

Recognize Sin —Praise God’s Mercy

Why do you think that people need to have the burden of sin and guilt lifted from their hearts?

Why is it essential to understand the mission of Jesus Christ as the Savior?

How can you commit yourself to a lifelong process of moral and spiritual conversion?

The Sacrament of Penance is an experience of the gift of God’s boundless mercy. Not only does it free us from our sins but it also challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and forgiveness for those who sin against us. We are liberated to be forgivers. We obtain new insight into the words of the Prayer of St. Francis: “It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.” By the help of God’s grace, our call to holiness will be clearer when we recover an awareness of the reality of sin and evil in the world and in our own souls. Scripture will be enormously helpful in this since it reveals sin and evil clearly and fearlessly. Scriptural realism does not hesitate to pronounce judgment on the good and evil that affects our lives. The New Testament is filled with calls to conversion and repentance, which need to be heard in our culture today.

If we say, “We are without sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. (1 Jn 1:8-9)

In our churches, we behold Jesus nailed to the Cross, an image that reminds us of his painful sacrifice to bring about the forgiveness of all our sins and guilt. If there were no sin, Jesus would not have suffered for our redemption. Each time we see the crucifix, we can reflect on the infinite mercy of God, who saves us through the reconciling act of Jesus. Despite society’s efforts to downplay the reality of sin, there is an instinctive recognition of its existence. Children generally know, even when not told, when they have done something morally wrong. Adults readily admit the evil of terrorism, unjust war, lies, unfair treatment of people, and similar matters. Society as a whole must also learn to admit the evil of abortion, physician-assisted suicide, and obtaining stem cells from embryos, which results in the death of embryonic human life. Denying evil corrupts us spiritually and psychologically. Rationalizing our own evil is even more destructive.

Jesus laid the foundation for the Sacrament of Penance during his ministry and confirmed it after his Resurrection. When Peter asked the number of times a person should forgive, Jesus told him

that there should be no limit to forgiving. Jesus forgave Peter his triple denial, showed mercy to the woman taken in adultery, forgave the thief on the cross, and continually witnessed the mercy of God. Jesus entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Church. The Sacrament of Penance is God’s gift to us so that any sin committed after Baptism can be forgiven. In confession we have the opportunity to repent and recover the grace of friendship with God. It is a holy moment in which we place ourselves in his presence and honestly acknowledge our sins, especially mortal sins. With absolution, we are reconciled to God and the Church. The Sacrament helps us stay close to the truth that we cannot live without God. “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). While all the Sacraments bring us an experience of the mercy that comes from Christ’s dying and rising, it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation that is the unique Sacrament of mercy.