

SAINT JOSEPH'S CHURCH + YORKVILLE

February 18, 2024, The First Sunday of Lent

Newsletter no. 205

One of the characteristics of Lent is a spirit of penance, and I would like to devote the next few newsletters to the sacramental aspect of penance, which goes under three different names—confession, penance and reconciliation. First, a word about these three names.

Confession and penance actually represent two different parts of the sacrament. Thus, confession refers to the telling, or confessing, of one's sins; penance, on the other hand, refers to what the priest who has heard the sins asks the penitent to do as a kind of spiritual compensation for those sins, usually in the form of prayers. Finally, reconciliation refers to the whole sacramental act, which reconciles the penitent with God, and that is the term that I will use in this discussion. Of course, the term "penitent" applies to the person who is confessing his or her sins and asking for forgiveness; like "penance" itself, it comes from a Latin word meaning "to regret," "to repent," or "to be sorry."

With those terms in mind, we can consider the four essential parts of the sacrament of reconciliation:

- 1) The telling of the penitent's sins to a priest, with some indication of how many times the sins were committed and any other details that are pertinent. For example, if I were to say that I hurt someone else, I would have to say what kind of hurt it was (was it physical or psychological? did I injure the other person seriously or just bruise him? did I insult him or embarrass him? and so forth) and more or less how many times I did it.
- 2) An expression of sorrow on the part of the penitent. This could be a so-called act of contrition, which might take a minute to say, or even a simple phrase like "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner." At the very least, the expression of sorrow implies that the penitent will try not to commit the same sins again.
- 3) The imposition of a penance by the priest, typically a prayer or prayers that must be said by the penitent within a reasonable amount of time.
- 4) The absolution of the penitent's sins by the priest, who uses a formula that concludes with the words, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

This is basically what the sacrament of reconciliation looks like today. Not mentioned in the list of essentials in the previous paragraph is the advice and encouragement that the priest might give to the penitent, if the situation called for it. It should also be noted that for centuries the sacrament of reconciliation has been associated with a particular place in a church, known as a confessional, which often takes the shape of a wooden structure with three small spaces in it—one in the center, where the priest sits, and one on either side, where the penitents kneel. Shutters separate the priest from the penitent, and besides the shutters there are curtains or a grill. When the priest opens the shutter to hear someone's confession, the curtain or grill hides the penitent from the priest. The use of a traditional confessional fosters the secrecy and anonymity that many people prefer in engaging in the sacrament of reconciliation. But in the past few decades an alternative to the traditional confessional has appeared, often called a reconciliation room, where the penitent can either be anonymous or abandon anonymity and confess his or her sins while talking to the priest face to face. (St. Joseph's has two traditional confessionals in the back of the church, which are no longer in use, and a reconciliation room that doubles as a so-called "cry room.")

Much of this would have seemed very strange to the earliest Christians. The practice of the sacrament of reconciliation, as they knew it, changed significantly by around the year 600, and it continued to change after that. In the following newsletters I plan to discuss what reconciliation looked like in the first few centuries of the Church's existence, how it developed, and how it got to what it is today.

This Monday, February 19th, is Presidents' Day, a federal holiday. On that day the church will be closed soon after the 12:15 Mass, and there will be no Mass at 6:00 pm. The rectory will be closed the whole day and will reopen on Tuesday, February 20th.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from February 17th to 25th

Saturday-Sunday, February 17th-18th (First Sunday of Lent)

4:00 pm: Howard Eckert (D)
8:00 am: Michael Fitzmaurice (D)
10:00 am: Colum O'Brien (D)
12:00 noon: Ludwig Umscheid (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Franciska and Ferencz Harangozo (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners

Monday, February 19th (Presidents' Day)

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Jean Lundahl (D)
There is no 6:00 pm Mass today.

Tuesday, February 20th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Thomas Conlon (D)
6:00 pm:

Wednesday, February 21st

7:00 am:
12:15 pm:
6:00 pm:

Thursday, February 22nd

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Helena Grant (D)
6:00 pm:

Friday, February 23rd

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Julie Ramirez (D)
6:00 pm: Huguette Canonne (D)

Saturday, February 24th

8:00 am:
12:15 pm: Joan F. Ryan (D)
4:00 pm: Howard Eckert (D)

Sunday, February 25th (Second Sunday of Lent)

8:00 am: St. Joseph's Parishioners
10:00 am: Katherine Folz (L)
12:00 noon: Joseph and Frances Valentino (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Helen and Laszlo Henrich and Jurasits Family (D)
6:00 pm: Mary Catanzaro (D)