

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

March 17, 2024, The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Newsletter no. 209

This is the fifth in a series of newsletters devoted to the sacrament of reconciliation, commonly referred to as confession. Thus far we have discussed how several passages in the New Testament indicate that, if someone committed a serious—or mortal—sin after baptism, which remitted all sins, there was no way that the sin could be forgiven; baptism, in other words, was the sole means that the Church offered for the forgiveness of sins. In the middle of the second century, however, the Church began to allow a post-baptismal opportunity for forgiveness. This second opportunity, which we now know as the sacrament of reconciliation, involved the confession of one's sins to a priest, followed by a long and humiliating period of public penance, and finally the absolution of one's sins by a bishop. Less serious sins, however, could be forgiven by prayer and charitable deeds, and particularly, according to St. Augustine, by exercising forgiveness toward others.

The harsh penitential regimen that is described above was more or less in force throughout the Church until the sixth or seventh century. By then many people had come to realize that this method of dealing with sinful human frailty was both impractical and unmerciful, and they were open to a new and milder form of reconciliation. This new form of reconciliation came unexpectedly from the westernmost and most isolated part of the Christian world, from Britain and especially from Ireland.

From the late fifth century onwards, Britain and Ireland had embraced both Christianity and the monastic life; there were thousands of monks and nuns who lived in monasteries, as well as many who lived alone as hermits. The monastic way of life had been brought to Britain and Ireland from France, then known as Gaul, and it had come to Gaul from fourth- and fifth-century Egypt, where monasticism had flourished since the early fourth century. Thus, British and Irish monasticism could trace their roots to Egypt and to the customs that were practiced there. One of those customs that traveled from Egypt to Britain and Ireland via Gaul was that a younger monk was expected to disclose his thoughts and temptations privately on a regular basis to an older and more experienced monk, an elder, who would then give advice and sometimes impose a penance to be performed by the younger monk; once the younger monk did this, he was considered absolved of any sins that he might have included in his disclosure of thoughts and temptations. This custom was embraced in Britain and Ireland. Whereas the Egyptian elder was not necessarily a priest, though, but rather a man with a reputation for holiness, in Britain and Ireland it was a priest who listened to whoever confided in him and then gave that person a penance to perform. This process could be reiterated as often as needed and could take place several times in the course of a year or even a month.

The seventh century saw an extraordinary wave of British and Irish monk-missionaries—who were motivated by the idea of leaving their homeland for the sake of Christ—descending on western Europe to renew the Christian faith there and to establish or re-establish churches and monasteries in Gaul, Germany and elsewhere. They brought with them the custom of repeatable penitence as described above, meaning that, as often as one committed a serious sin, he or she could confess the sin, do penance and receive forgiveness. The earlier form of a once-in-a-lifetime sacramental reconciliation was already slowly dying out, but for several centuries that earlier form and the newer British-Irish one coexisted. It was not until sometime in the Late Middle Ages that frequent confession, without the necessity of public penitence, became the universal norm in the Western Church, as it remains to this day. As far as we can tell, this gradual change took place organically; no central authority intervened either to permit it or to forbid it.

There is still more to say about the sacrament of reconciliation, and we will conclude our discussion of it after Easter. Meanwhile, the next two newsletters will be devoted to Holy Week and Easter.

Since the traditional feast of St. Patrick, March 17th, falls this year on a Lenten Sunday, which does not allow for the celebration of a saint's feast day, the feast is therefore transferred to Monday, March 18th. The following day, March 19th, is the feast of St. Joseph, our parish's patron. The novena in honor of St. Joseph will conclude with the 6:00 pm Mass on the 19th. Please plan on celebrating our saint by attending Mass that day.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from March 16th to 24th

Saturday-Sunday, March 16th-17th (Fifth Sunday of Lent)

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

Monday, March 18th (Feast of St. Patrick)

7:00 am: James Richardson (D)
12:15 pm: Mary Frances Malone (L)
6:00 pm: Bernice Mackey (L)

Tuesday, March 19th (Feast of St. Joseph)

7:00 am: Michael Eich (L)
9:00 am (School Mass):
12:15 pm: The Living and Deceased Members of the Keane Family
6:00 pm:

Wednesday, March 20th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: John Timlin (D)
6:00 pm:

Thursday, March 21st

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Thomas and Mary Rogan (D)
6:00 pm: Lidia Sanchez (D)

Friday, March 22nd

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: The Marota Family (L)
6:00 pm: Jenny Arffinann (L)

Saturday, March 23rd

8:00 am: Bridget Healy (D)
12:15 pm: Peter Vergara (L)
4:00 pm: Bernadette Daniels (L)

Sunday, March 24th (Palm Sunday)

8:00 am: Virginia Taylor (D)
10:00 am: James Patrick O'Brian (D)
12:00 noon: Christine E. Corcoran (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Veronica and Istvan Gruber (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners