

# SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

March 3, 2024, The Third Sunday of Lent

Newsletter no. 207

In the previous newsletter, as part of our brief Lenten series on the sacrament of reconciliation, commonly known as confession, we discussed the Church's position regarding the forgiveness of sins in the first two centuries of its existence. The New Testament, written over the course of the first century, suggested that not all sins were forgivable. Jesus himself speaks of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as unpardonable (see Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10), and in the First Epistle of John 5:16-17 we read of mortal sins that should not be prayed for and that therefore must be unforgivable. It was not until the middle of the second century that a writing known as *The Shepherd of Hermas* stated that there was a single opportunity for forgiveness after baptism, when all a person's sins were washed away, although once that single opportunity had been exhausted, there was no other chance for repentance in this life. A one-time possibility of repentance after baptism then remained the norm over the next four centuries.

For the earliest description of that one-time sacrament of reconciliation we have to go to a North African theologian named Tertullian, who wrote a treatise called *On Penitence*, which dates to around 200. This is what he says in that treatise: "Since this second and last penitence [after baptism] is so serious a matter, it must be tested in a way which is proportionately laborious. Therefore, it must not be performed solely within one's conscience but must also be displayed in some external act.... Thus, we confess our sin to the Lord, not as though he were ignorant of it but because satisfaction receives its proper determination through confession, confession gives birth to penitence, and by penitence God is appeased. [This] is a discipline that leads a person to prostrate and humble himself. It prescribes a way of life that, even in the matter of food and clothing, appeals to pity. It bids him lie in sackcloth and ashes, to cover his body with filthy rags.... Moreover, it demands that you know only such food and drink as is plain.... It requires that you habitually nourish prayer by fasting, that you sigh and weep and groan day and night to the Lord your God, that you prostrate yourself at the feet of the priests and kneel before [your fellow Christians], making all the brethren commissioned ambassadors of your prayer for pardon." At the end of this harsh regimen comes the absolution of the penitent's sins by a bishop. Tertullian acknowledges how difficult all of this is, especially since it is carried out in public for everyone to see, but he makes it clear that the alternative is to be unforgiven and to risk hell.

The details as to how penitence was to be carried out varied somewhat from place to place and depended on the local bishop, but they always included a public show of remorse, although the actual telling of one's sins—the confessional part—was private. The Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical council, which met in 325 and which legislated for the whole Church, decreed twelve years of public penance for those who had renounced the faith in time of persecution. During the celebration of the eucharist they were to spend three years standing in the vestibule of the church for the first part of the liturgy, but they had to leave before the second part; for another seven years they were to lie prostrate within the church itself for the whole liturgy; and for the final two years they could participate in the liturgy, but without receiving communion. All of this was presumably in addition to other practices such as private prayer and fasting and perhaps wearing some special apparel, and at the end of it would have come the absolution of the sin.

St. Augustine, writing nearly a hundred years after the Council of Nicaea, is less rigorous, but he still says that those who are engaged in doing penance for serious sins had to occupy a place in church where they were cut off from the rest of the congregation, and they were not allowed to receive communion. More than that, ordinary Christians were warned not to eat with them, although they should pray for them. Augustine, like the other witnesses to the process of penitence in the early Church, indicates that absolution for sins was the responsibility of the local bishop.

What has been described thus far was the early Church's process of reconciliation for serious sins. Before discussing the radical change in that process, which happened in the sixth and seventh centuries, next week's newsletter will have something to say about the forgiveness of less serious sins.

On Monday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, our annual novena to St. Joseph will begin. The novena prayers will be said following the 6:00 pm Mass each day of the novena. For those who wish to have a particular intention remembered during the novena, envelopes for that purpose can be found at the entrances of the church, and they will be placed on the altar for the course of the novena.

Father Boniface

## Mass intentions for the period from March 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>

### Saturday-Sunday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> (Third Sunday of Lent)

4:00 pm: Jimmy Quinn (D)  
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: Bridget Creighton (D)

### Monday, March 4<sup>th</sup>

7:00 am: Marie Sama (D)  
12:15 pm:  
6:00 pm: Sister Mary George, S.H.C.J. (D)

### Tuesday, March 5<sup>th</sup>

7:00 am: Marie Sama (D)  
12:15 pm: Joan Salem (D)  
6:00 pm:

### Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>

7:00 am:  
12:15 pm:  
6:00 pm: Rev. John Blewett, S.J.

### Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup>

7:00 am: Laura, Karl and Josephine Heidemann (D)  
12:15 pm:  
6:00 pm: Edgardo Halagao (D)

### Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>

7:00 am: Kathleen Scheider (D)  
12:15 pm: Kathleen Gallagher (D)  
6:00 pm: Emma Dulmovits (D)

### Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>

8:00 am: Domingo Pabalate (D)  
12:15 pm: William J. Kava (D)  
4:00 pm: Angelina Duffy (D), First Anniversary

### Sunday, March 10<sup>th</sup> (Fourth Sunday of Lent)

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 Gerenscer Family (D)  
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners