



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Lent-Year C-March 10th 2019

***Readings: Deuteronomy 26: 4-10, Psalm 90, Romans 10: 8-13,
Luke 4: 1-13***

This is the last of the three sermons I promised you on the Sacrament of Reconciliation – Confession.

In the first one we looked at the spiritual pattern in the lives of great saints (Isaiah, Peter and Paul) that showed their recognition of their own sin and utter inadequacy was foundational to them throwing themselves absolutely on the mercy of God. From that point their ministry (and ours) can become fruitful.

In the second one I looked at the seven reasons/excuses why we try to avoid confession – that encounter with the truth and the liberating love and mercy of God.

Today I have two tasks. One is to remind ourselves of the spiritual dynamic of what happens in the Confessional and second, very important, how we prepare.

First then.....what is going on.

What we do in the Confessional, if it is not true, is a presumption bordering on madness. In order to celebrate this sacrament we must be utterly confident that the Scripture is true. God alone can forgive sins. In Christ's sacrifice God has broken the power of sin and death. In Christ's

commission to His disciples the power of that absolution has been given to His Church. The priest acts in persona Christi – as he does at the altar – and dispenses, with awe and reverence at so great a commission, the sublime mercy of God, the reconciliation of fallen man, the truly wonderful unspeakable generosity of God.

Together, in absolute confidence, two sinners –priest and penitent – come before the Mercy seat of God. The penitent pours out the grief and burdens that keep him from glory, the spectacular scarlet sins of youth and the grubby repetitive irritations and failures that make him less of a man than God intended. We encounter both the reality of the self and wait on the transforming love of God. Weary, mud stained pilgrims, we stumble towards the waters of healing. Prisoners of sin we wait embarrassed and hopeful hearing the key of liberation turning in the lock of the soul.

The priest, himself a sinner and a penitent, listens – one ear to the penitent, one ear to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Properly celebrated this sacrament brings us a unique, personal and immediate closeness to Jesus and a second by second openness to the Holy Spirit of God. The channels of prayer are fully open and the wires are humming. We confess what has wounded the heart of God, what has wounded others, what has wounded us. We are humiliated, in solidarity with the dust from which we came. But we are home – at the foot of the Cross, at the feet of the Risen Lord.

The priest, if he is doing his job, is praying throughout with you. He waits on the Ghostly Counsel of the Spirit and is given God's Word to speak to the penitent. Those words are the words of welcome from the Father to the prodigal. They are a celebration of our return. But they are also wisdom, counsel, battle plans for the spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged.

The penance is a gift of prayer – ideally something that resonates with the penitent's personal struggle but above all a glorious song of thanksgiving for God's love.

The absolution is the final and ultimate response to our contrition, our sorrow. Unconditional mercy and love – forgiveness – re-entry to the Presence, a foretaste of eternity.

I always end by saying to my fellow sinner: 'Go in peace and pray for me, a sinner.' Because that is the truth. We are in solidarity on the pilgrim road. When the priest sees a fellow penitent coming towards him, he does not recall

their sins – they have been left at the foot of the Cross and the priest has the gift of divine forgetfulness. Instead the priest feels an enormous sense of solidarity with a fellow pilgrim who is serious about the Faith and serving Jesus. The Sacrament of Liberation has been celebrated. We go on our way with joy and thanksgiving.

That is what happens in the Confessional. How we prepare for this will determine how nearly our experience conforms to this divine reality.

Preparation: Unless there is an emergency, a mortal sin – in which we get there without delay – proper preparation is the key to a good confession. When I know I am going to have the opportunity to seek the Sacrament I begin three days before. I invite the Holy Spirit of God to raise into my consciousness all the things that have offended God and Man, all that stands between me and the beautiful holiness of God. I sometimes use the check lists in the popular prayer books to jog the memory. And then I write them down. I make a list. This does several tasks. It avoids Freudian forgetfulness when I enter the box. I can't dodge anything. It is a proper encounter with the reality of who I am. It is embarrassing and humiliating. It wounds my pride – the very provoker of my sin (At the end of Mass this morning there will be a sheet

available, at the door, which is an excellent aid to preparation and takes us into the 'nitty gritty' of it. If it helps – fine. If it doesn't put it down. Remember all aids are just that – aids and not the thing itself. The thing itself is heart to heart with God- coming to the wonderful liberating mercy of Jesus' love)

Before I enter the box the divine work has begun. Being thorough is vital- for our own sense of liberation when it comes - but also for the confessor. He is there as a doctor of the soul. If you went to the doctor and said simply, 'I've not been too well lately.' How would he begin to prescribe?

Symptoms are the key to diagnosis and advice - and the roads to remedy. When we go to the doctor with a nasty leg ulcer he does not recoil in horror. He is thinking, 'Infection', 'Circulation', 'wound therapy'. So with the priest. He is thinking absolution, remedy, cure. Being specific is important. Also avoiding circumlocution is important. 'I am occasionally less than honest' is meaningless. 'I stole a mars bar from Londis. I robbed a bank. I lied about my neighbour and caused a lot of trouble.' These are different symptoms.

There are sins of commission and omission. Gossiping about someone can be a sort of theft – stealing their good name. Failing to witness when opportunity arises or avoiding the opportunity to do good are omissions. It is called self-examination because that is what we do. We accuse ourselves at the court of the judge of all. We do so as errant children seeking forgiveness, seeking the mercy of God, seeking the warm embrace of our loving Father, seeking the absolution won for us by the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

Fully confessed, Spirit counselled, divinely pardoned - we walk out of the box God embraced, utterly liberated, with thankful hearts to make our

joyful penance and rejoin the long pilgrimage to the Eternal Presence
marked by the stations of the Mass.

Jesus died for our sins. If we truly know this we would be regular seekers
of this amazing and costly mercy of His love.

See you there