

GOD'S LOVE FOR US
(Conclusion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation)
2/28/06 Topic of Discussion
Presented by Monsignor Fimiani

Opening Prayer – (Msgr. Used the words of absolution given at the end of the Sacrament of Reconciliation)

The session started with a tour of the church highlighting the location of the confessionals of the past and comparing them with the modern reconciliation room. The old confessionals at St. Michael have been converted into shrines. These are dedicated to St. Michael, St. Gabriel, the Sacred Heart and one to the theme of the season. Msgr. gave a graphic description of what the confessionals used to look like and how the faithful used them. These were then contrasted with the two present reconciliation rooms in the vestibule of the church which are less intimidating, and well lit. The soundproof glass doors that we see at St. Michaels are to ensure privacy while maintaining a sense of openness, for both the protection of the priest and the layperson. Penitents have a choice of traditional confession behind the screen or face to face. The latter mode is encouraged to give a person access to the priest as a counselor while he is still in the person of Jesus. This makes the confession more meaningful than merely a recitation of the “list” of sins. The opportunity to go beyond what you did into why you did it provides a greater motivation for change.

The ministry of the priest in the forgiveness of sins was instituted by Jesus himself. The apostles were commissioned with his words: “Whose sins you shall forgive shall be forgiven and whose sins you shall retain shall be retained.” The concept of forgiveness was important to Christ. The story of the prodigal son and the account of the “good thief” are examples.

As discussed during the last session, in the early church confession was a one time event. As the faithful befriended the monks the sacrament evolved from people seeking direction in dealing with their daily lives and the problems they encountered to listing their sins. Thus confession became more frequent. However there was inadequate formation of the clergy to deal with the penitents, the complexity of their lives, their offenses and to provide appropriate counseling. Until recently, the “listing of sins” and their frequency was the only way one approached the sacrament. Early on, the clergy would match the sins with the appropriate penance, and the faithful returned frequently to “list their sins” and “receive penance.” The need for clergy reform and training was an important task. This was finally accomplished in the past 15 to 20 years. The present focus of the Sacrament of Reconciliation goes beyond the “list” to seeking counsel for the motivation and reason for why one sins. While it might lessen the frequency of merely reciting sins, the benefit of such a confession will promote greater understanding and awareness of the need to change ones sinful habits.

Msgr. Fimiani offered to assist and direct anyone present to prepare for reconciliation. He provided a bifold "Examination of Conscience." The examination is divided into three categories: 1) How is my relationship with God? 2) How is my relationship with others? 3) How is my relationship with all of God's creatures. A good examination of conscience is based on the Ten Commandments and how I failed to keep them. In preparation for the sacrament Msgr. encouraged those present to go beyond merely looking at their sins to recognizing why you keep committing them and the effect they have on those around you. We must examine our motivations and the state of our hearts. "To whom much is given, much is expected." With these words Jesus is stressing the importance of how our sins relate to our roles in life; the higher the calling the greater the responsibility. For example, a young man drunk at a bar will not cause as much scandal as a drunken priest. We are encouraged to seek counsel from the priest in the confessional or reconciliation room, to be encouraged by the reassuring words expressed by him and most importantly to hear the words of Jesus himself: "I absolve you of all your sins." Even though there have been no earth-shattering sins committed you can still avail yourself of the reconciliation room to lift your spirits by the words of reassurance and comfort given by the priest. An important element of a good confession is the firm resolves not to repeat those sins, and even though we might fall again, the intention not to must be sincere.

There was a discussion about what actually constitutes sin, and questions arose regarding personal responsibility. It included sins of thought, word and deed. Anger was discussed and while the gospel says "Be angry but sin not" distinction was made between the emotion of anger as opposed to negative acting out behavior. Similarly a fleeting impure thought was contrasted with entertaining and enjoying it which then may result in immoral action. Msgr. explained that while there are those who engage in antisocial and often brutal behavior, they may not actually be committing sin because of the lack of those elements that make them sin such as full knowledge and consent. For instance, some may be criminally insane or pathologically they have no moral awareness.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes the "Gravity of Sin : Mortal and Venial. 1854 - Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture, became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience."

1855 – *Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. *Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.

1857 – For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met "Mortal sin is a sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."

1860 – Unintentional ignorance can diminish or even remove the imputability of a grave offense. But no one is deemed to be ignorant of the principles of the moral law, which are written in the conscience of every man. The promptings of feelings and passions can also diminish the voluntary and free character of the offense, as can external pressures or pathological disorders. Sin committed through malice, by deliberate choice of evil, is the gravest.

In biblical times there was an erroneous concept of sin. People believed that sickness, especially leprosy, was a consequence of sin. Jesus, in his teachings, corrected that misconception and offered the incomprehensible act of God's forgiveness. This was very difficult for the people of that time to understand, precisely because it was so hard for them to forgive each other. We must try to get more intimate with God. We must find time to dialogue with him. Becoming closer to the Holy Spirit, the second person of the Holy Trinity, brings us to a deeper awareness of our sinfulness and need for conversion. This is a daily task.

The unconditional love of God is described all throughout the Old and New Testaments along with his rejoicing over a penitent. Visuals of "The Sea of God's forgetfulness" where he puts our confessed sins, being carved in the palm of his hand, the shepherd going after one lost sheep and the rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner all remind us of the love of God poured out on us in spite of the fact that we reject him. Confession of our sins and turning away from them gives us an opportunity to make a U-turn in our lives back to the source of our very existence. The readings from last Sunday give us an image of God, his constant forgiveness and mercy and they encourage us to seek the graces available in the sacraments.

Msgr. Concluded with a prayer and an announcement that there would be a tour of the church on Sunday, 26th of March.

Submitted by:
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