

Reconciliation: Jesus is Waiting for You

Dear friends in Christ,

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 have made a confession. Perhaps we struggle with disbelief, with despair, with human weakness, with addictions, or with lingering resentment or grief. And yet, how wonderful it would be to be freed from these chains!

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). Now for the ancient Hebrews, the worst thing about death is that *the dead cannot praise God*. Thus, the *Miserere*, the great Psalm of Repentance, proclaims, "Restore me from death, God, my saving God, that my tongue may praise your healing power. Lord, open my lips; my mouth will proclaim your praise" (Ps 51:16-17). Thus, when we sin, we wound or even destroy 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.

Do you remember the story of John the Baptist's father, Zechariah? He doubted God's Word (sent through the angel) that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son in their old age; because of his sin, he became mute. But when God forgave Zechariah after he acknowledged his sin through a corresponding act of faith, "immediately, his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing to God" (Lk 1:64). Again, the gift of praise was 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 *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. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bend ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). "The glory of God is a human being fully alive" (St. Irenaeus).

So, if you come regularly to confession, know that Our Lord and I are grateful - please continue with this practice. If you haven't been to the sacrament in a while, please come back. Invite others to come as well - after all, this is the time for a *New Evangelization*, for proclaiming Glad Tidings anew. Jesus tells us, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Isn't his message the *very essence* of the Good News? Friends, please hear Jesus' call, and come to have your burdens lifted in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Come, be healed and restored. Jesus, our most merciful, loving, forgiving God will be waiting.

Father Anthony Ahamefula