

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

March 10, 2024, The Fourth Sunday of Lent

Newsletter no. 208

In the past three newsletters we have been discussing the sacrament of reconciliation, otherwise known as confession, and in the most recent newsletter I described how reconciliation was carried out in the Church's first few centuries. In those early days, as I mentioned, there was only one opportunity for reconciliation if someone committed a mortal sin after having been baptized, and the penance that was imposed for such a sin was often extremely rigorous and involved public humiliation. If that single opportunity were exhausted and a person committed another mortal sin, there would be no further chance for reconciliation. No wonder that, in the early Church, many people delayed their baptism until they were well into their adulthood and sometimes even on their deathbed, lest if they committed a serious sin after their baptism, they would be obliged to go through the rigors of penance. (The most famous example is that of the emperor Constantine, who was baptized on his deathbed in 337.)

So much for mortal sins. But what about sins that were not mortal, which we call "venial" (taken from the Latin word *venialis*, meaning "pardonable")? These are the smaller offenses that we all commit every day, like lying to save face or mild gossiping or overeating. The Old Testament was certainly aware that even good people would commit minor sins and not be permanently hurt by them; as Proverbs 24:16 states, "A righteous person falls seven times and rises again." An alternative but often-cited version of this verse adds "a day," making the verse read: "A righteous person falls seven times *a day* and rises again." The same Old Testament book proposes a way that these venial sins could be forgiven: "Love covers all offenses" (Proverbs 10:12). The New Testament says much the same thing: "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). The same thought is developed in James 5:20: "Whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his ways will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Once again in the Old Testament, Tobit 12:9 says that helping the poor has the same effect: "Almsgiving delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin." Doing a good deed, in other words, whether an unspecified act of love or, more specifically, doing something like correcting a sinner or giving alms, is enough to remit one's venial sins. Thus the Bible itself set the tone for dealing with the minor sins that did not need to be subjected to the harsh demands of reconciliation as practiced in the early Church.

In his treatise *On Faith, Hope and Charity*, written in the 420s, St. Augustine lists many of the different ways by which these minor sins could be forgiven. He notes that, when it is said with sincerity, the Lord's Prayer "wipes out entirely the slight faults of every day." However, the most important way of all, according to Augustine, is almsgiving, for which he cites the words of Jesus in Luke 11:41: "Give alms, and behold, all things are clean for you." But Augustine understood almsgiving as something more than simply supporting the poor with money. For him it included any good thing that we would do for another person, and so he enumerates the works of mercy—namely, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, and so forth, as examples of almsgiving. Then he adds, "There are, therefore, many kinds of alms, the giving of which helps us to obtain pardon for our sins, but none is greater than that by which we forgive from our heart a sin that someone has committed against us." And of course the Lord's Prayer itself, as Augustine reminds his readers, asks God to forgive our sins on the condition that we forgive those that others have committed against us.

These, then, were the ways that venial sins could be pardoned—by prayer, almsgiving and, above all, the practice of forgiveness. What Augustine expressed in the fifth century had been part of the Church's understanding from the beginning and continues to be so to this day: venial sins are forgiven by prayer and good works. In next week's newsletter we will discuss how the Church's practice of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for reconciliation changed drastically and allowed for the frequent confession of one's sins.

This Monday, March 11th, our annual novena in honor of St. Joseph, our parish patron, will begin. The novena prayers will be said every day after the 6:00 pm Mass (or after the 4:00 pm Mass on Saturday) until the end of the novena on the actual feast of St. Joseph, Tuesday, March 19th. Those who wish to have their intentions remembered during the novena may write them on the envelopes at the entrances to the church and drop them in the collection basket or bring them to the rectory. They will then be placed on the altar for the entirety of the novena.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from March 9th to 17th

Saturday-Sunday, March 9th-10th (Fourth Sunday of Lent)

4:00 pm: Angelina Duffy (D), First Anniversary
8:00 am: Eileen O'Keefe (D)
10:00 am: Necima and Elias Saliba (D)
12:00 noon: Tom Merkl (D), Fifth Anniversary
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Nemet and Gerencser Family (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners

Monday, March 11th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Martha Weir (D)
6:00 pm: Alice von Hildebrand (D)

Tuesday, March 12th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: George Rodriguez (D)
6:00 pm: Rita Rowen and Yolanda Brach (D)

Wednesday, March 13th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Willie Healy (L)
6:00 pm: George Redmond (D)

Thursday, March 14th

7:00 am: Ethel Corpin (D)
12:15 pm: Agnes Hogan (D)
6:00 pm:

Friday, March 15th

7:00 am: Merle Conde (D)
12:15 pm: Fundador Santiago (D)
6:00 pm: Canon Henrique Fragelli (D)

Saturday, March 16th

8:00 am: Jeffrey T. Waldmann (L)
12:15 pm: Mary Rooney (D)
4:00 pm: Diane Wazlowski (D)

Sunday, March 17th (Fifth Sunday of Lent)

8:00 am: Jeffrey T. Waldmann (D)
10:00 am: St. Joseph's Parishioners
12:00 noon: Rose and Frank Christoforo (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Jozsef and Maria Kurucz (D)
6:00 pm: The Deceased Members of the McFadden Family