

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION *BEGINS IN THE CONFESSIONAL*



**“It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered
through the Sacrament of Penance.”**

- Pope St. John Paul II -
“Novo Millennio Ineunte”, no. 37

DEPARTMENT OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

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THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: I AM A SINNER.

The question posted by a newspaper “What is wrong with the world?” was answered by Catholic author and writer G.K Chesterton as follows:

“Dear Sirs:
I am.
Sincerely Yours,
G. K. Chesterton.”

FOR REFLECTION:

“Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.’” - (Luke 6:37-42)

“I am”. It is these two simple words that are our starting point for understanding the New Evangelization and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

When we hear the term “New Evangelization” we often think about what we have to do in order to get other people to change and to become more Christ-like. However, the New Evangelization begins with each one of us and our call to conversion so that we can be a sign of Christ’s love and mercy in the world.

Pope Francis was recently asked by a journalist “Who is Pope Francis?”. His response was startling in its simplicity and humility. It is however, the same response that resonates from each of our hearts - “I am a sinner.”¹

It is clear that we cannot call others to embrace Christ without embracing Christ ourselves, and we cannot call others to repentance if we ourselves do not repent and confess our own sins.

The New Evangelization begins with each one of us. We are called to deepen our personal relationship with Christ so that it is “no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me” (Galatians 2:20).



WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION?

The Sacrament of Reconciliation contains three elements: conversion, confession and celebration. It is this sacrament which changes us, challenges us and equips us as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ to reach out to others and to transform the world. This Sacrament brings us into intimate contact with Jesus. Here, we are liberated from the sins that trouble our hearts and minds and experience God’s unconditional forgiveness and mercy, so that we can be a living fountain of forgiveness and mercy to others.

CONVERSION:

Acknowledging our weaknesses and failings leads to a conversion of heart, mind and will. This is the first step in turning away from sin and turning to the Father who loves us and desires each one of us to be in intimate communion with him.

¹ America Magazine, “A Big Heart Open to God.” www.americamagazine.org/pope-interview

PENANCE:

Penance provides an opportunity to redress those failings and to satisfy those sins and patterns of sin that we habitually fall into. The priest provides spiritual encouragement and also a way for us to redress and satisfy those we may have wronged in the form of a penance. Penance may consist of “prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1460).

CONVERSION:

In confession, we are given an opportunity to amend for our weaknesses, limitations and struggles as before the priest we stand before Christ and take responsibility for our actions and our failings. We acknowledge our short comings and also praise God for his gifts of mercy and abundant love in forgiving us. We leave the sacrament with a renewed sense of wholeness and intimacy with God having experienced a true conversion of hearts. This “transformative and renewing action of God is the “engine” of every reform and translates itself into a true evangelizing force” according to Pope Benedict XVI.²



REFLECTION STORY: “SPIRITUAL SURGERY”

Abby, a 45 year old nurse disclosed that during her college years she had stopped going to Mass and to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In her own words she shares her experience with us:

“I grew up Catholic and even went to Catholic school, my family went to Mass every Sunday but we rarely talked about our faith or prayed together as a family. At college, I was very busy beginning my nursing career and didn’t place a high priority on faith or attending Mass. I attended Mass a couple of times during the year but I didn’t go regularly and didn’t feel the need to go to confession. To be honest, nobody had really taken the time to explain it to me and I was afraid to go.

It was during my college years however, that I found myself pulling more and more away from my faith and engaging in behaviors that hurt others and wounded myself. To the outside world, I was a successful person but inside I felt hopeless. I knew that my life was spiraling out of control and I needed someone to talk to.

One day in Church I heard about the Cure of Ars, St. John Vianney and how he had spent about 17 hours a day in the confessional in France. What could these people be confessing to him I thought, is everyone in need of regular confession? That same night, I woke up with a great sense of urgency. Very clearly, I could see that my need to talk to someone and my desire to go to confession coincided.

The next morning I went to a neighboring parish and asked to see the priest. He met with me and gently helped me to make a confession that changed my life. I was given an “examination of conscience” which helped me to identify patterns of sin and where I was in need of healing.

As I left the confessional I could not stop the tears springing to my eyes, I felt freer than I had ever been and deeply grateful for a chance to change.

Today, as a nurse I often describe confession as “necessary spiritual surgery” but far less invasive! As a nurse I regularly see people in need of surgery who are at their most vulnerable and sensitive. Surgery identifies the problem, removes it and sets the patient on the road to healing. That is what confession has done for me!

We might approach the sacrament feeling vulnerable and exposed but end up finding a deep peace and sense of wholeness from Christ who is the Divine physician, a peace that does not come from the world. I cannot imagine the person that I would be without Mass and the sacraments but particularly confession!”

² Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Apostolic Penitentiary, March 10, 2012.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In the silence of your heart or in a small group setting (if you are comfortable) please discuss your thoughts on any of the following questions:

- What aspects of Abby's story resonate with me?
- How do I feel about the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- When was the last time that I went to Confession?
- Is it difficult for me to go to confession? Why?
- What name can I give to the restlessness in my heart?
- What would I let go of right now in order to be truly happy and peaceful?
- What pattern of sin can I recognize in my own life?



THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST'S LOVE

Sin has a triple effect. It weakens our relationship with God, it affects our relationships with others and it denigrates and damages our true sense of who we really are - as children of God created in His image and likeness. It is in recognizing that we have wronged God, our neighbor and ourselves that we are set free from the bindings that keep us from forgiving and fully loving others. When this liberation happens through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are better disposed to proclaim the Gospel with both words and deeds.

The Sacrament of Confession is an encounter with Jesus Christ who loves each one of us and wants to forgive us. Pope Francis reminds us that confession "is an encounter with Jesus...who waits for us just as we are. Jesus waits for us to forgive us". Confession should not be viewed, according to Pope Francis as a "torture session" but an opportunity "to praise God, because I, a sinner have been saved by Him."³ He loves us, wants to heal us and is waiting for us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation offers love, healing and abundant mercy - will you accept Christ's invitation to join Him there?

RESPOND:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists many ways for the Christian to express interior penance, including the following:

- Fasting, prayer and almsgiving;
- Efforts at reconciliation with one's neighbor;
- The intercession of the saints;
- The practice of charity;
- Gestures of reconciliation;
- Concern for the poor;
- The exercise and defense of justice and right;
- Examination of conscience;
- Spiritual direction;
- Celebration of the Sacraments of Penance, Reconciliation and Eucharist, to name just a few.
- (CCC, nos. 1434-1439).

Please choose one of the above ways that you can express interior penance and make an effort to carry out this act for the satisfaction of your sins.

³ http://en.radiovaticana.va/storico/2013/04/29/pope_shame_is_a_true_christian_virtue/en1-687330

CLOSING PRAYER:

Prayer Guide: Together we pray the Act of Faith:

All: O my God,

I firmly believe that You are one God in Three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe that Thy Divine Son became Man, and died for our sins, and that He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches, because you have revealed them,

Who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

Amen.



OUR PARISH - SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION



DEPARTMENT OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

The Department of New Evangelization inspires & equips parishes in the New Evangelization to form disciples of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Questions? Comments? Need Help?

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