JMJ

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT – C – 2021

A couple of weeks ago, I met with the children who are preparing for their First Confessions. A few of them seemed a little nervous about going to confession, so I told them a story.

The Cat Joke! …

Now, what has that story got to do with going to confession? Well, I told the children that a lot of people feel about confession a little bit like that cat must have felt about the car. … They think that it’s going to hurt them. They think that they’re going to be worse off than they were before. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It’s not the front bumper of a speeding car they’re going to encounter there in the confessional, but the open arms of their loving Savior.

There’s a crucifix hanging on the wall of our confessional here at St. Bernard. I look at it often from where I sit as the priest. Our Lord is depicted on that cross, not so much as suffering, but as waiting: His head is turned slightly to the right, toward the open door of the confessional, and His arms are open wide, to receive the next penitent. That crucifix has been an inspiration to me.

Because it’s really our Lord who waits for us there in the confessional. It’s Jesus who forgives through the ministry of His priests.

You may remember my telling you that, many years ago, a Presbyterian church in Muskogee asked me to teach one of their adult Sunday school classes. After I had given my talk, I asked if there were any questions. The very first question asked was, “Why do Catholics confess their sins to a priest; it seems like interfering with a sinner’s going straight to God.”

In answering that question, I compared the sacrament of Penance to another one of the seven sacraments, the sacrament of the Eucharist. I asked them, “Is the consecrated Host an interference with a person’s communion with God, or is It the means by which that person is in communion with God?” “Oh, the second,” they said. I responded: “The same is true of confession. The priest isn’t there as an *interference* with a person’s receiving the forgiveness of God; he’s there as the *means by which* the great mercy of God is poured out for the forgiveness of that person’s sins.”

My father was a good Catholic. He made his confession about every two months; but always to a priest in a neighboring parish. I think he was afraid of going to confession to his own pastor. He didn’t really have to be afraid. Priests have pretty short memories; and if they remember anything at all, it should be that the wonderful grace of God brought one sinner to another to seek the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

But if you’d like to confess your sins to a priest from a neighboring parish, I wouldn’t mind it at all; in fact, we’re going to make that very easy: We’re going to bring some of those neighboring priests right here to St. Bernard this Thursday night, between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m.

Please come. Join us and be reconciled to God. It won’t hurt you. It’ll help you; it’ll purify you and strengthen you. And that’s a promise – not from me, but from Jesus.