

The Sacrament of Mercy

I am always grateful for suggestions and recommendations from parishioners about topics for this weekly column. And I'm happy this week, at the request of a parishioner, to reflect on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, also known as Penance or Confession.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation absolves us of our sins and helps us to resist sin. If our sins are grave or mortal, the sacrament restores sanctifying grace to our souls and restores us to friendship with God – it reconciles us to God. And if our sins are less serious, or venial, the sacrament helps us to grow in holiness and perfection by making us more aware of our sins and more eager to avoid them, so that we can love and serve God better. This is the sacrament that helps the soul to start again, with a clean slate, whenever necessary, and it reminds us that God's love and mercy are infinite and greater than any sin. For this reason, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also known as "the sacrament of mercy."

Unfortunately, however, Reconciliation is also known as "the forgotten sacrament," since so few Catholics these days ask to receive it. I once asked an elderly woman who was near death and who had been away from the Church for many years if she would like to make a confession, and she replied, "Oh, do they still have that? I didn't think anyone did that anymore." I assured her that there were still seven sacraments, even if one of them had become unpopular.

Christ gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation because He knew we would need it. Everyone one of us needs this sacrament, because everyone one of us sins, at least in some small way. One of the effects of the Fall is our concupiscence, our tendency to sin, and no one is immune from it (cf. Rom 5:12). But what matters to God is whether or not we are honest about this reality and whether or not we humble ourselves to admit and voice our sins and ask for His mercy.

Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God was the reason why Christ came among us and died for us (cf. 1Jn 2:2; Lk 24:47). As Saint Paul says, "*we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation*" (Rom 5:11). So, every time we approach Christ in this sacrament and ask for His mercy, we take advantage of what He did for us on the Cross and we assure Him that He did not die in vain.

The only requirement for us to receive this gift of God's mercy in Reconciliation is our honest sorrow for our sins and a firm intention to try to avoid sin in the future. To prepare for confession, we reflect honestly on our lives and ask God to help us see how we fail to obey the Commandments, how we put ourselves before God and others, and where there is a lack of virtue in our lives. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a great way to grow in self-knowledge, honesty and humility. God always sees and knows our sins, but He invites us to see and acknowledge them, so that He can give us certainty that they are washed away forever.

At the suggestion of some of the faithful, who have reminded me that Sunday is the day most people go to Church, Fr. Booth and I are happy to add another hour of confessions each week, on Sunday morning, from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m., beginning this Sunday, November 1. It is our hope that God's infinite mercy will flow abundantly here at St. Julie's Parish.