

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

February 25, 2024, The Second Sunday of Lent

Newsletter no. 206

In last weekend's newsletter we began a brief series of discussions on the sacrament of reconciliation, otherwise known as confession or penance. I pointed out the four essential aspects of reconciliation as it is practiced today—telling one's sins to a priest, expressing sorrow for them, receiving a penance from the priest, and being absolved of one's sins by the priest—and I also mentioned the advice that the priest often gives to the penitent as well as the place where reconciliation frequently occurs, namely, a confessional. In this weekend's newsletter and the next I would like to provide some historical background to the sacrament.

Reconciliation means being reconciled to God (and by extension to one's fellow human beings), and that means that there are sins to be forgiven which have estranged us from God. In several places, though, the New Testament says, or seems to say, that there are sins which cannot be forgiven. Jesus himself speaks of an unforgiveable sin in Matthew 12:31-32: "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." This is repeated in Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10. This sin, or blasphemy, is generally considered to be the opinion of some in Jesus' own day that his miracles were diabolical. In the Epistle to the Hebrews 10:26-31, the anonymous author of the epistle says that "if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The author of the epistle apparently means that someone who sins after baptism has no way of appeasing God and must face eternal punishment. Finally, in the First Epistle of John 5:16-17, John writes, "If anyone sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is a sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal." Here John differentiates between mortal, or deadly, sin, and other sins that are not deadly, and he gives the impression that praying for someone who has committed a mortal sin is useless, which in turn suggests that a mortal sin is unforgivable. But John does not tell us what kind of sin is mortal.

The understanding that some sins were unforgivable, which we can attribute to the high ideals and intense zeal of the earliest Christians, carried over from the New Testament into the Church of the first two centuries. Thus Tertullian, a North African theologian who wrote toward the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century, cited 1 John 5:16-17 as evidence that there were unforgivable sins, and he named three—apostasy, murder and adultery—while leaving open the possibility that there were others as well. According to Tertullian and many of his fellow Christians, such sins could be forgiven only by God; bishops, however, could forgive lesser sins. Even so, the forgiveness of lesser sins could be granted only once in a lifetime. The wider Church, however, rejected the view that there were sins that could not be forgiven, but for centuries it was the universal understanding that what we know today as the sacrament of reconciliation was a one-time affair.

As harsh as this one-time opportunity for reconciliation must seem to us, it was in fact a relaxation of an even harsher practice, which did not allow for any reconciliation at all. Until about the middle of the 2nd century, baptism, which was of course unrepeatable, was the sole means of having one's sins forgiven. But around the year 140, a writing called *The Shepherd of Hermas* was published in Rome and announced a completely new and momentous teaching—that there was now a single opportunity for forgiveness after baptism itself: "After that great and holy calling [namely, baptism], if anyone sins who has been tempted by the devil, he has one repentance. But if he continually sins and repents, it is of no advantage to such a person, for he will hardly live." *The Shepherd* circulated widely and was even considered by some to be scriptural. Thanks to the authority and influence of this writing, a more merciful approach to forgiveness came to be accepted in the early Church.

Next week's newsletter will continue this discussion of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Beginning this Monday, February 26th, and continuing on the three subsequent Mondays, March 4th, 11th and 18th, I will be giving a series of talks on the Eucharist. The talks will be held in church and will start at 6:45 pm, soon after the 6:00 pm Mass. They are free of charge, and everyone is welcome.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from February 24th to March 3rd

Saturday-Sunday, February 24th-25th (Second Sunday of Lent)

4:00 pm: Howard Eckert (D)
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 the Jurasits Family (D)
6:00 pm: Mary Catanzaro (D)

Monday, February 26th

7:00 am: Marie Sama (D)
12:15 pm: Alice and Lourdes Lliteras (D)
6:00 pm:

Tuesday, February 27th

7:00 am: Marie Sama (D)
12:15 pm:
6:00 pm: Mario Lacazette (D)

Wednesday, February 28th

7:00 am: Elliot Waldmann (L)
12:15 pm: Lucas Xavier (D)
6:00 pm: William A. Geary (D)

Thursday, February 29th

7:00 am: Living and Deceased Members of the Cobert Family
12:15 pm: Mark McCullough (D)
6:00 pm: Sean Hanniffy (D)

Friday, March 1st (First Friday)

7:00 am: Marie Sama (D)
12:15 pm: Virginia Taylor (D)
6:00 pm: Vera Kreppel (D), 20th Anniversary

Saturday, March 2nd

8:00 am: In Honor of St. Agnes of Bohemia
12:15 pm: Rachel Saliba (D)
4:00 pm: Jimmy Quinn (D)

Sunday, March 3rd (Third Sunday of Lent)

8:00 am: Megan, Matt, Sarah and Ryan (L)
10:00 am (German): St. Joseph's Parishioners
12:00 noon: Chiara Troiano (L)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Lucia and Frank Shumaker (D)
6:00 pm: