Sacrament of Healing (Confession) to Prepare for the Eucharist

2023-02-09 — Fr. Ebuka Mbanude

Father Ebuka began his talk by telling us the story of David in his own words (2 Samuel, Chapters 11 & 12). This is the David whom God had blessed with so much success, who had followed his passions in the early days of his kingdom. David sinned by having relations with the married Bathsheba, and then sinned again to cover his original sin by having her husband Uriah killed in battle after. It is a story of passion, deception, adultery, murder. The prophet Nathan helped David understand what he had done by telling him a story of his own. David is outraged at the villain in the story only to have Nathan tell him that the villain is David. The recognition of his own sin in Nathan's story leads David to great remorse, and this recognition changed him. David came to understand that he not only sinned against God, but himself as well, his office as king, his wives, Bathsheba, and Uriah. David humbled himself and asked for forgiveness right then and there.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) has much to say about the sacrament of reconciliation (CCC 1422-1498): "Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon form God's mercy for the offense committed against Him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins, and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion" (CCC 1422). The Church is wounded by our sins, just like David's kingdom was wounded by his sin. Part of the mission of the Church is to labor for our conversion, to bring the children of God to conversion, to right relationship with God. Right from the beginning, both John the Baptist and Jesus would convey a message of reconciliation, a message of conversion - "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand." For us who believe in Christ, it is a return to Christ, an interior conversion, and without this conversion, all our activities in and around the Church will not be complete. In his walk with God, God wanted more for David then just repentance for his sin; He wanted a conversion, a change of heart to the depth of his being that impacted all of his actions for himself and for the kingdom.

In order to go deeper into the sacrament of reconciliation, we have to understand two things - first, the idea of sin, and second, the idea of God's mercy, God's love.

SIN

Father took us back to Genesis Chapter 3, and the story of Adam and Eve. Everything is given to them in the garden of Eden, except they are not to eat from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But the serpent came and tricked them, reframing God's words — "Did God really say..." "You will not die...Your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." (Genesis 3:1-5). While originally Adam and Eve were blind to sin, once they opened the door to sin by disobeying God, they lost the innocence God gave them. In trying to be like God, they became less human: fallen, broken human, no longer blind to sin. And we are still dealing with the consequences of that act today. At the root of their act of sinfulness was a lack of understanding of God's Love. The command to not eat of the tree was a sign of God's Love — He gave them everything, but also a command not to eat of the one tree. The devil convinced them that God was deceiving them. God comes looking for them in their new sinful state.

Our sin is never just personal, but is also universal as it has a wider effect that we may not even know or understand. Like in the story of David, others are impacted. Essentially, we sin against ourselves and God and the Church. God came searching for Adam and Eve, and so He comes searching for us too.

GOD'S MERCY & HIS LOVE

We find God's Mercy and His Love in the sacrament of reconciliation. At confession, we not only recognize our sinfulness, but also that God is waiting and looking for us. God's Love is waiting for us, and once we come to that recognition, it moves our hearts to repent.

Father Ebuka said here are many enemies of confession, and proceeded to mentioned three of them:

- **PRIDE**: The inability to recognize our own sinfulness. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John1:8-9). For God, being a “good” person is not what He asks of us. Rather, He asks us to be a "holy" person, which involved a deep self-examination of our sinfulness.

- **PRESUMPTION**: Taking God's Love for granted. If we know God is going to forgive us, we might as well just go ahead and do whatever we please. While there is some truth to this attitude because of God's mercy, in reality, it is a rejection of God's Love. The Book of Proverbs cautions us against presuming in several instances.

- **SHAME & GUILT**: Shame can prevent us from seeing the possibility of God's mercy, and guilt can hold us back from receiving God's mercy, sometimes even for years, even for sins already confessed. Healthy guilt leads to contrition, but a “prolonged” guilt becomes a weapon for the enemy to cause us to doubt the Love of God.

CONFESSION IN SCRIPTURE

There are many scriptural references to confession, and the necessity for confession. Prophets Nehemiah and Daniel in their prayers made great confessions. Daniel's prayer of confession (Daniel 9:3-19) as he prays for the people of Israel begins with an acknowledgement of God's Love, then of the sins committed, and concludes with a request for forgiveness. And God responds with His Mercy.

The priest of the Old Testament always sacrificed two animals on the Day of Atonement, one for himself, and one for the people. In contrast, Christ’s sacrifice, which is of infinite value and in perfect obedience, was once and for all, for everyone, and satisfies everything.

WHY DO WE GO TO CONFESSION?

- Jesus teaches us in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our sins…"
- We restore broken relationships created by our sins
- So we can embrace the Love of God so radically shown to us on the cross. God can restore us back to Himself through the death & resurrection of His Son. We are created in Love to be in communion with God, and God will do everything possible to restore that relationship. God's Love is both merciful and just. We must include justice in God's Love. Sometimes He can deny us a blessing because of our sin, until we repent and seek His Mercy.
- The Church tells us to go to confession!

OUR ROLE IN THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

- Go to confession at least once a month. If need be, confess same sin over and over, don't invent new ones! Keep going; conversion can happen slowly. The Lord will slowly purify the heart, and turn it around in a way that pleases Him.
- Need for contrition when going to confession — a deep sorrow that springs from our Love of God.
- Importance of confession in person — needs to happen face to face, not a note under a door to a priest!
- Penance is the satisfaction for what we have done wrong. Repair what was done wrong — apologize and restore relationship.

God is always seeking us, that is why He gave us this Sacrament. And when we come to Confession, we will find Him!