

Celebrating Reconciliation

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Imagine a high school graduating class. The students have worked together during the last four years, doing their best, studying hard, and encouraging one another. Throughout their senior year, they look forward eagerly to graduation day. Then imagine school officials telling them in their final week that everyone has passed, and there is no need for a graduation ceremony. There will be no diplomas, no caps and gowns, no pictures, and no *Pomp and Circumstance*. The reaction would be uproar. Students and patrons would be angry, because there is a need to ritualize graduation. People need ritual for most of life's important events.

Reconciliation ritualizes forgiveness. It celebrates the liberation that Christ Jesus won for all on the cross. It is also the way for individuals to experience God's mercy.

Celebrating this ritual well takes effort and preparation. Reconciliation is a liturgical action, with prayers from a priest presider, dialogue and responses from the penitent, and a formula Trinitarian prayer. The penitent neither is passive nor simply receptive. The individual is required to actively give an account of remorseful actions. This can be the most difficult part of the ritual. By voicing sins, the penitent takes ownership of unloving, unjust, and sinful ways. In most other situations, admitting fault results in punishment. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, admitting fault is the doorway to God's transformative grace.

A fruitful reconciliation first entails a good examination of conscience. This is perhaps where most of the penitent's work should be done. Many struggle because of an unfamiliarity with sin. It is easy to grow comfortable with sin. Spend time with a good examination, or compile your own from a collection of others.

Penance should not be confused with punishment. Rather, it serves as the strengthening force to a deeper communion with Christ. It fosters a virtue that helps stave off destructive behaviors.

Knowing what you want and what the sacrament offers can minimize disappointment. The sacrament of Reconciliation is not intended to be spiritual direction or counseling. Either of these in conjunction with reconciliation can be very life-giving. The sacrament itself is a ritual liturgical action. It brings to life the biblical realities of healing and forgiveness. Reconciliation restores the soul broken by sin, and renews us as the forgiven, redeemed children of God.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Describe the best sacramental reconciliation experience.
- What social sins affect you today?

HOME ACTIVITIES

Create an examination of conscience from a variety of resources for all to consider.

Practice examining your conscience nightly. Take time to evaluate the day, calling to mind the regrets and unloving actions, as well as the joys and grateful moments. R

SCRIPTURE CORNER

Luke 15:8–10

Luke 15:11–32

Why might there be rejoicing in heaven over one who repents?

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