

On the Sacrament of RECONCILIATION

The REALITY of SIN

1. anxiety of modern religious education and preaching: “nothing seems to be sin anymore”; “so much emphasis is placed on GOD’s love and forgiveness that the reality and gravity of sin is played down”.
2. If GOD is so loving and forgiving does it matter how we behave?
3. SIN does exist: it causes us to be estranged and alienated from GOD; they are the expressions of the state of one’s heart; it is basically the lack of love (Mt. 22:37-40): the refusal to love GOD and our neighbour.

A FORGIVING HEART

1. One of the most beautiful experiences we can have is that of being forgiven. FORGIVENESS is the reassurance that those we have offended still love us.
2. It does not have to mean that the past is forgotten or that the wrong we have done no longer matters. Our past sins are all part of the tapestry of who we are but forgiveness makes it possible for us to weave them all into this tapestry without fear so that we can be at peace again with ourselves, our fellow men and women, and our GOD. **That is the meaning of RECONCILIATION.**
3. The BIBLE assures us that GOD can and will forgive any sin because he never refuses his love to anyone [Isaiah 1:18; Hosea 11:1-4; Isaiah 49:15; Joel 2:13].

JESUS: A Sign of Forgiveness

His whole mission was to set people free from their sins so that they could enjoy the freedom of living as children of GOD [Mark 2:1-12; Luke 7:36-50].

These stories make the point that GOD takes delight in forgiving, and is always ready to extend a warm welcome to one who has strayed: The PRODIGAL SON.

The son cut himself from his father but the father never disowned him. Nor did the father impose any conditions on his son’s return.

The CHURCH: The Sacrament of CHRIST

1. The CHURCH is empowered by the SPIRIT to carry on the presence and saving activity of CHRIST especially through the SACRAMENTS.

2. Since **forgiveness** and **healing** were so dominant in the ministry of JESUS, it would be strange if the church did not make provision for a special sacrament which would continue his saving activity.
3. It is the Sacrament of PENANCE or RECONCILIATION which shows most clearly the continuation of CHRIST's spiritual healing and forgiveness.

The History of the SACRAMENT

1. There is evidence to show that JESUS intended that the Twelve should have the same authority to forgive sins as he had himself [Mt. 16:19; Mt. 18:18; John 20:22-23].
2. The church has, from its early years, worked on the principle that the original leaders of the Christian community passed on their authority to forgive sins to those who succeeded them.
3. Over the centuries, there has been a development in the way the church has celebrated this sacrament of forgiveness. In earlier times, formal forgiveness for sin [or: **absolution**] was reserved only for those who had committed very serious public sins like murder, adultery, apostasy. It was accompanied by a long period of public penance and could normally be received only once in a lifetime.
4. The early Christians took seriously the teaching of Saint Paul about becoming a "new creation" at baptism. It was expected that a baptized person had the grace to avoid serious sin, and because formal forgiveness of serious sin was restricted and involved serious penances, many converts to Christianity delayed their baptism until late in life. They feared falling into serious sin after baptism and the public penances which were imposed.
5. A change in the understanding of the sacrament came about in the 6th and 7th centuries: the Irish Monks developed the practice of forgiving sins in JESUS' name as part of a more frequent private confession which included less serious sins. It became available to anyone who requested it as often as seemed desirable.
6. Because the CHURCH is the Sacrament of Christ: it is, therefore, a RECONCILING Community. It emphasizes no longer the actions and attitudes of the penitent but the saving work of CHRIST who reconciles sinners to GOD and to the community.