediately thought of our Confession and Absolution section in the Mass. For most of us who are not major criminals the confession and absolution should satisfy our needs to make a new start. We say the formal words of confession but hopefully, the words send a shaft of light into the inner sinner and the words which speak of forgiveness calm our consciences and give us a sense of resolve for the next round of temptations.

If not, there is always the option of private confession where those whose consciences are not quieted by a general confession may seek a more individual and personal confession, receive counselling and then hear the words of forgiveness spoken to them as an individual, not just one of a group. Anyone who feels this need may find support simply by requesting it.

The result may be experienced as a new start, a dawn, an offer of renewed hope.

When it comes to our secret sins, God knows and we know too.

We also know what to do.

