

## All-or-None Thinking: A Barrier to Overcome

Humans often simplify information. We find it difficult to experience conflict or uncertainty. Our biological roots tell us to "fight or flight." So, we often describe things as black or white even when there is substantial gray. We often do not realize that we tend to oversimplify and distort information.

We immediately see the error when other people engage in serious All-or-None thinking. Here are some examples:

*I didn't get into Harvard, so I won't go to college.*

*I can't afford a BMW, so I would rather walk.*

*Abortion is wrong, so I guess the doctor who was murdered at that clinic deserved it.*

*I don't like \_\_\_\_\_ about the government, so I'm moving to Canada.*

Returning Catholics, like all humans, have a tendency to avoid the difficult process of trying to sit and be still with imperfect understanding, conflict, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Here are some examples:

*Because I sin, I must not be a Christian.* No, Catholic teachings include the water of Baptism, the tears of Penance, the gifts of Grace and Holy Spirit, and the final cleansing process of Purgatory. We all sin. You are expected to recognize that you are imperfect and to participate in your personal spiritual journey of growth and development.

*Because I can't receive the Eucharist due to remarriage or cohabitation, there is no reason to go to Mass.* No, God reveals himself to us in many ways--nature, scripture, Mass, being in the presence of other Christians, the Holy Spirit, Christian role-models (called saints), the innocent love of children, and Eucharist. No human, on this earth, can experience the full wonder of God. So, if you are not able to receive the Eucharist, seek God where you can,

including Mass, and grow in love and faithfulness. A barrier to the Eucharist may fall away in your future through annulment, marriage in the Church, the death of a former spouse, or the end of a cohabiting relationship. Full reconciliation with the Church is possible, but even if it does not happen on this earth, it is not logical to throw away the opportunities that you do have. We recognize and fear the addictive power of sin, but we also believe in a loving and just God. So, do the best you can do right now, try to do more later, be humble, and pray for mercy and grace.

***I can't go back to the Church until the rest of my family is ready to join me*** (or until I buy new shoes, until after my birthday, until I lose 20 lbs, or whatever). The fastest way to convince others is to go back to the Church yourself. The wisdom of the ages tells us that sometimes, "He who hesitates is lost." If you are finding your faith, act on it, and secure your place in the Body of Christ. There will still be room and opportunity for others you love to follow you.

***Because I don't like a certain priest, teaching of the Church, faith formation teacher, altar boy, or style of music, I will try to find another Church.*** No, there will always be something wrong (eventually) with any Church if we require a perfect match with our current personal preferences.

The forest of Christianity is very clear: love God, love your neighbor, and love yourself. Yet, many of us have difficulties with or lack understanding of some specific teachings (trees). This activates the human tendency to "throw the baby out, with the bath water." We need not fight or flight. We should pray, read, speak with others, and seek understanding in the humility of that moment. We can and we must resist our human tendency to engage in All-or-None thinking.