

Day 151 – Tuesday, August 18

The Sacrament of Reconciliation... Hmm, just what do these ‘big’ words actually mean? Let’s take this time to unpack their meaning.

“Reconciliation”

Now, “Reconciliation.” Remember Baptism? In that sacrament, we were invited by God to share in His divine life – to be called his sons and daughters. In the same sacrament, we acknowledged such a generous invitation by accepting God to be our Father. In baptism, we begin to live as members of God’s family. As sons and daughters of God, we are called to become like God, holy (Leviticus 11:45) and perfect (Matthew 5:48).

To be holy and perfect is a tall invitation but by God’s grace, it is possible to be holy and perfect – the reason why we recognize countless saints in the church. There are times, however, when we give in to temptation and end up committing sin – which is *an offense against God because sin disrupts our relationship with God* (Rite of Penance). But God’s love and mercy is for the sinner (Luke 5:32). God unceasingly calls us, not to condemn but to save, through

repentance – to humbly and honestly recognize our sins and failures;

contrition – to be really sorry for hurting God and others because of our sins,

penance – to concretely show in our thoughts, words and actions our ‘yes’ to God and our ‘no’ to evil. In this sacrament, we receive

absolution – our sins are forgiven by God through Jesus in the ministry of the priest, and therefore, we are once more reconciled with God and one another, the Church.

Before I (the author not Fr. Jim) studied and prepared for the priesthood, I myself did not frequently receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Back then, I merely found myself burdened by my repetitive confession of the same sins. I was wondering if God was really forgiving me. But in the seminary, as we were encouraged to receive the Sacrament at least once a month, I experienced a radical transformation!

As I brought my sins to my confessor, I also encountered God’s love and mercy. And the more I brought my sins to the confessional, all the more that God allowed me to experience His love and mercy. **I would even say that God overwhelmed me with His love and mercy.** And this very experience of God’s love and mercy enabled me to develop a real hatred for sin (contrition), to the point of being sick to my stomach on account of my sins. That God kept welcoming me, a penitent sinner, with His love and mercy provided me with so much encouragement that I began to deliberately choose to live the goodness of God in my life.

Through the sacrament, God was allowing me to experience His love and mercy so that I may really learn how to be loving and merciful. The grace of the sacrament has not only allowed for my sins to be forgiven (absolution in the confessional) but has also been at work in the gradual transformation of my life (my way of living outside the confessional).

In the light of eternity, we’re here for a very short time, really. We’re here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein