

Advent Reflection on the Sacrament of Reconciliation-Fr. Jim

Vatican II looking at the practice of the early church, wanted to restore a communal sense for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Also in this renewal of the sacrament, penance was now undertaken not to “earn God’s love or “makeup” for what has happened or just “get absolution” but to continue the process of conversion. The New Rite of Penance is not seen as much as a juridical procedure but a way of **healing**. The Rite of Reconciliation (# 7) states: “Just as the wound of sin is varied and multiple in the life of individuals and of the community, so to the **healing** which penance provides is varied.” I have seen this demonstrated in such a powerful way in the women that have gone through Project Rachel. How many of us who have been raised as Catholics think of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a healing sacrament?

The Rite of Reconciliation (# 7) also states that “The Sacrament of Penance **reveals the heart of the Father.**” We see the “heart of the Father” revealed in the wonderful parable that Jesus teaches about the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). We see this love revealed in Jesus treatment of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), the penitent woman (Luke 7:36-50), the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8), and even his own disciples such as Matthew the tax collector, and Peter, who denied the Lord three times. Each of these stories or encounters reveals the desire of the Father for us, to individually experience his love through his words and touch of forgiveness.

C. K. Chesterton stated that he became Catholic because it was the only religion that went down with him into the depths of his sinfulness. Many people today follow the 12 steps and step five states that “we admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” (Like James 5:16-“Hence, declare your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may find healing.”) Remember that the first thing Adam and Eve did after they sinned was to hide. A friend of mine put it this way: “we are only as healthy as our secrets”. The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us a safe and grace-filled place to break down the barriers that sin builds between us and God and one another. I am very grateful that we as Catholics have a way to respond to our human failings through the tremendous gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I have been fortunate to have had two very loving priests as my confessors, Fr. Bill Trott (for over twenty-five years) and now Abbot John Denberger. I have always experienced Christ’s unconditional love through my celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation with them. They have taught me how to be a compassionate confessor through their gentleness and understanding. I want people to experience this same grace when they come to me as a confessor. I am not sure there is a time when I feel more like a priest than when I am in the confessional, especially if someone has been away from the sacraments for a long time. It helps me understand in a deeper way the joy of the father who welcomes his son back in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The individual Sacrament of Reconciliation is a privileged time when the forgiving and healing grace of Christ can touch each of us personally.

How long has it been since you have taken the time to go to a priest as an individual in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? I would encourage you to take the opportunity this Advent to celebrate with members of our faith community the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This Advent our celebration will be on **Monday December 14th at 7:15pm at St. Joseph’s Church**. There will be some wonderful priests present (Fr. Bill Leone, Fr. Dick O’Connell, Fr. Augustine Chumo, Msgr. Gerry Krieg, and Fr. Peter Deckman) who have given up their time in order to be available as instruments of God’s forgiveness and healing for you. Amidst all the shopping, baking, and parties, what better way to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord this Christmas than by taking the opportunity to use this tremendous treasure of our Church. I hope you will take this time to celebrate individually this marvelous gift of our Church, the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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