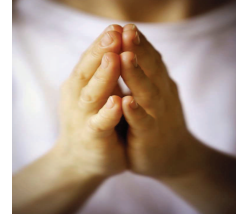


Reconciliation: The Sacrament of Conversion

(Source: Ancient-future.net, article by Jonathan Bennett)



Origin

Penance was instituted by Christ after the resurrection when he breathed on the disciples and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). Matthew 16:15-20 also mentions a similar theme where Jesus gives Peter the keys and the authority to bind and loose. The book of James gives witness to the early form of public confession, as well as to its healing power (James 5:13-18).

History

In the early Church, confession and penance were very public affairs. A person, after committing a grave sin, would ask the bishop for penance and would publicly live the life of a penitent, meaning exclusion from communion, as well as a strict course of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The "Order of Penitents" was an official class of people within the early Church. After this early period, confession and penance continued to evolve over time. The emphasis of the Sacrament was expanded with the Second Vatican Council, which emphasized reconciliation with God and amendment of life and allowed the option of public services of penance (but these must always include private individual confession).

Today

The basic theology behind the Sacrament has remained the same throughout time, namely reconciliation with God and the community. The Catholic Church teaches the primary elements of the Sacrament are contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The sinner confesses his or her sins to give external expression to their internal repentance. The priest then gives penance and through the power of his ordination, pronounces the words of absolution. A "penance", or "satisfaction" is required in that when we sin, we offend God and his justice. Such an offense against justice requires some kind of satisfaction. It's like when a person steals, even if he is completely forgiven, justice requires him to make reparation. This "penance" can also serve the purpose of helping the penitent make the changes needed in his or her life.

For additional information see the following articles at www.AmericanCatholic.org under the Catholic Update Newsletters section:

- The Sacrament of Reconciliation: Celebrating God's Forgiveness
- How to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation Today
- Sacrament of Reconciliation: Celebrating the Mercy of God
- Ten Tips for Better Confessions - The Gift of Reconciliation

Note: There will be Penance Service offered at St. Mary's on Thursday, December 10. Reconciliation is also offered weekly at St. Mary's on Saturdays at 4:00 PM.