

Thinking about Reconciliation

a reader for priests and people

This series offers an oversight of reconciliation in the liturgical life of the Church. It offers individuals a broader perspective on reconciliation than is provided in other Liturgy Office resources which are specific to the Rite of Penance itself. The text includes extensive quotations from the Rite of Penance and other Church documents, and series of questions to encourage personal engagement with the material.

The parts of Thinking about Reconciliation are listed below. They can be downloaded from the Liturgy Office website: www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources.

Part One: *The Mystery of Reconciliation in the History of Salvation*

Part Two: *The Mystery of Reconciliation in the Sacraments*

Part Three: *The Church, the sinner and society*

Part Four: *The Rite of Penance*

Part Five: *Preparing for and celebrating the Rite of Penance*

Appendix A:

Two sets of additional questions. The first is intended for those who wish to review current parish and/or deanery practice in the light of the Rite, and the second for those who wish to reflect on *Thinking about Reconciliation* as a group.

Acknowledgements

Excerpts from the *Rite of Penance* © 1974, 1975; *Roman Missal* © 1973; *RCLA* © 1985; *Pastoral Care of the Sick* © 1982; *Order of Christian Funerals* © 1989, 1985; International Commission on English in the Liturgy Inc., all rights reserved. Used with permission. *Thinking about Reconciliation* © 2004 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales.

This document may be freely copied for study purposes. It was prepared as part of a series of resources supporting the *Rite of Penance* by Liturgy Office 39 Eccleston Square London SW1V 1PL www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources

Thinking about

Reconciliation

a reader for priests and people

Part One

The Mystery of Reconciliation in the History of Salvation

God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The Prayer of Absolution. (*Rite of Penance*, 48)

The Sacrament of Penance is about much more than simply the forgiveness of a person's sins. It is about God the Father of mercies seeking to draw that person more deeply into the community of love that is the Church, united with Jesus. It is about our personal story of salvation from sin, an episode in the whole history of salvation.

The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ and by making peace for all things on earth and in heaven by the blood of Christ on the cross. The Son of God made man lived among men in order to free them from the slavery of sin and to call them out of darkness into his wonderful light. He therefore began his work on earth by preaching repentance and saying: 'Turn away from sin and believe the good news' (Mark 1 :15).

This invitation to repentance, which had often been sounded by the prophets, prepared the hearts of men 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' (Mark 1 :4).

Jesus, however, not only exhorted men to repentance so that they should abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord, but he also welcomed sinners and reconciled them with the Father. Moreover, by healing the sick he signified his power to forgive sin. Finally, he himself died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Therefore, on the night he was betrayed and began 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 upon the apostles, empowering them to forgive or retain sins and sending them forth to all peoples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name.

The Lord said to Peter, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed also in heaven' (Matthew 16:19). In obedience to this command, on the day of Pentecost Peter preached the forgiveness of sins by baptism: 'Repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2: 38). Since then the Church has never failed to call men from sin to conversion and by the celebration of penance to show the victory of Christ over sin.

RP1

Our salvation in Christ was won by the saving mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. We first participate in that salvation through the sacrament of Baptism. The work of our redemption is made a present reality again and again each time we participate in the liturgy, and especially when we take part in the celebration of the Mass. (cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium 2). The Eucharist is a sacrament for the forgiveness of sin, for venial sin, and our participation in the Eucharist helps protect us from sin.

In the sacrifice of the Mass the passion of Christ is made present; his body given for us and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins are offered to God again by the Church for the salvation of the world. In the Eucharist Christ is present and is offered as 'the sacrifice which

has made our peace' with God and in order that 'we may be brought together in unity' by his Holy Spirit.

RP 2

When we have committed serious sin, or when we feel the need for additional assistance in overcoming even venial sin, there is need for something more. It is then that we have recourse to the sacrament of Penance.

Furthermore our Saviour Jesus Christ, when he gave to his apostles and their successors power to forgive sins, instituted in his Church the sacrament of penance. Thus the faithful who fall into sin after baptism may be reconciled with God and renewed in grace. The Church 'possesses both water and tears: the water of baptism, the tears of penance'.

RP2

Those who by grave sin have withdrawn from the communion of love with God are called back in the sacrament of penance to the life they have lost. And those who through daily weakness fall into venial sins draw strength from a repeated celebration of penance to gain the full freedom of the children of God.

RP7

Questions

1. What stories of God's saving love have made the strongest impact on you? Stories from the scriptures? Stories from the history of the Church?
2. How has your understanding of God's love and forgiveness developed over the years? Are you able to pin-point any particular times when your understanding changed?