

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The power to forgive sins was given to the Church by our Lord on the first evening of Easter. *"Jesus breathed on the disciples, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained' "*(Jn 20:22-23). At the heart of the Gospel is the call to repentance... the call to turn from sin toward God (Mk 1:14-15). In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we have a means for forgiveness of sin committed after baptism (*The Anglican Service Book*).

In the book, *Taste of New Wine*, Episcopal priest Keith Miller suggests when you have confessed your sins to God, you must then admit our faults before man. He suggests when you have to let somebody else know what God has revealed to you about your sins, you will never again waste time pretending you are righteous. To love is to trust, and to trust is to reveal those things about yourself that could give someone else the weapons with which to hurt you. We can be this vulnerable to God; we must also be vulnerable to our brothers. "This is why confession must be not only from man to God but from man to man. It is God himself who reveals where we are missing the mark. To tell Him about our sins is simply to acknowledge we have heard what He has been telling us. The real test comes when we can let go of our righteousness and tell at least one other human being about this new insight that God has given us regarding our disobedience or unfaithfulness" (*No Longer*

Strangers, Bruce Larson).

In its essence, penance is something extremely simple. We kneel beside another and confess to God our sins, laying bare the real failures of every day which honest thinking compels us to admit. A confession is not a portrait of vague disgust with ourselves but revealing those concrete occasions in which we have sinned. Confession and the granting of God's forgiveness, or absolution, not only gives us, but also compels us to seek a new and enriched relationship with the Savior of the world, with our neighbors, and with ourselves. By our penance, we enter into the joy of our Lord.

The four stages of this Sacrament of the Gospel of Grace are:

Contrition (sorrow for having offended God)

Confession, (Admission of our transgressions)

Absolution (God's forgiveness)

Satisfaction (penance).

*Ask Fr. Rob about "examination," and "amendment" also as integral and necessary parts of the reconciliation process. Ed

Contrition is our sorrow for having offended God by our sins. By careful self examination, we become aware what our sins are and the extent to which we have offended God's love and goodness.

We begin with the invitation to God to touch us through His priest, "Bless me Father for I have sinned." The priest will respond by extending God's grace to you through a blessing.

Introduction: help the priest to understand your situation by explaining how long it has been since your last confession, and any important circumstances in your life Confession: we own up to our sins simply, hon-

estly, and completely. We make our confession to a Priest as a minister of God and as a representative of his holy Church.

Absolution: God washes away the stain of sin from our souls and gives us strength to resist sin in the future. Satisfaction: we do our penance as a sign that we will try to do God's holy will in the future, resolving not to sin again, by the help of God's Grace." (*The Anglican Service Book*)

In the first chapter of John's Gospel we are taught: *"if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 Jn 1:8-9)

Likewise, St. James writes, *"therefore confess yours sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."* (Ja 5:16) The body of Christ has always sought to produce an attitude of accountability. The sacrament of reconciliation is one that can be a deeply moving experience and spiritual healing. It takes courage to kneel before another human being, though be it that one stands there in the Name of God, and humbly acknowledge our failures to live up to God's call on our lives. To hear another human voice giving Biblical counsel and assuring another person of the forgiveness of sins is a powerfully freeing experience; however, it is important to choose both a confessor and a spiritual director carefully. The person should be one whom you respect spiritually and in whom you perceive God's active spirit. The person should be a person of compassion and mercy and possess the quality of humility. **** This practice may have originated in Western Christendom from the Celtic Monks in Ireland or in the Celtic Church. Nonetheless, it is shared

by several different communions in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. **** This is a very strange place for these sentences! Ed

The rites for reconciliation or confession are found in many books. *The Book of Common Prayer* (BCP), p. 446. "The Reconciliation of a Penitent" is available for all who desire it but need not be the only format that can be used. *St. Augustine's Prayer Book*, pg.122, (Holy Cross Publications, West Park, NY) and *The Practice of Religion*, pg.96, (International Anglican Fellowship, West Des Moines, IA) provide wonderful formats as well as self examinations before confession. Reconciliation should not be not restricted to times of sickness or near death. Confessions may be heard anytime and in any place. When heard in church, the confessor may sit inside the altar rails or in a place set aside to give greater privacy and the penitent kneels nearby. If preferred, the confessor and penitent may sit face to face for a spiritual conference leading to absolution or a declaration of forgiveness. When the penitent has confessed all serious sins troubling the conscience and has given evidence of due contrition, the priest gives such counsel and encouragement as are needed and pronounces absolution.

Before giving absolution, the priest may assign to the penitent a psalm, prayer or hymn to be said, or something to be done as a sign of penitence and act of thanksgiving.

The content of a confession is not normally a matter of subsequent discussion. The secrecy of a confession is morally absolute for the confessor, and

must under no circumstances be broken (BCP, 446).

Before confession an examination of conscience is made. Here are some questions we might ask ourselves:

Is my heart set on God, or am I more concerned about the things of this world? Have I been careful to grow in my understanding of the faith, and am I wholehearted in accepting Christ's teaching? Am I willing to be known as a Christian? Do I raise my mind and heart to God each day in prayer and turn to God in time of temptation? Have I love and respect for God's Name and for my brothers and sisters in the body of Christ? Do I set aside time for the Lord on the Lord's day and for personal prayer? Do have I a genuine love for others or do I use them for my own ends, doing to them what I would not want done to myself? Have I contributed to the well-being and happiness of the rest of my family by patience, proper respect and giving them help in spiritual and material needs? Do I do my best to help the victims of oppression, misfortune and poverty or do I look down on them? Do I share in the apostolic and charitable works of the Church and in the life of my parish? Do I share in the work of promoting justice, morality, harmony and love in human relations; or do I spend my life caring only for myself? In my work am I hardworking, honest serving society, paying a fair wage and faithful to my promises and contracts? Do I use a position of authority in a spirit of service for my own advantage? Have I obeyed legitimate authority? Have I injured others by rash judgment, deceit, damage to reputation, honor, material possessions, life or limb. Have I been responsible for an abortion? Am I estranged from oth-

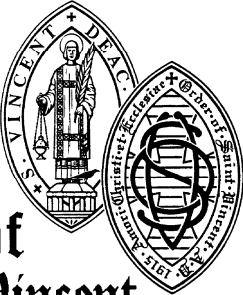
ers through insults, quarrels, anger, hatred, or the desire for revenge? Have I been ready to make to make peace for the love of Christ and to forgive? Have I always tried to act in the true freedom of God or am I the slave of forces within me? Have I kept myself as a temple of the Holy Spirit consecrated for resurrection and glory? Have I been patient in accepting the sorrows and disappointments of life? What use have I made of time, of health and strength, of the gifts God has given me? Where is my life leading me? Have I tried to grow in the Spirit through prayer, reading the Word of God, receiving the sacraments, and self-denial? Do I examine my actions in respect to the seven deadly sins: pride (exaggerated opinion of one's own worth), avarice (immoderate desire for earthly goods), lust (desire for impure pleasures), anger (inordinate expression of displeasure), gluttony (intemperate use of food or drink), envy (feeling of resentment over another's superior attainments, endowments or possessions, and sloth (laziness or carelessness in doing right or practicing virtue because of the effort).

I hope this tract will be of help in our personal celebration of the Lord Jesus on the day of His resurrection.

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