A Message From Our Pastor

A New Act of Contrition

The practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during the season of Lent affords us all the opportunity to look into a spiritual mirror and take stock of our thoughts, words, and deeds, and also look more reflectively at our relationship with God, with others, and with the poor. And for most all of us, this helps us recognize the need and importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. During Lent, through the daily readings or devotional prayers, we often hear a call to repentance, conversion of heart, forgiveness, and mercy – all so that we can dwell in right relationship with God and experience the fullness of life that comes through Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection.

This Lenten season, the Catholic Church in the United States is receiving a slightly revised translation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Fortunately, it will be easier to adapt to than the new translation of the Mass that was promulgated in 2011. Some people are still getting used to saying "and with your spirit." (I sometimes still inter-mixup-switch the old and new texts of the Nicene Creed, so I make sure to have the text in front of me on Sundays, otherwise the congregation grinds to a halt if I say the wrong words into the microphone!)

But just in case you were wondering why we have a new one: the Second Vatican Council was held from 1962-1965 in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome where all the bishops of the world gathered to compose a more modern way of presenting and teaching the Catholic faith. There weren't any new doctrines, just ways of teaching about articles of faith that did a better job explaining why we believe what we do. As part of that Council, they discerned it appropriate to change the language of the Mass from the normative Latin texts to the vernacular; that is, to the local language. By 1973, all the texts of the Sacraments had been translated into English... except that the committee in charge of the process may have been hasty, or employed a little too much poetic license, reinterpreting some texts (like "and also with you"). So a few decades later, the US Bishops formed a new committee to do a more accurate job of translating from Latin to English. In 2011 a new translation of the Mass in English was promulgated. And then one by one they went on to translate the ritual texts for each of the other sacraments... and now it's Reconciliation's turn.

The overall rite for an individual person going to Confession is still the same, but the Prayer of Absolution the priest prays have been revised slightly. And there is also a new version of the Act of Contrition that people can use. (See insert).



Because many of us are creatures of habit, it is perfectly acceptable to use the version you already have memorized. In fact, depending on when you memorized the Act of Contrition, you may have be using one of a few different options. And they are all perfectly appropriate. The official ritual book for the Rite of Penance & Reconciliation teaches that "among the actions of the penitent, the most important is contrition, which is 'heartfelt sorrow and detestation for the sin committed, with the resolve not to sin again'." The Act of Contrition, therefore, is not about praying the words exactly correct, it is a person's prayerful expression of metanoia, that is, a sincere conversion of heart.

So the good news for people going to Confession is that the most important elements are expressing sorrow for their sins and an intention to avoid sin. The church has always thought it prudent to provide an Act of Contrition that people can memorize so they don't have to feel pressured to make up a prayer on the spot. However, it is acceptable for a penitent to use their own words, as long as they express contrition and the intention to avoid sin. Furthermore, the rite also affirms that the only way we can approach the Kingdom of Christ is by metanoia, by a sincere change of heart.

Which is precisely the goal of Lent — that through these observances of the Lent, we may enter into the Paschal Mysteries of Christ's Passion, death, and Resurrection with minds and hearts made pure, and thus receive the fullness of the heavenly treasures which pour forth from the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The New Act of Contrition

O my God,
I am sorry and repent with all my heart
for all the wrong I have done
and the good I have failed to do,
because by sinning I have offended You,
Who are all good
    and worthy to be loved above all things.
I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid the occasions of sin.
Through the merits of the Passion of our Savior Jesus Christ,
    Lord, have mercy.