

YEAR OF FAITH 2012 – 2013

5th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME | February 9 – 10, 2013

A novice asked his mentor, “Who is closer to God, the saint or the sinner?” The mentor replied, “Why, the sinner, of course.” “But how can that be?” asked the novice. “Because,” said the mentor, “every time a person sins they break the cord that binds them to God, but every time God forgives them the cord is knotted again. And so, thanks to the mercy of God, the cord gets shorter and the sinner closer to God.”

In today’s Gospel, Peter, realizing his sinfulness in the presence of Jesus begs Jesus to depart from him. Jesus, who is the cord that unites us to God draws Peter ever closer to God by declaring “Do not be afraid” and invites Peter to follow Him, by becoming “fishers of men.”

For all of us, when we are in the presence of great beauty or talent we seem to see our own short comings. We watch athletic events and are reminded of our own lack of physical health, or watch successful individuals and second guess our career choices or even our vocations...All too often we see our own blemishes and flaws in the perceived success of another. .

The same is true when we come into the presence of holiness. That relative who truly practices what she preaches, with unconditional love; or the neighbor that makes time to put his faith into action, by caring for those in need. All too often many will dismissed this perception of holiness by finding fault in the person...and like Peter say “depart from me”...or like the prophet Isaiah in our first reading we cry out “Woe is me, I am one of unclean lips” and this is how I am going to stay!

But the cord that binds us to God can also draw us ever closer to holiness and we find ourselves seeking to share in the divine life of God. That attraction, that drawing closer to the holy...is the first step in the process of conversion, and our reconciliation to God. We hear the Lord call us by our names. We see his divine light that not only shows the way to His embraces...but also shows our own sinfulness and failings. There are those who will turn away...afraid of what they have done! But the Lord Jesus says “Do not be afraid!”

These words encourage us to draw closer to Jesus and the Church through the Sacrament of Healing...the Sacrament of Reconciliation; the Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins. Christ gave his Church the power to forgive sins. To Peter, Jesus entrusted the Keys to bind and loose, and down through the centuries that gift has been handed down to the successors of the Apostles and to the priests of the Church.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, Penance, or Confession; these are different titles, that describe the various elements of the Sacrament of Healing that reestablish our relationship with God and the Church, broken by sin. Contrary to our world’s understanding, sin is never private...when we sin, we sever the cord, and the communion we have with God and His Church. Therefore, to be truly reconciled we must seek not only God’s forgiveness, but also the forgiveness of the Church.

This movement of the heart is much more than just saying "I am sorry." Our society is filled with people who say and do hateful things...and then say "I am sorry" and all is to be forgiven! Yet, the heart that said and did these painful things has not changed.

In the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation our posture is very different, our hearts are moved by contrition, by sorrow for what we have done...or said, or even thought. This sorrow brings us to our knees as we ask for forgiveness, with hope that God with His unconditional mercy and love will hear our request and we will be forgiven. We are humbled, and contrite, not only by what we have done, but the reality that by our actions we have lost the grace we received at our Baptism...this is why the Church Fathers saw the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a Second chance at Baptism. It takes courage to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation in a Society that denies the reality of sin and makes excuses for bad behavior. Many will say I can seek God's forgiveness in my own way; I will pray directly to God and say I am sorry. Sad to say this leads those folks onto a path of confusion and darkness.

Without the Sacrament of Reconciliation we do not have the grace of Christ's light to guide us on the path of conversion to fullness of life with God, as His sons and daughters. In a world which values freedom, many chose slavery to sin and a life full of fear.

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict reminds us that "To live life to the full in freedom we must overcome the test that this freedom entails, that is, temptation. Only if he is freed from the slavery of falsehood and sin can the human person, through the obedience of faith that opens him to the truth, find the full meaning of his life and attain peace, love and joy." (Angelus March 5, 2006)

Wednesday of this week is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Holy Season of Lent; a time of prayer, fasting and alms-giving. 40 days in which the Church calls all her sons and daughters to examine their relationship with God, the Church, and the world. This year, let us prepare for Easter by a conversion of heart, confessing our sins, doing penance, and reflecting the mercy of God in our lives.

Let not our failures, our sins, and our fears, keep us away from the mercy and love of God...but with hope and confidence in Jesus, listen to him when he says: "Be not afraid" ...then our lips be cleanse, our hearts filled with peace, and we will truly be "Fishers of Men" a net to draw all people to Christ.