

## I. The Ministry of Reconciliation in the History of Salvation

1. The father has shown his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ, making peace by the Blood of his Cross, with all things whether on earth or in heaven. The Son of God made man, dwelt among us so that he might free us from slavery to sin and call us out of darkness into his marvelous light. He, therefore, began his work on the earth by preaching repentance and saying: “repent, and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15).

This invitation to repentance, which had often been preached by prophets, prepared our hearts for the coming of the Kingdom of God through the voice of John the Baptist, who came “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (MK 1:4).

Jesus, however, not only exhorted people to repent so as to leave their sins behind and turn to the Lord with all their heart, but he also welcomed sinners and reconciled them with the Father. In addition, he healed the sick, thus giving a sign of his power to forgive sins. Finally, he himself died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Furthermore, on the night he was betrayed, beginning his saving Passion, he instituted the Sacrifice of the New Covenant in his Blood for the forgiveness of sins. After his resurrection, he sent the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, that they might have power to forgive sins or retain them and might receive the office of preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations in his name.

To Peter the Lord had said: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19). Obedient to the command of the Lord, on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the forgiveness of sins through Baptism: “Repent ... and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Since then, the Church has never failed to call people from sin to conversion, and to reveal the victory of Christ over sin through the celebration of Penance.

2. This victory over sin first shows itself in Baptism, in which the old self is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin may be destroyed and that we should no longer be slaves to sin but, rising again with Christ, we should henceforth live for God. For this reason, the Church confesses her faith in ‘one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.’

In the Sacrifice of the Mass, the Passion of Christ is made present and the body handed over for us and the blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins are again offered to God by the Church for the salvation of the whole world. For in the Eucharist Christ is present and is offered as the “Sacrifice of our reconciliation,” so that we, through his Holy Spirit, “may be gathered into one.”

But in addition, our Savior Jesus Christ, when he conferred on his Apostles and on their successors the power to forgive sins, instituted the Sacrament of Penance in his Church, so that the faithful who had fallen into sin after their first bath of regeneration might be renewed in grace and reconciled to God. For the Church “has both water and tears: the water of Baptism, the tears of Penance.”

## II. **The Reconciliation of Penitents in the Life of the Church**

*The Church is Holy both, at the Same Time, Always in Need of Purification*

3. Christ “loved the Church and handed himself over for her, that she might be made holy” (Eph 5:25-26) and united her to himself as a bride; he fills her, who is his Body and fullness, with his divine gifts and through her spreads truth and grace to all.

The members of the Church, however, are exposed to temptation and unfortunately often fall into sin. Because of this, “while Christ, ‘holy, innocent, and undefiled’ (Heb 7:26), knew nothing of sin but came to expiate only the sins of the people, the Church, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, embracing in her bosom sinners, always follows the way of penance and renewal.

*Penance in the Life and Liturgy of the Church*

4. In many and various ways the People of God performs and perfects this continual repentance. For the Church, sharing in the sufferings of Christ through her own patient endurance, performing works of mercy and charity, conforming herself daily more and more to the Gospel of Christ, becomes a sign in the world of conversion to God. She expresses this in her life and celebrates it in her liturgy, while the faithful confess themselves to be sinners and implore the forgiveness of God and of their brothers and sisters, as happens in penitential services, in the proclamation of the word of God, in prayer, in the penitential elements of the Eucharistic Celebrations.

In the Sacrament of Penance, the faithful truly “obtain pardon from the mercy of God for the offense committed against him and are at the same time reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion.”

*Reconciliation with God and with the Church*

5. Because sin is an offense committed against God, which disrupts our friendship with him, repentance “ultimately implies that we should love God and entrust ourselves completely to him.” The sinner, therefore, who by the grace of a merciful God, enters on the way of repentance, returns to the Father who “loved us first” (1 Jn 4:19), to Christ who has given himself up for us, and to the Holy Spirit who has been poured out upon us in abundance.

But “there reigns among people, by the hidden and benign mystery of the divine will, a supernatural solidarity whereby the sin of one harms the others just as the holiness of one also benefits the others,” and so repentance always carries with it reconciliation with one’s brothers and sisters, to whom sin always causes harm.

In fact, often when people commit deeds of injustice, they act together, in the same way, when they repent they help one another, so that freed from sin by the grace of Christ, they may work together with all people of good will for justice and peace in the world.