

n. 15 Reconciliation

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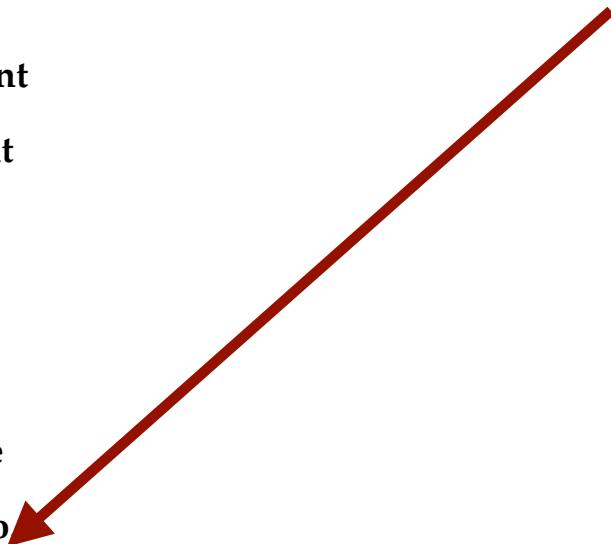
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n. 15. Reconciliation



- Sacrament of **Penance** – the focus is on the steps taken by the sinner to repent of sin, and to try to make up for the harm caused insofar as that is possible. These steps include personal ones as well as those imposed on the ‘penitent’ by the Church.

Sacrament of **Confession** – the sinner confesses (names and admits to) sin, and also confesses (acknowledges in a public way) God’s holiness and mercy.

Sacrament of **Forgiveness**

Sacrament of **Reconciliation**

- restored to communion with God
- restored to communion with Church

‘Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offence committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labours for their conversion’ (Vatican II LG 11§2).

We often reflect on God’s merciful forgiveness. Perhaps less often do we reflect either on the ways in which our sin pollutes the environment in which others have to live or on the ways in which we are being helped by those who live holy lives.

The call to turn (return) to God is a constant call to the whole Church who ‘clasping sinners to her bosom, is at once holy and in need of purification, and follows constantly the path of penance and renewal’ (Vatican II LG 8). The word ‘conversion’ picks up the idea of turning back. It is the movement of a contrite (‘broken’) heart that is drawn and moved by grace to respond to God’s merciful love.

‘He set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’



Rembrandt

But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate’ (Luke 15:20-24).

Peter was so sure of himself that he could say: 'Though everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you' (Matthew 26:33). When Jesus was apprehended, and when Peter was accused of being a follower of Jesus, he persistently denied even knowing Jesus.

Jesus turned and looked across the courtyard and caught Peter's eye. It was then that Peter remembered Jesus' warning and realized what he had done, 'and he went out and wept bitterly' (Luke 22:61-63). We can only imagine what was in that glance. It surely included sadness and hurt, but above all love. Peter's repentance was his response to being loved.

Peter (John 21:15-17)

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Lord; you know that I love you.” ... “Feed my lambs.”

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” ...

“Lord; you know that I love you.” ... “Tend my sheep.”

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” ...

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” ... “Feed my sheep”.

The human frailty that we see in the Prodigal Son and, in a different way, in Peter highlights the power of God's healing and forgiving love. Peter's humility enabled Jesus to entrust him with the care of the others, knowing that he would not be tempted to take the glory to himself.

‘It is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us’ (2Corinthians 4:6-7).

‘Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance towards the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life, with hope in God’s mercy and trust in the help of God’s grace.’

‘A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my commandments’ (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

‘They will look upon the one they have pierced’ (John 19:37)



‘Taking a cup and giving thanks, Jesus gave it to his disciples, saying: “Drink from this, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matthew 26:27-28).

‘I live now in faith, the faith of the Son of God loving me and giving himself for me. I cannot give up God’s gift’ (Galatians 2:21)

Julian of Norwich (Showings ch 39 and 73)

‘Full lovingly does our Lord hold us when it seems to us we are nearly forsaken and cast away because of our sin – and deservedly so. Our courteous Lord does not want us to despair even when we fall often and grievously into sin. For our falling does not hinder God from loving us ... Some of us believe that God is all powerful and may do everything; and that he is all wise and can do everything; but as for believing that he is all love and will do everything, there we hold back. In my view nothing hinders God’s lovers more than the failure to understand this. As by his courtesy God forgives our sins when we repent, even so he wills that we should forgive our sin, and so give up our senseless worrying and faithless fear.’

Jesus asks us who have experienced being forgiven to reach out to forgive others: ‘Father, forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us’ (Luke 11:4).

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:21-22).

Jesus said to the disciples, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ (John 20:21-23).

‘Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you’ (Ephesians 4:32).

- Understanding is not sufficient
- Forgetting is not possible or helpful
- The passing of time does not heal
- We are to accept the other person's repentance and give love (for-give).

It is God's forgiveness that liberates us to grow in love. If we can allow ourselves to be moved by grace, if we can grow to be the Heart of Jesus in the world, we will find that by forgiving others we are liberated from much of the hurt that they have caused us. We are also offering those who have hurt us an opportunity to live again.

Some hurts radically alter relationships. There is no point in pretending otherwise. But no hurt need choke off our loving. Jesus could pray: 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.' His heart was pierced, but he continued to love, and it is this love that he poured out over our hurting world. He offers us this love for us to offer it to others in forgiveness.

Let us thank God for those who have held us when we were paralysed, and have carried us to Jesus. Let us thank God for the 'Good Samaritans' in our life. When we see someone who is too afraid to move, let us lift them up and take them to Jesus.

The following contribute to repentance and so to forgiveness

- efforts at reconciliation with others through acts of love
- bearing the cross of daily life
- ‘The Eucharist is a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sins’(Council of Trent).
- spiritual reading and prayer
- penitential liturgies, pilgrimages, self-denial

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is principally intended for those who have sinned in such a way as to break their communion with God and with the Church = 'mortal' or 'grave' sin.

- prior to the Irish influence of seventh century, the sacrament was only for public sins, notably idolatry, murder and adultery, and was offered sometimes only once and after a prolonged period of public penance. It was reserved to the priest (the leader of the community) to reconcile the penitent to the community and to God.
- the public penance element was later abandoned, and the sacrament was used as an occasion for the confessing of venial sins and generally for spiritual direction.

The acts of the penitent

- **contrition** – flowing from love (‘perfect’)
 - flowing from fear (‘imperfect’), can bring a person to the sacrament where it can deepen
- **confession** of all mortal sins after examination of conscience

mortal sins to be confessed at least once a year in view of receiving communion

venial sins - though there is no obligation to confess these, it is recommended as a help to sensitising one's conscience.

- **satisfaction** - making up to those hurt by sin
 - prayer/action to counteract disorder created by sin

We are all able to mediate God's forgiving grace to each other. For sins which constitute a break from the community (mortal sin), the authority to forgive and so bring about reconciliation is restricted to ordained priests.

n. 1465

‘When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.’

n. 1467

The priest can never speak of what he has heard in the sacrament.

n. 1449

‘God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Three Rites of the Sacrament

1. Individual penitent and priest
2. Community celebration of prayer and song during which the individual penitents confess their sins privately to the priest who offers them absolution
3. Community celebration during which the priest offers a general absolution

Paragraphs 36-37 of the Ritual speak also of 'Penitential Celebrations': 'gatherings of the people of God to hear the proclamation of God's word, in which we are invited to conversion and renewal of life in which the good news is announced of our being freed from sin through the death and resurrection of Christ.'

Sacramental Absolution is not given, and so for a person in mortal sin sharing in one of the above three rites is necessary.

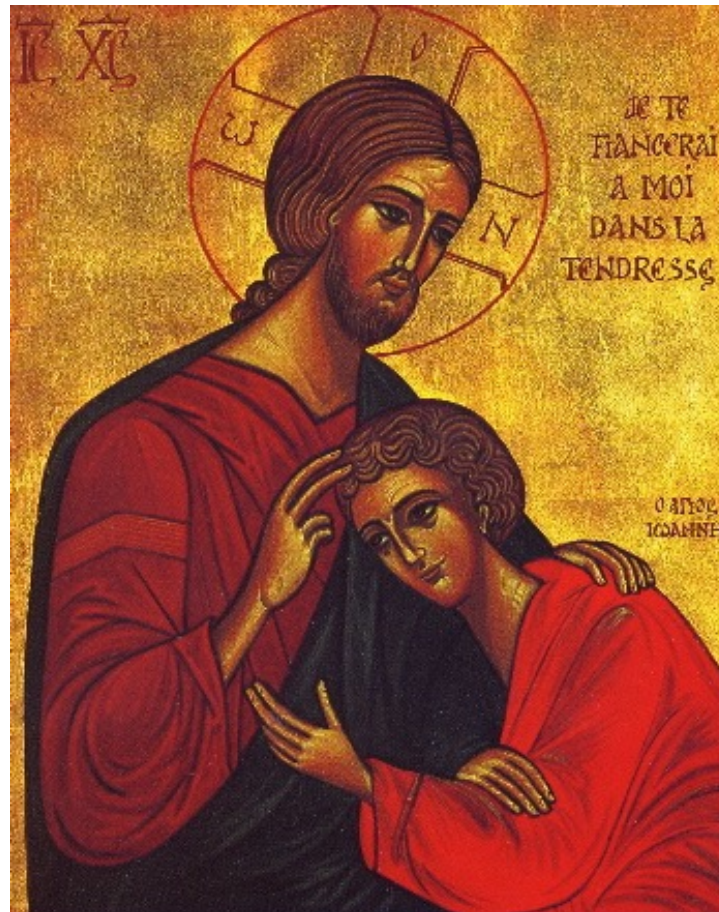
The sacrament brings about reconciliation with God

The sacrament brings about reconciliation with the Church

‘Reconciliation with God leads to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being where he regains his most central truth. He is reconciled with his brothers and sisters whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation’(John-Paul II, Reconciliation and Penance 31.5).

One effect of sin is to attach us to things in an unhealthy way. The Church not only offers a way of forgiveness; it also welcomes us into a communion of love, a love which helps heal us from these unhealthy attachments. This is the positive value of what are called ‘**indulgences**’ – ways in which we open ourselves through devotion, penance and charity to receive the healing love of the Church community with which we have been reconciled. The holiness of one profits others in the ‘**communion of saints**’.

Create in me a clean heart, O God



Liam Lawton