

GOD'S INSPECTION STICKER Very often, I like to use humor in my homilies and sermons. My first Pastor, Msgr. Shannon told me once, "Son, don't start every homily off with a joke" which probably is good advice. But oftentimes a little humor can go a long way in getting attention and also in making a point. In this regard, a parishioner came around to the back of the church last week and gave me some comics from the Sunday paper. She said, "I thought you might be able to use these!" Well, there was this cartoon of "Hagar the Horrible" which is one of my favorites. In the cartoon strip, Hagar the Viking is talking to his parish priest. The priest is lecturing him and says, "Hagar, you must give up your sinful ways!" He replies, "Okay, no more drinking or stealing!" The next frame shows the priest pointing his finger and yelling, "First give up lying!" I had a good chuckle when I read that. But the Hagar cartoon makes a very good point. It is difficult for all of us to change our bad habits and sinful ways most of the time. We become very comfortable with our sins and failings. However, we do need to change spiritually speaking and this change is what we call "Repentance." Repentance could be defined as striking out in a completely new direction if we have been heading down some bad roads. When we go to confession, the priest usually always asks us to say the "Act of Contrition." It is a prayer that most of us know by heart although there are now different versions. Sometimes we might rattle off that Act of Contrition so fast that we might not even reflect upon the words that we're saying. There was a little boy who prayed, "Dear God, I am hardly sorry for my sins" not heartily! When we say this prayer we are promising God to do better in our lives. This is called a Purpose of Amendment. So we say, "I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to sin no more." Like Hagar the Horrible we do promise to give up our sinful ways. Hopefully we're sincere and not lying! We should be trying to correct our faults. In other words, our confessions should have an effect in our lives. The late Archbishop Fulton Sheen once said, "There are no planes in the spiritual life: either we are going uphill or coming down." Well, we all want to make progress in our spiritual relationship with the Good Lord. Very often a complaint expressed about Catholics and confession is, "Why bother when you are going to do the same things over again?" Well, there is some truth to that criticism. By the grace of God and the sacraments, we should be changing for the better and not just repeating the same sins. In this regard, just recently I brought my car to the service station because my inspection sticker was expired, As it turned out, my car did not pass inspection because the engine light was "on" and a problem with the spark plugs and charges was detected and needed to be fixed. Once the problem was corrected and I spent \$800, the car passed! Well some day, not our car but our souls will need to pass inspection by the Lord. So let's get things in order while we have the time. Let's always make sure to make progress towards and not away from our eternal goal!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Jerome