

From the Pastor

March 7, 2010

3rd Sunday of Lent



In this 'Year for Priests' we continue to reflect on St. John Vianney's outreach to the errant, who came to him by the thousands for God's pardon and peace in the

Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sadly, today many say there's no need to go to an ordained priest to be reconciled! Do they baptize on their own, except in a life-or-death emergency? Do they go to 'just anyone' to be confirmed, or to the Bishop or his delegate? Do they confect their own Eucharist, anoint the sick themselves, witness their own weddings or ordain their own bishops, priests or deacons? I doubt it!

So why are we so opposed to confessing our grave, serious, mortal sins to an ordained priest? While venial or lesser sins need not be confessed, and we can atone for 'ordinary' or 'everyday' sins on our own - if we are concerned with our spiritual health, shouldn't we have at least an annual 'check-up' in the confessional - just as we have an annual physical with a doctor? Perhaps reviewing the words of Absolution prayed by priests over repentant sinners can help explain the role of the ordained priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

According to Church doctrine, the only truly essential words needed to absolve sins are: ***"I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** However, this 'brief form' should only be used in an emergency, since the longer form gives sound spiritual instruction - and reminds us who it is that forgives us, why it's important for a priest to be involved, and how going to Confession is a crucial part of being a member of the Catholic community:

***"God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."***

By dissecting this prayer we can see the Lord's desire to forgive us through His Church and His priests. The prayer begins with the crux of

salvation history: the "***death and resurrection of his Son***" by which God redeemed the world. While God's redemptive plan reached its climax in Jesus Christ, God had previously channeled His pardon and peace through the leaders of His People: patriarchs like Abraham and Moses, through judges and prophets, kings and priests. Then the Lord continued His redemptive work through the Apostles; now He works through today's bishops and priests. For our Faith has ***NEVER*** been a 'me-and-the-Lord' thing; it has always been communal, nurtured and governed by priests who the Lord empowers to ***speak*** and ***act*** in His almighty, holy Name!

Then the prayer highlights how God cares for and helps us ***now***: ***"[He] sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace."*** The Holy Spirit is given to ***all*** the ***baptized***, and in a ***special*** way to the ***confirmed***, to the sick who are ***anointed***, to those united as one in ***Matrimony*** and to those in ***Holy Orders***; in each of these sacraments the Spirit's power infuses the receiver with special graces. But only the ordained are empowered to forgive sins ***in the name of God and His Church***. While anyone can and must forgive others in their ***OWN*** name, only those in Holy Orders can speak for and act in the name of the Lord and His Church!

Finally, the prayer notes how it all comes down to this particular moment in time, with this particular sinner, who seeks pardon for the particular offenses just confessed - and to this particular priest who was ordained to speak and act ***'in persona Christi'*** - as another Christ: ***"I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."*** Thus the graces and blessings won for us by Jesus on His Cross 2,000 year ago are now applied to the one over whom the Sign of the Cross is made as the priest utters these awesome words! As we hear these words, and place that saving Sign of the Cross on ourselves, we are truly forgiven of all our sins!

For the rest of Lent, which is ***"the acceptable time, the day of salvation,"*** [2 Corinthians 6:2] until our Parish Penance Service on Monday, March 22, pray the Prayer of Absolution often!

With God's love and my prayers,

Father Mike

Reverend Michael J. Kreder