

A Merciful God Awaits Sinners

Kathy Kuczka

Long ago while participating in Cursillo, Sr. Margaret McAnoy, IHM, said, “When you die, God is going to ask you about your life. God is going to ask, ‘Did you enjoy it?’” Not only did this question surprise and delight me, but it changed my perspective toward how God responds to his creation. I went from viewing the Lord as a critical, demanding judge to a being who enthusiastically cheers us on. Sr. Margaret’s words came back to me during a recent experience of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Confessing my sins has never been easy or comfortable. It has meant putting away my pride, lowering my defenses, and baring my soul enough to acknowledge my weaknesses. When I thought of Sr. Margaret’s words, I realized that no matter how far I wander from God, or no matter how broken I am, God waits, patiently and mercifully. God longs for us to live with joy.

This is the joy celebrated in the sacrament of reconciliation. It is the joy of returning to God, who has been waiting for us with open arms. The anguish and the joy of confession can be found in Psalm 32. There, the psalmist discovers the freedom of confession after first resisting it. When he can no longer keep silent, he confesses his sins and, in turn, finds in the Lord shelter, freedom from distress, and deliverance. So overwhelmed is he by God’s grace, he shares his good news with others. The psalmist proclaims: “Mercy surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD. / Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; / exult, all you upright of heart.” Praying Psalm 32, or any of the other penitential psalms (6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143), is helpful in preparing for confession.

For an examination of conscience, a number of resources are available, but consideration should be given to using the Scriptures, particularly the Gospel accounts of Jesus encountering the woman at the well (John 4:5–42), the man born blind (John 9:1–41), and the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–45). Each of these Gospels focuses on themes of God’s mercy and deliverance and bids us to look deeply into our lives. Reading the story of the man born blind, for example, may bring questions such as, “Where have I been blind to God’s love?” or “What areas of my life are in need of God’s light?”

Another simple way to prepare for confession is to pray the Lord’s Prayer daily. This prayer’s plea to forgive and to be forgiven calls for continual conversion and encourages a consistent trust in God’s mercy.

In addition to weekly individual confessions, most parishes celebrate the Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents



Preparation for confession can include reading the Scriptures such as John’s account of the man born blind. Such reading gives us awareness of blind spots in our lives.

with Individual Confession and Absolution during Advent and Lent. During this liturgy, the community prays together before and after individual confession. This rite more accurately articulates our belief that both sin and forgiveness are social, not just individual. That is to say, everything we do or fail to do affects somebody else.

Following confessions, one may wish to bless oneself with holy water from the font (when holy water is available) as a reminder that reconciliation is a renewal of our baptism. Then, like the psalmist, those who have been reconciled are called to be vessels of reconciliation for others as Paul reminds us in the Second Letter to the Corinthians:

And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Let us pray for the courage to approach the sacrament of reconciliation with the assurance that God is encouraging us and ready to ask of our experience, “Did you enjoy it?”