

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

What is the Sacrament of reconciliation? How do we explain its' significance in today's culture?

We often describe the ritual of the sacrament to parents whose children are preparing for the sacrament of Reconciliation for the first time, but frequently deliver nothing of the true and fundamental spirit of reconciliation linking experience and the gifts of our faith in the sacraments.

First we need to consider the meaning of the word Reconciliation meaning reunion, restoring friendships, building relationships, bringing about peace between people. Then we have a basic foundation to build on!



We often confuse the purpose of the sacrament of reconciliation with the former understanding of it being about confession and doing penance. Confession is what we do as part of the sacrament and penance is both what we do and what we feel when we are confronted with our human frailty.



The Sacrament of Reconciliation is:

- a celebration of God's love for us,

God
❤️'s
Me!

- a celebration of the love-ability of each one,
- a celebration of the fact that we are a part of God and God is a part of us
- a celebration of the fact that God trusts us



- a celebration of the fact that we are directly connected with God and all other people through the bloodline of love.
- A celebration of God's belief in us

Every expression and experience of love is a sharing of God and an experience of God.



Jesus tells us in the Gospels that He came that we may have life and have it to the full.

In St John's Gospel He tells the disciples: Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (Jn. 14:27)

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

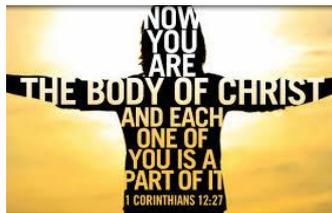
When we are in a personal, or family or community state of upset, uncertainty, distrust, hurt...we have no peace! Lack of peace leaves us feeling tired, useless, tense, worried, paranoid and in danger of making bad decisions. Lack of peace leaves us in bad relationships with others – with a disunion. It leaves us with a longing for peace, an 'at-homeness' with what is of God.

A true and deep sense of peace exists when we are reconciled with ourselves – accept ourselves as loveable, as good, as having a great purpose in life, of knowing that we are doing right by ourselves and others. When we are at peace with ourselves and others we sleep well at night, we are productive at home and work, we are able to have fun, we don't feel threatened by questions people ask us or by criticisms thrown at us. If we are at peace with ourselves, we are happy when we know we have truly done our best – we don't expect perfection – none of us are capable of that. Being at peace with ourselves is a good measure of how we are with other people!

We can only be at peace with ourselves if we are also at peace with one another. Offering forgiveness to other people is not just a selfless sacrifice on our part, it is a way of letting go of burdens, anger and resentments that are heavy and needless.



If we have not done right by another person we might be left with anxiety about what might happen, anger with the person we might blame for our situation, frustration with systems, paranoia and a belief that people are out to get us in some way, exhaustion because we are using our energies in a way that is to no persons best interest. We are connected with one another by nature of the fact that we are all part of Christ's Body with love as the connective tissue, the blood in our veins....



Selfishness is the opposite to love. Selfishness keeps God out of our relationships and lives. Selfishness squeezes the life out of us. Only love, only God can fill our deepest human need. God made us and wants the best for us; God gave us the gift of free will so that we may share in God's creative power – in giving us free will, God allows us the same freedom to destroy! God never destroys, but we often do! When people say: how could God allow such a thing to happen?-it's a fair question, but the answer lies in the choices we make, as God only ever chooses creation and love.

choose love.

What examples of reconciliation do we find in the Bible?

The Good Shepherd provides us with the image of God as all-embracing and unconditionally loving of each one eagerly drawing everyone into the warmth and protection of the fold.

The parable of the Prodigal Son in which forgiveness is available to the prodigal son and also to the disgruntled son who 'did all the right things'.



Jesus encounter with Zacchaeus who sought forgiveness and found that Jesus chose to share his company and home.



The account of the good thief on the cross who through his acknowledgment of Jesus as God became one with Him in the kingdom.

Jesus' healing of the soldier whose ear Peter's off: Jesus reprimands Peter, not the soldier who was one of those leading Him to the cross!



Why do children receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the age of seven/eight years?

Children are understood to reach the age of reason at seven – eight years. Young children have known the difference between right and wrong since very early years, but are not ready to understand why something is right or wrong and to judge their own actions until the age of seven/eight. Children, from this stage onwards, are able to develop a capacity to change their behaviour so that they may become the best person as God made them.

It is only possible to change something if one knows what behaviour or attitude it is that needs to change.

In making the act of confession to another person and to God we name what it is that is causing us to be less loving and then set about making a change so that we become more loving.

We talk about penance – have you ever tried to lose weight, or to cut back on alcohol use, or smoking – it is not easy – we have to break a pattern when it is comforting at the time, but causing us and others long term harm. In addition it is well acknowledged that one needs to name and own the addiction before change can occur.

When we approach the sacrament of reconciliation we need to name what we are doing that is wrong so that it is before us as something that we are going to try to change. In naming our selfishness – we are also making a commitment to another person that we are going to change.

Why confess to a priest and not just do it in the quiet of our hearts?



When we sin / are selfish it affects a lot of people around us. Any time we have an argument it has a big ripple effect on friends, family and those with whom we work. Selfishness of an individual or bad behaviour always has an effect on a lot of other people, as does love. Therefore, it is necessary to confess to those whom we have affected – we do that through the priest who represents both God and the community. It is not the priest's job to judge, but to mediate the gift of healing and forgiveness so that peace with ourselves and others may be restored. The priest may offer some consolation or pastoral advice if it is appropriate or helpful, but he's not going to be tut-tutting – if God does not judge those who confess, no one else had the right to do so either.

Reconciliation is a healing sacrament. It is a gift and source of healing.

What can you do to help children prepare now?

Encourage children to reflect on how they show love, receive love or fail to love.

Know how to acknowledge wrong doings and selfishness and to apologise.

Affirm expressions and efforts of love.

Provide children with the example of good relationships.

Read the Sunday Gospel and consider how to follow Jesus' example more closely.

Love them – so that they know how important love is and God is.