

Only God can forgive sin, but we human beings need to hear with our senses and to know with our hearts that God has really forgiven us. The priest represents Christ and the entire community when he prays and speaks the words of forgiveness.

‘Penance’ takes into account the nature and seriousness of sin. It involves doing whatever we can to repair damage done to others; for example, repairing what is broken, restoring a reputation hurt by gossip, paying compensation for injuries and seeking forgiveness and reconciliation with others. It may include actions to help deepen our living of the Gospels, such as prayer, works of mercy and service of neighbour, voluntary self-denial, defence of justice and right. It includes following Jesus in the patient acceptance of a cross we are called to bear (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par 1459; 1480).

## Eucharist

Eucharist is the greatest ‘Sacrament of Reconciliation’, bringing unity with God and others and healing love. Every decision we make shapes the person we are becoming now, and for the future. Eucharist feeds the Spirit and helps us remain ‘at home’ with God’s ways and the community that supports us. If serious sin has been part of our lives, the Church asks us to return to a state of friendship with God (of ‘grace’) through receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, before we come to the Eucharist.

It is good to reflect prayerfully on the way we have lived each day and to experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation at regular intervals. Reconciliation and Eucharist are both Sacraments of healing and strengthening, helping us to live in the way and the life of Jesus Christ.

This is our baptismal call.



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Imprimatur: + The Most Rev Leslie R Tomlinson DD Bishop of Sandhurst.

15<sup>th</sup> October 2012

## Sacraments ~ Part 5

### Reconciliation

#### Sacraments of Healing

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### The Compassionate Healer

Imagine walking with Jesus through Galilee, and being there when the paralysed man hears him speak these words; ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven you... I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home’ (Luke 5:20,24). Imagine the woman, who washed Jesus’ feet with her hair, as she heard him say; ‘Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven, for she has shown great love’ (Luke 7:47).

In Jesus, people encountered God’s unconditional love, compassion and mercy. Through his stories, they learned of a God who is like a parent, wanting to forgive a runaway son or daughter, long before there is a turning for home (Luke 15:11-34).

*God is also like a Shepherd, he said, impatient to find  
and bring a lost one back to safety  
(Luke 15:7).*

Peter denied his friend and leader, three times, but Jesus forgave him and helped Peter to re-affirm his love (Luke 22:61; John 21:15-17). Peter, deeply aware of his own weaknesses and need for God’s love and help, became a leader able to strengthen his brothers and sisters.

### For Reflection:

Place yourself in the shoes of those who met Jesus, as you read a Gospel story

- Jesus heals a paralyzed man; calls Matthew; eats with ‘sinners’ (Matthew 9:2-13);
- Parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7);
- Parable of a prodigal son and his father (Luke 15:11-32);
- Do good to enemies (Luke 6:31-38);
- A woman is forgiven (John 8:1-11).

## A Change of Heart

We need Christ's life and grace to help us on every day, so we may continue to make good decisions and act upon them.

When we make sinful choices we are not 'living true' to our identity as people created in God's image, baptised into the new life of Christ. Sin is freely chosen action, or failure to act, that contradicts Jesus' 'law of love' (John 15:12-14). Sinful actions are neither life giving nor loving. Sin harms our relationships with others, ourselves and God, leaving us less free to choose what is good and true.

Jesus Christ showed the way to find *freedom from* everything that holds us back from being all God created us to be, true images of God (Genesis 1:26-28). He brings *freedom for* genuinely loving relationships and life in all its fullness (John 10:10; John 15:12-14).

Jesus Christ invites each of us to embrace what he stands for, to make a difference in our world; *'The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.'* (Mark 1:15). The word *metanoia* means 'conversion' or 'change of heart'. It is a radical 'turning' away from sin and a desire to really turn towards God, trusting in God's mercy and love (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par 1431). God loves us first and God makes it possible for us to change.

## Becoming Forgiving People

At first, Peter tried to put limits on forgiveness;

*'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me,  
how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?'*  
*Jesus answered, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times'*  
(Mt 18:21-22).

In the 'Our Father', the prayer Jesus taught us, God's forgiveness for ourselves is closely tied to our willingness to forgive others: 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us...'  
(Luke 11:4, Matthew 6:12).

## Walking With God Each Day

Each day this week, thank God for the day's gifts.  
Ask for help to pray with these questions:

When did I give and receive the most love today?  
When did I give and receive the least love today?

Talk to God, Jesus, the Spirit, as your prayer leads you.

[From: *Sleeping with Bread*, Dennis Linn,  
Sheila Fabricant Linn & Matthew Linn]



## The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Risen Jesus gave his disciples authority to forgive sins in his name (Luke 15, 19:9):

*"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.  
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 20:22-23).

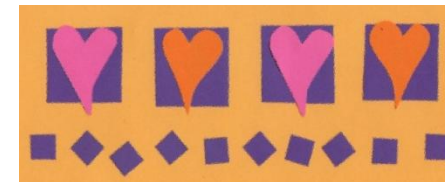
*"I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth  
shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"*  
(Mt 16:19 cf. Mt 18:18, 28:16-20).

The Sacrament of God's forgiveness is called Reconciliation *"because it imparts to the sinner the life of God who reconciles: 'Be reconciled to God.' He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: 'Go, first be reconciled to your brother'"* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par 1424). It is also called the Sacrament of 'penance', 'confession', 'forgiveness'. It is a Sacrament of 'healing': Jesus does not simply forgive our harmful and life drying actions. He desires to heal the source from which these actions come. Therefore, when preparing for this Sacrament, we need to go beyond recalling our actions. We are able to ask God's help to identify the deeper areas of our life which are in need of healing.

You will recognise the following elements when this sacrament is celebrated with one individual or with a community celebration:

### The Rite

- Contrition
- Confession
- Act of penance
- Absolution and Prayer



The form of this sacrament has changed over the years, but the basic elements remain the same: The Spirit inspires sorrow for sin (contrition) and a real desire for change. The individual confesses their sin to a priest and prays for God's forgiveness. The priest may offer words of encouragement and suggest an action for the penitent to 'make up' for sin, and for spiritual growth (sometimes called 'penance' or 'satisfaction'). The priest speaks the words of forgiveness ('absolution') in the name of Jesus Christ, on behalf of the whole Church:

*God, the Father of mercies,  
through the death and the 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 your sins.  
In the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*  
(See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, par 1444, 1447 – 1448)