



In Joy and Hope

by

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The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The challenge of Lent is to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. These are the words used to begin this holy season when we received ashes on our forehead. The first Sunday of Lent's Gospel tells us how we respond to this challenge - "The kingdom of God is at hand; reform your lives and believe the Good News." To reform our lives is the work of a lifetime. It is the ongoing process of being faithful to all that a good and gracious God asks of us.

To help us reform our lives, Jesus gives us the opportunity to experience forgiveness and healing through the sacrament of reconciliation. The sacrament of reconciliation was Jesus' Easter gift to the church. He appeared to the disciples that first Easter evening and told them, "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven. Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

The sacrament of reconciliation is to experience God's forgiveness. Jesus emphasized this message as part of the good news he proclaimed. Many of the parables and stories in the Gospel are stories of forgiveness. Jesus not only told endless stories of forgiveness, he showed forgiveness in his own words and actions. He told his disciples to "forgive seventy times seven," which is a Hebrew expression to forgive endlessly. The woman caught in adultery found forgiveness in Jesus' acceptance of her. Even as he was dying on the cross, Jesus asked his father to forgive his enemies.

In the sacrament of reconciliation, we celebrate God's forgiveness. It is an opportunity for us to reflect on our own lives and to identify the areas in our life that call out for healing and forgiveness. The sacrament asks us to name our sins and to acknowledge them. In our world today, that can be a difficult challenge. Years ago Pope Pius XII said that "the greatest sin of our time is the loss of a sense of sin."

The individual experience of the sacrament of reconciliation is a grace and a gift. In this sacrament we encounter the healing power of Jesus who offers us forgiveness for our sins. To celebrate reconciliation is to take the gift and grace that Jesus offers and to share it by seeking ways to reconcile ourselves with others.

In the sacrament of reconciliation, we meet a God who is loving, faithful and forgiving. The invitation to reconciliation tells us that sin, fear, anxiety and guilt are things to be healed, not hidden. Finally, reconciliation challenges us to do to others what Jesus does to us by finding ways to bring forgiveness and healing to those around us.

Lent is a time to reform our lives. To celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation is to take this challenge seriously. May God's grace and peace be yours.