



# COME BACK TO THE LORD

## PREPARING FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important part of the Advent and Lenten seasons. It has long been a tradition in the church to confess one's sins before celebrating the great feasts, including Christmas and Easter. This flyer is the first of two that will prepare us for the Communal Celebrations of this sacrament here at our parish. You will also have the opportunity for individual confession after each service and other times during the Advent and Lenten seasons.

Certainly, God knows when we are sorry for our sins. And since God's only relationship with us is one of unconditional love, whenever we turn to God with a sincere sorrow for sin and a desire to make a new beginning, God is there to meet us with forgiveness. As human beings, however, we may need a more concrete way of experiencing God's love for us. As Catholics, we believe that God has given us the sacraments as a way of showing that we are receiving the gift of his love in very real and down-to-earth ways, enabling our Church to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ in our present time.

There are other ways that we celebrate God's forgiving power at work in our lives. Each Mass begins with a "Penitential Rite" where we pray for God's mercy and then are assured that God's mercy and forgiveness are present to us. ***The Mass itself is a Sacrament which conveys God's forgiveness.***

But there are times in our lives, when we may freely and deliberately choose to separate ourselves from God's love by committing an act that is seriously evil. In such a case, a more personal reconciliation with the Church is ***strongly encouraged***. Moreover, whenever we commit such a sin, we will likely feel the need to confess it and won't feel completely comfortable until we do. The church asks that we make an individual confession of our sins to a priest (representing the Holy Spirit present in the community of the church) in case of serious sin. Through prayer, holy conversation, and Scripture, we can gain insight about what we have done and what we need to change in our lives. ***And when we do confess, we often feel a tremendous sense of relief and joy—just like the many people in the Gospel stories who experienced forgiveness through Jesus!***

Individual confession and celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation can also be of great value even when we have not committed a serious sin. It is a way of taking an honest look at our own lives and "taking inventory" of our relationship with God. "Naming" the tendencies or habits that cause us to drift from that relationship may be the beginning of a process of our re-centering our thoughts and actions on God.

**NEXT WEEK: How to Go to Confession: A Practical Guide**