

## *Sacrament of Reconciliation*

I'm waiting for sloth  
to come back in style,  
he said.

You may wait a long time,  
I said.

That's ok, he said,  
I can use the practice.

– Story People

## *Sacrament of Reconciliation*

Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

### Discussion Questions

“If you do not worship the Lord as God, you will have strange gods before you” (Fr. Richard Rohr). Strange gods would be easy to recognize and dethrone if they were obviously evil. What strange gods do you see in our society?

Examples of possible strange gods: Celebrities, jobs, self-image, security, money, family, power, success, comfort, etc.

## *Review*

Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

- Symbols and ritual can be powerful tools for building community and our relationship with God.
- Sacrament is an outward sign that comes from God to show God's favor.
- True presence is a self-gift, and is not the same as physical presence. The Sacraments require our true presence.
- Priesthood is a commitment to serve God and the community through leadership. The church bestows on men willing to make this commitment the unique power to offer the Mass, forgive transgressions against the Body of Christ, and reconcile people to the church.

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- Before we can talk about reconciliation we have to describe three indescribable concepts:
  - Grace
  - What does it mean to be "fully human"?
  - Sin

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### ■ Grace

- Grace is the favoritism that God shows human beings. It is a gift from God that enables us to be aware of God -- to have a relationship with God, if we so choose.
- Grace does not come down from an external heaven, but dwells within us.

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### ■ Grace

- This definition of grace has consequences, as pointed out by the sacramental theologian Bernard Cooke.
- "If one uses this model to think about God's saving action, there is no need to think of God giving "actual graces" from time to time as we need them; nor is "sanctifying grace" something we increasingly accumulate through the faithful reception of sacraments. *God, rather, given for us and dwelling in us, brings forth depths of personal growth that would not otherwise be possible.*

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### ■ Grace continued

- "This divine friend's loving presence provides ultimate hope and support as we encounter the difficulties, decisions, [failures], and sufferings of life. The reality of this relationship, as we increasingly accept it, provides a wisdom to guide us in the important decisions that shape our personhood and destiny."

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### ■ Thus,

- A growth or increase in grace is the building of the relationship between us and God.
- Grace is a "quality" -- a better relationship.
- Grace is not a "quantity" – we're not accumulating get-out-of-jail-free cards!

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### ■ Fully Human

- Usually we associate limitations with the word human:
  - I'm only human
  - Less than divine
- We will be using a more positive definition.
  - Jesus was fully human.
    - What does this mean?

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### ■ Fully Human

- Jesus is the perfect example of what it means to be human.
  - He perfectly loved us and he perfectly loved God.
  - He lived in perfect grace.
- As Christians, we have dedicated our lives (through our baptism into the Body of Christ) to Christ. This means that we strive to live our lives as Jesus did -- we strive to live in perfect communion with God.

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### ■ Sin

- Sin is the wounding of our relationship with God. This wound may result from transgressions against God directly, or by hurting others or our self.

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### ■ Sin

- Sin is *always* against God. It is always a matter of making a relationship less, and in the process making us less than we are called to be...
  - Sin may also be against other people.
  - Since sin affects me it also affects the Body of Christ, of which I am a member. *Always!*
  - At the very least, personal sin is failure in fidelity to the community.

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### ■ Sin

- Remember that Christ profoundly linked the community and God when he taught.
  - Love God with all your heart ... and your neighbor as yourself.
  - Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there.

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### ■ Reconciliation

- Reconciliation is not “giving God the bad news and saying sorry.” It includes being sorry, but the most important aspect is left out. We want and need to re-establish the relationship between God and us.
  - It's not “God and me!” Jesus made it very clear that *I* need *You* if I want to be a disciple of Christ.
  - Both penance and forgiveness are personal, but neither is simply individual.

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### ■ Reconciliation

- When we sin, when we realize that our relationship with God is wounded or broken, we need our Church.
- Our parishes are led by our pastors. They have devoted their lives to serving God and us. Who better to turn to? Who better to help us mend our relationship with God? To help us change our ways for the better?

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### ■ Reconciliation

- But is this *all* that we should do?
  - Need to repair relationships
  - Need to work for justice
  - Need to respond to the broken relationship by living our lives differently
    - The way I behave outside of church affects my church.

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### ■ Reconciliation

- Reconciliation requires confession and conversion ...
  - it demonstrates to God our sincere sorrow.
  - It helps us to grow in the wounded part of our relationship with God.

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### ■ Reconciliation

- This sense of reconciliation seems different than what many Catholics usually experience when going to confession. Why?
  - As usual, we have to look at the history.

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### ■ History

- In the first two hundred years, the church developed a process of reconciliation for people who failed to live out their Baptismal vows. This process required a period of conversion back to Christ, followed by the Bishop readmitting the offender to the church through the laying on of hands.

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### ■ History

- This readmission was considered to be a “second chance,” a one-time event for people who lapsed. It was only used in serious cases of adultery, murder, or denial of faith. People who were in this process of post-baptismal conversion were called the “order of penitents.”

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### ■ History

- After a couple of hundred years, very few people participated in Reconciliation.
- Lenten penance is a fifth century development, a way to do penance for "smaller" sins without becoming an official member of the order of penitents. This became official church practice in the 900's.

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### ■ History

- During the invasion of the barbarians (~800) the practice of Irish monks (not only priests) was to carry a little book that gave a penance for each type of sin. People liked this, and since they weren't going to the bishops for reconciliation (sins were not "serious" enough) it became common practice.

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### ■ History

- Confession to the laity did not become unpopular until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when getting “absolution” from a priest became the norm.
- It is in this environment that the practice of indulgence came into being. If you have to do something (penance) when you're bad, you should/could get something for when you are good to offset your “debt.”

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### ■ Notice what happened.

- The patristic period saw *conversion* as the requirement for reentering the community of salvation.
- The early medieval period saw *satisfaction* as the cause of divine forgiveness.
- As the amount of satisfaction declined with immediate absolution, confession and satisfaction became *humiliation and self-punishment*.
- In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the ritual combination of *confession and absolution* replaced confession and satisfaction as the central factor in obtaining divine forgiveness.

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- Notice what happened.
  - Vatican II returned the church to the “conversion” understanding of reconciliation.
    - Although this is easily said, it is not easily accomplished.
    - Fr. Tom on reconciliation today!

