

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time • Year B • February 19, 2012

O God,
you renew all
in your loving embrace.
May we long for you
alone. May we seek
wholeness in you alone.
O merciful Lord,
cast aside our sins and
make us holy and healthy.
We ask this through
Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sunday Word

Isaiah 43:18–19, 21–22, 24b–25

Psalm 41:2–3, 4–5, 13–14

2 Corinthians 1:18–22

Mark 2:1–12

Something New

God lavishes his love on his people, but they have wandered far from him through their sins. God wipes out those offenses for his own sake and recreates an upright people to give him praise.

Only Yes

There is no ambiguity in Christ, says Paul. The Good News is truly good. Christ is God's "yes" to us, the embodiment of every lovely divine promise made to humanity.

Forgiveness of Sins

The people are astounded and praise God in response to the miracle Jesus works. But he is more than just a miracle worker. Jesus is sent to bring glad tidings to the poor, to forgive our sins and raise us up to newness of life.

Church Teaching: Penance and Reconciliation

Abundant Love

God loves us unconditionally and completely. From this abundant well-spring of divine love, flows God's merciful love. Jesus Christ fully manifests divine love. And the Lord tells those who approach him seeking his healing love that their sins are forgiven. The whole earthly life of Jesus (his ministry, suffering, Death and Resurrection) unlocks for us the font of a new, healed, and risen life. Through the Paschal Mystery, we are redeemed and offered the promise of eternal life.

When we say yes to God's love in Baptism, we are incorporated into the mystery of Christ and his Church. Those who fall into sin after Baptism are not baptized again. Instead, they can experience the bountiful mercy and forgiveness of God in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

Those who avail themselves of this sacrament do so because the Holy Spirit prompts them. In other words, God's grace is already at work in the contrite believer prior to the celebration of the Sacrament.

With Contrite Heart

True sorrow and remorse for one's sins encourages a person to have an interior change of heart. Often repentance results from one's own examination of conscience, a powerful homily, meditation on Sacred Scripture or through the help of a spiritual director.

A believer with a contrite heart then approaches the sacrament seeking God's mercy. Privately the penitent will confess his or her sins to the priest confessor. The priest confessor is never allowed to reveal what transpires. This is called the "sacramental seal."

The Rite of Penance

The celebration of this sacrament has four major ritual elements:

- ◆ *An act of contrition.* The penitent is greeted by the priest (or bishop). The penitent expresses sorrow for having sinned, and a firm resolution to avoid sinning in the future.
- ◆ *Sins are confessed.* The penitent enumerates both sins of commission and omission. The penitent also acknowledges any pattern of negative behavior.
- ◆ *Penance is given and offered.* Penance often includes reciting prayers, charitable works, and voluntary self-sacrifice.
- ◆ *The priest gives absolution.* The priest expresses that God alone forgives and reconciles the penitent. He or she receives forgiveness for their sins, healing the rupture with God and his Church.

All of the baptized who have reached the age of reason are obligated to confess their mortal sins at least once a year. Those not in a state of grace may not receive the Eucharist without first celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

This sacrament gives sanctifying grace. The healing grace in this sacramental works a real change in the person toward holiness and renewal. Christ the Good Shepherd brings us back fully into the fold when we celebrate this sacrament. United again in the Church, the person can find joy again in the sharing at the Lord's Table, the Eucharist.

Key Terms

ABSOLUTION

Formula prayer by which a confessor acknowledges that God forgives the penitent of his or her sins (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1449).

CONFESSION

Another name for the Sacrament because in it the penitent confesses or acclaims God's mercy as well as his or her own sins (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1424).

MORTAL SIN

Grave transgression against God's law, which destroys charity in the person's heart and ruptures one's relationship to the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1440).

Voices of Faith

We have many sins. We offend both in word and in thought, and we do very many things worthy of condemnation. And if we say that we have no sin, we lie, as John says: "We deceive ourselves." And we make a covenant with God, entreating him to forgive us our sins, as we also forgive our neighbors their debts.

—Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

Asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness—which is like an obligation, since everyone is included in the Lord's admonition: "Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone!"—are indispensable elements for peace.

—Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1434 (many forms of interior penance), 1444 (Church ministry of reconciliation from Christ), 1456 (confession to a priest essential), 1468 (effects of the Sacrament)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 18, especially the section entitled, "Recognize Sin—Praise God's Mercy," pp. 242 – 243

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

296 (names for this Sacrament), 298 (institution of this Sacrament by Christ), 304 (which sins must be confessed), 306 (venial sins)