

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA Penance and Reconciliation

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, . . . Jesus came and stood among [the disciples] and said, "Peace be with you. . . . As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sin of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:19, 21b-23)

Insight

When have you reconciled with a friend or family member? What was that like?

John and Anthony decided to meet at the corner bakery. It was neutral territory. The break between the two brothers occurred over the family business. Anthony wasn't up to speed, or at least that is what John thought. The argument became public, spoiling the atmosphere at work. Anthony was eventually forced out.

The brothers hadn't spoken to or seen each other for years. Then John visited his doctor. His cough was more than a cold; it was an indication of lung cancer. He needed to call Anthony. Those first words on the phone were the hardest for John. He admitted that his bullshiness helped tip their relationship over the edge.

John got up from the booth as Anthony walked through the front door of the bakery, and the brothers embraced. The talking got easier, the burden got lighter. John and Anthony knew that what they said to each other here was going to have an effect on the whole family.

For Reflection . . .

The new life we are given in Christ through Baptism does not abolish our frailties and weaknesses. Reconciling with God cannot be separated from reconciling with the Church.

What are your worst tendencies that harm yourself or others?

How has your mending a broken relationship with an individual rippled outward to positively affect others?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1422–1498

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 234–245

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 296–311

Church Teaching

Conversion

Jesus calls us to change for the better by renouncing evil, turning away from sin, and embracing the Gospel way of life. Our response to his call entails a lifelong process helped and made possible by God's grace. Divine assistance first produces in us a heart disposed to walk the path of penance, renewal, and continual conversion.

Baptism is the first and fundamental place where conversion occurs. But conversion continues throughout a believer's life, even after Baptism. All of us commit grave sin. Therefore Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for all who fall from grace by sinning after Baptism.

Celebrating God's Forgiveness

Four interrelated actions by the penitent constitute a person's proper celebration of the sacrament. They are

- *Examination of conscience:* preparation by using passages from Sacred Scripture, especially the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, or other reflections of conscience
- *Expression of contrition or sorrow:* described as perfect when motivated by the love of God and imperfect if it rests on other motivations to cease sinning
- *Confession:* telling one's sins to the priest, including all that are serious (mortal sins)
- *Satisfaction:* acts of penance given by the confessor and agreed to by the penitent to repair the damages of sin

All confessors are bound without exception to maintain absolute secrecy about the sins revealed in confession. They cannot speak about the sins or about the penitent to anyone, ever.