



Union with Christ Step 1

Sin, Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The gifts of the Sacrament (Emeritus Bishop Kevin Manning, Diocese of Paramatta, 2014)

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a wonderful reflection on the Sacrament of Penance. When the young prodigal wakes up to himself, he leaves his sins behind, and goes to his father confessing: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.' The father welcomed him with open arms and a great celebration followed. This scene reflects beautifully the return of the sinner to God and the welcoming forgiveness which awaits.

The Sacrament of Penance is a natural outcome of the overwhelming mercy of God, for it enables us to encounter the mercy of God dispensed through the ministry of a priest as communicated by Jesus Himself: *'Receive the Holy Spirit. For whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain they are retained.'* (Jn. 20:22-23) We must be aware of the need for conversion, to awaken our consciousness of sin. Over time we must develop an understanding which includes the social dimensions of sin, along with the realisation, of St Paul, that *'however great the number of sins committed, grace is even greater'* (Rom. 5:21).

The Holy Spirit who brings sin to light is also the Consoler, he one who disposes the human heart to be open to the grace of repentance and conversion. We cannot turn our world around on our own strength, we need Christian hope to help us desire the Kingdom of God and eternal life. This we do by *'placing our trust in Christ's promises, not in our own strength but in the help and the grace of the Holy Spirit.'* (CCC 18:17)

An incisive way to prepare for a good Confession is to remember that the Holy Spirit came to confront the world of sin, to confront, but not condemn. When the Holy Spirit confronts us with our sin, we cannot but feel ashamed of what we have done, but, at the same time, we feel so loved by God that we desire God's mercy immediately.

So, I encourage you to call sin for what it really is. Take ownership for your actions as they really are. No matter if it has been ten, twenty or even forty years don't be afraid to make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation / Confession for you are going to meet One who has waited lovingly for you to come to experience his mercy.