

## **Bless Me, Father, for I Have Sinned**

I made my first confession in 1958 at St. Helen Church in Saginaw. I think the late Msgr. Ralph Richards was my confessor. A young priest, Fr. Richard Cross, gave us instructions as to how to examine our conscience: "You don't keep a list of sins, do you? You don't disobey your mother and then run into your room and write down 'disobeyed Mother,' do you?" Even as second graders, we got the joke.

So, he said, just tell the priest if it was once or twice, a few times, many times, or a whole lot. That way, you won't risk making a "bad confession" if you committed 17 sins but only confessed 16 of them. That is how children think. It's normal.

But adults cannot successfully use a child's reasoning about the Sacrament of Reconciliation or about the whole matter of sin. If they do, one of two things is likely to happen:

1. They will always feel guilty about not having properly examined their conscience and not having confessed every single sin.
2. They will come to see the whole matter of confessing sins to another human being as an unnecessary practice, and simply not celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation at all.

And sometimes, people have had an unpleasant experience in the confessional due to the words or actions of a priest who just wasn't skilled at conveying the sense of mercy that is expected in this sacrament. I'm one of those people. I took about a ten-year break from confession afterwards. You might have had a similar experience.

But as we prepare to enter our church and to literally take a new look at the Liturgy, the sacraments, and our role as the Assembled Body of Christ, we will also have a new Reconciliation Room to encounter. It's the same glass art facade as before, but with two doors rather than one. Inside, one of the existing large clear etched windows will provide daylight for those in the room and will light the glass art from within as seen from the rest of the church. The Reconciliation Room will have a lightness coming from within that will be both inviting and calming.

So, why is there confession, and why do we need a whole room for it? The answer is rooted in the Incarnation - the event in which the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, becomes flesh as a truly human being, and lives among us. His life, death, and resurrection bring us salvation. In the Church and her sacraments, He lives with and in us "even to the end of the age." (Mt 28:20, the very last words of the Gospel of Matthew)

God could have saved us just by willing it. He did not need to send His Son. But God created us to know what is real and true through human experience, and so God became a human experience so that God could be real and true to us.

Yes, God can forgive sins directly, and certainly does so all the time. But WE need a human experience. We need to confront what is wrong in our life, and say it. As the words leave our lips, the burden of guilt leaves our shoulders. Parents know this about their children: the child must learn to say when he or she has done something wrong, or is in trouble. As God's children, we need to do the same.

Celebrating Reconciliation (and it is a celebration; remember the feast of the Prodigal Son's return) is not what you remember from second or third grade. It's not a pop quiz on a list of sins, it's a real and present opportunity to make things right in our relationship with God.

The renewed Reconciliation Room - light, beautiful, inviting, comforting - expresses just a hint of the joy you will experience when you've been released from your guilt and sin by these beautiful words you can hear with your own ears:

*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

What if you can't remember what you're supposed to say? Doesn't matter! Just go. Tell the priest it's been a long time since you were here. He will welcome you home and he'll take it from there.

Want something to give up for Lent? Give up "Reconciliation-Resistance." It's time to come home.