

As a priest, I am becoming increasingly aware of just how badly wrong ideas, or false beliefs, or false expectations affect people. The vast majority of the burden that people feel comes from these false, or even incomplete, beliefs. I am not talking here about atheists or worldly people or those who have a hatred of what is right and good and true; their false beliefs are also causing them problems but that is not what I am speaking of here. I am speaking here of faithful Catholics who participate in the sacraments. We can still have wrong notions – things maybe we picked up in childhood, from the world, or even misunderstandings about what God has revealed. I was talking with a faithful young man once who was struggling some and it turned out that he had a misunderstanding about something in Scripture and some of the teachings of the Church. Frankly, I was surprised at how much relief he had from just straightening that out, and it didn't take much to do it.

Scripture itself brings out the misery caused by false understandings, ideas, expectations, and beliefs. This past Wednesday was the feast of St Matthias, the Apostle who replaced Judas Iscariot. Scripture says that the devil entered into Judas. But that didn't just happen. Judas opened himself up for it. In the Acts of the Apostles we hear St Peter say that "Judas went his own way," meaning he followed his own ideas which he knew were contrary to our Lord. He was so miserable because of it that he ended up hanging himself in despair.

How often do husbands and wives have false beliefs or expectations for marriage and family life that leads to so much frustration, irritation, and perhaps even breakdown of the marriage. Sometimes one or both come into the marriage thinking: if I just get married, then I will be happy and everything will be alright. This is a false expectation that places a burden on the spouse and marriage that it cannot possibly bear. Or one or both have expectations of what the other must do in order to prove their love for them. Or they have a false understanding of what love is. Or they demand absolute perfection in their spouse, while having almost no demands for themselves. All of these false beliefs and expectations make people miserable – the person themselves and the people around them. We have to stop and ask ourselves in a serious way: is this what I really want to do?

Our Lord said that the Kingdom of Heaven (as it begins here on earth) is like a net thrown into the sea that collects fish of every kind and then the good and the bad are separated. He also says that He makes the rain and the sun fall on the good and the bad alike, and that the weeds grow up with the wheat. All of this saying that those who would be followers of our Lord, sincere in becoming like Him, in loving Him, are going to have to live (in this world) with those who don't. And yet how often people expect and even demand Heaven here on earth. They end up miserable, often day in and day out, because of a false belief or expectation: "this" is the way it should be. They end up kicking the goad and making themselves and others around them miserable. If, on the other hand, I accept that the wheat and weeds are *meant* to exist side-by-side in this life and this world, by God's own design and His will, I will be much more at ease.

There are countless wrong ideas that lead to an unnecessary burden and misery. Suffering, of all kinds, is a frequent area where a true understanding can greatly unburden a person and help them be at peace. Previous articles have talked about leisure and work, as revealed by God. How much unburdening would people experience if only they would heed His word. In the Gospel we hear that "the Jews" said to our Lord: how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us. Our Lord replied: I have told you and you do not believe. How often will we make our Lord repeat that same statement to us?

Consider a little example of right and wrong thinking. Suppose on some hot summer day a dad asks his son to go out and fix a fence; it's going to take all day, he's going to have dig post-holes by hand, he's going to have to work with barb-wire and get cut up some, and so on – it's going to be hard work. Consider 2 cases. In the one case, the son looks forward to the work, he's glad to challenge the elements, he's glad to take part in the work of his father; he grabs what he needs, heads out, and tears right into the work. In the second case, the son grumbles and complains the whole time – why do I have to do this, it's hot, it's hard, that barb-wire is sharp, and on and on he goes. Now who is going to have the greater burden – the first one or the second one? Of course, the second. If I eliminate the false expectation that everything should be easy for me and just set about

to do the work of my Father, then the burden will be light – the sun, the post-hole digger, and the barb-wire will still be there, but they will (rightly) be seen as valuable tools to do valuable work and the yoke will be light.

False beliefs, false expectations, wrong ideas *always* create a burden that cannot be carried, a burden that deteriorates and eventually kills as it becomes heavier and heavier. In fact, that's what they're meant to do.

The Gospel from last Monday was from our Lord's Good Shepherd teaching where He said: whoever does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. The thief is trying to take that which is not his to have, namely our Lord's sheep. The Church Fathers ask: who is the thief? It is heretics, i.e., those who teach falsely. In other words, false beliefs, ideas, expectations and so on are designed to separate us from what is good and thus lead to our misery. We are bombarded with false teaching in all kinds of forums today, especially the media which includes social media and the entertainment industry.

There are countless false beliefs that lurk in our minds and weigh us down. They are far too many to enumerate but before coming to the remedy, a couple more examples might help to see that remedy. One that I believe is somewhat prevalent goes something like this: safety in this life is the most important thing; safety comes from following the crowd, so I will follow the crowd. It controls the person and invariably leads to giving into or going along with things that the person does not like or believe, with the result of having countless irritations, frustrations, and maybe even depression because I have yielded control of my very self to others. If I pursue that thought further, I realize that I am being controlled by fear. If I pursue it even further, I will realize that this fear comes as a result of a false belief or expectation, or perhaps more precisely a false belief stemming from an incomplete knowledge and understanding. Eternal life, for example, is a counter to this false belief. Another example – often times when people set out to really follow our Lord they will find some tangible sin that they cannot seem to overcome. Almost invariably, if not invariably, it's because of some false belief that is stuck in their mind. It might be a false expectation, in which case the Lord might actually be protecting the person from something even more harmful – probably pride. For example, suppose a priest is struggling with some form of intemperance – maybe he watches too much television. He thinks: if I could just overcome this, then everything would be great, parishioners would be led into conversion, and....and what? Well of course: everyone would then see my greatness as well, I'd be the source of their salvation! Until he discovers and roots out *that* false belief, he will likely continue to be miserable. The Lord wants to root out that core fault (tendency towards self-glorification and glorification of self over God), one that will certainly lead to his demise.

The Remedy. Of course the key to overcoming the false beliefs that have crept into our minds one way or another, and cause so much unnecessary burden, is to discover them and then choose against them and form a new way/habit of thinking based on truth. Notice from the previous examples what that entails: **the person stops and examines their own thinking.** The most essential key to overcoming burdensome false beliefs (the one that is so very often completely neglected) is that we really stop, silence ourselves, and think about our own thinking. Examining ourselves is much more than just going through a list of tangible sins, in fact I would dare say that, while that is necessary, it is even more important to do this greater examination of ourselves, where we discover our own false beliefs. Thinking about our own thinking means to notice our own thoughts, motives, and intentions. It is most beneficial to make a habit of doing this every day. It can be a little difficult at first but like with all things, it becomes easier and more fruitful with practice. One thing that can help with this is to just review the day, each day – to use the various experiences of the day to help me discover what is in my own mind. Maybe I tensed up, for example, in some particular situation and so I stop and think about that and ask myself why. Maybe I realize that I ran my mouth too much, and I stop and examine that and ask why. This practice is indispensable in receiving our Lord's promises of freedom and life in abundance. It is almost certainly the greatest failure of Catholics who wish to be faithful to our Lord. Sometimes maybe we need a little help in discovering the false beliefs we hold. Our Lord is, in fact, the great psychologist, if you will. We can seek His help with prayer and study and by spending time with Him. And of course we can always talk to others, people who know the faith well. Things that we have a hard time seeing might be rather easily picked up on by someone else. This is part of the great work of this life. Go forward with all your strength!

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.