

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

God gives us a Second Chance...and a Third... and...

One of the most loving things that anyone can do for another is to give them a chance to do better. The Sacrament of Reconciliation does exactly that for us. God is very in touch with our human nature and, as such, understands that we may not always act in accord with His call to holiness for us. These acts that draw us away from holiness may come from error and negligence, or they may be acts of the will, but, whether they are mistakes or purposeful acts, they affect our relationship with both God and others. God has given us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to bring us back into right relationship (**reconcile** us) with both God and the community, the Body of Christ.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) tells us, "Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation."

[CCC 1440] As we look at these dual effects of both sin and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can come to understand that there is no such thing as a "private" sin – one that only affects the sinner's relationship with God. Let me use a quick analogy to illustrate. If a husband and wife act coolly to one another after an argument, the harm may extend beyond the spouses to the children, who also may be affected by this break (however temporary) in the relationship of the parents. While the children may not have been part of the argument itself, they can sense the tension between their parents and may even feel some insecurity in their home. In the same way, when someone sins "in private," her private sin has effects, of which she may not even be aware, on the community. Due to the dual effects of sin, we can also see one of the reasons that we are called to

confess our sins to God through a priest. Can't I just go directly to God? Yes, and truly, it is only God who forgives sins, but it is through the priest that we receive the dual reconciliation with both God and community.

Also, when we confess to a priest through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we receive the special grace that Jesus intended in establishing the Sacrament. "[Jesus] said to [the Apostles] again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." [John 20:21-23]

Finally, there is a psychological reason for our confessing our sins to another (a priest). "The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible." [CCC 1455]

I have heard many say that confession is "scary" or "humiliating." It's true that no one likes to admit where we've made mistakes, and it does require humility to do so. However, if we begin to see this Sacrament as the Sacrament of Love that Jesus intended when He instituted it, perhaps we can have a different view. In the title of this column, I said that "God Gives Us a Second Chance...and a Third...and," but we have to allow Him to do so, and that's the real reason we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation – to give God another chance to show His love for us and help us grow toward holiness!

Next week, we will continue our discussion of the Sacraments of Healing with the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

