

Prepare the Way of the Lord

My dear friends in Christ,

Today's Gospel resounds these words "*A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.*" The way of the Lord is none other than the path to our hearts. What better way is there to prepare our hearts during this season of Advent than through the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

For many of us Catholics, both those brought up in the Church since childhood and those formerly of Protestant or non-Christian faiths, the Sacrament of Reconciliation can seem a bit frightening. Perhaps it has been a long time since we've made a confession. Perhaps we struggle with disbelief, with despair, with human weakness, with addictions, or with lingering resentment or grief. Yet, how wonderful it would be to be freed from these struggles.

What does sin do to the sinner? Sin is a choice, the result of which is the experience of alienation from God, our neighbor, creation, or ourselves. In Scripture, this experience is often described in terms of living as if dead (the ultimate alienation). Thus, when we sin, we wound our life's purpose; namely, making our lives a song of love and praise to the One who IS Love. And yet when God, in his mercy, heals and rescues us from our sins, the gift of praise is restored.

What, then, is the heart of confession? Yes, without a doubt, there is the confession of sins, after which one receives pardon, absolution, and a penance of healing. But there is something deeper, something much more profound. What is it that brings me to confession, to what the Fathers of the Church called "second Baptism?" It should be the same thing that brought me to my first Baptism: Faith. When I approach a priest for the healing sacrament, I confess—really, I profess—my faith, my trust in the God who forgives and heals me, the God of eternal mercy and love.

Finally, what results from a good confession, that is, a confession of sins following a genuine confession of faith and trust? None other than the confession (or profession) of praise. God, as it were, brings us back to life—heals our hearts, wounded in their ability to "speak," to express love—so that we might be free to glorify him anew. Thus, what begins as a frightening experience for many ends in joy—the gift of praise restored.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is also, importantly, a sacrament of healing. We are all wounded by our sins, by the guilt we have from the hurts we have inflicted on others, and by our own lack of forgiveness of hurts inflicted upon us by others. Jesus wants to heal these wounds, to take away or alleviate the pain that they cause. But he will not force us to come to him; he respects our own free will and wants us to seek forgiveness, which can be difficult. Yet all it takes is a contrite heart and an honest confession, and Jesus stands ready to console us. Come, be healed and restored. Jesus, our most merciful, loving, forgiving God will be waiting.

If you have been away, come back during Advent. It is a time of renewal, of new beginnings, of new life. Allow this Advent to be a new beginning in your life of faith. I invite you to join us this Wednesday at Holy Trinity at 6:30 pm or Thursday at St. John's at 9:30am for prayer and confession.

May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts this Advent season.

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