

## FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

This weekend's Gospel brings us the beautiful story of the sinful woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, and anoints them with ointment. This great outpouring of love from the woman is in reaction to the love and healing that Jesus brings. He confirms this healing with the words, "**Your sins are forgiven**" and "**Your faith has saved you, go in peace**" (Luke 7:48, 50). We look at this great love between them, and we are reminded that the heart and core of our Faith is not ritual or moral law but RELATIONSHIP. We are called to be in a love relationship with God, the One who has loved us from all eternity! When we look at the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** (also known as **Penance** or **Confession**), we are reminded that this Sacrament is about *healing a relationship*! This week, we'll do an overview of the Sacrament and how it heals our relationship with God. Next week, we'll look more at the Rite of Penance.

Sometimes when we think about Confession, we think about "having to go in the 'box'." We might argue, "Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest?" At the root of this mindset there is missing the intense love of Christ and how He chooses to work. In all of Jesus' actions, He works in an *incarnate* way – this is a fancy way of saying that He works in a body, in the flesh. Jesus knows that sometimes (most times!) we need a God "with skin" – we need to hear His love with our ears, not just in our hearts, we need to be able to feel the touch of His love, to see His Presence. He came into our humanity to heal us and draw us to the Father using His humanity as the conduit of grace. He still uses the Sacraments – outward signs which our bodies sense and experience – to bring us His love and grace. He has instituted the ministerial priesthood in order that we could hear His words of love spoken at Mass, touch and receive His Body brought to us in the Eucharist, AND HEAR WITH OUR EARS THAT WE ARE FORGIVEN OF OUR SINS! We "have" to go to confession to a priest, not because Jesus wants to see if we will jump over all of the obstacles He makes, but that *we may truly KNOW that we are forgiven*. In the Sacraments, the priest acts *in persona Christi capitis* (in the person of Christ the head) and is *alter Christus* (another Christ). In some mystical way, Christ is truly present in the priest when he celebrates Mass (he says, "This is my body..." not "This is Jesus' body"). Christ is present in the priest when he hears confessions. We go to Christ Himself when we confess! In our trust, we go to Him in the priest.

The grace of Confession is that we are *reconciled* to God. Sometimes we may find ourselves struggling with discouragement over our sins. Jesus says: "But I love you! Come to Me. Run to Me. Do not be afraid of Me. I want nothing more than for *you to have life!*" Remember, sin isn't about breaking rules, it is about putting a wedge between us and God. With VENIAL SINS (lighter sins), we hurt our relationship. With MORTAL SINS (heavy sins), we cut off our relationship with God (remember, to commit a mortal sin, you need three things: 1) it has to be serious matter; 2) you have to know it is serious matter; 3) you have to choose freely to commit the sin). Reconciliation doesn't just wipe away our sins (as if all we were trying to do was take away some stain on our soul); at a much deeper level it is telling God we're sorry and *reestablishing* the relationship we hurt or broke by our sins.

An analogy: If a wife were to walk in on her husband cheating on her, there would be a serious rift in the relationship. It would take a long time for this husband to reestablish trust with his wife. First, he would need to be deeply sorry – not because he was caught, but *because he hurt his wife*. Second, he would need to apologize and promise not to do it again. Then, he would need to begin the long process of reestablishing trust by showing his love for her, and a continued fidelity. After a time of healing, with the grace of God, the wife may then finally be able to let him back into her heart.

I think this is an apt analogy because throughout the Bible God constantly is referring to His relationship with us as a marriage. Our sin is *infidelity* to that marriage with God. The beautiful thing is that with the Cross and Resurrection, Jesus has done all of the "heavy lifting" in this marriage. When we sin, we need to be sorry for our sins (contrition). The Sacrament of Reconciliation actually *perfects* our sorrow, so that even if we are sorry for the wrong reasons, He Himself makes them right! In Reconciliation, we apologize to God and promise not to sin again (this is the part of the Act of Contrition when we say that we will "sin no more" and promise to "amend my life"). After this, there is no long process of rebuilding trust – *Jesus has already covered that gap!* Let me say that again, **what would take months or years to heal if we were to offend our spouse, Jesus did already, so we immediately are back in His Heart!** Wow! No need to be afraid! We should *run* to confession to receive His great love!

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, may we truly run to the Heart of Jesus to receive His mercy poured out especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation!