

4 – Reconciliation

Aim: To unpack the sacrament of Reconciliation as a sacrament of Healing



A Summary of the last session & Introduction (Aseel)

SLIDE

We looked at the four “P’s” of sin: pollution; power; penalty and partition.

On the cross, it was as if all of sin was drawn out and met Jesus on the cross and it overwhelmed him. Jesus truly died. But it didn’t end there, Jesus defeated death and rose bodily.

Resurrection affirms this life and the next as a seamless reality. It affirms our humanity, our bodies right now. It gives us new hope. Jesus went to the place of the dead, but after he rose into a new body. That is what is promised to us as well.

What does that mean for us? Every good deed, word and thought is now in service for building up the kingdom of God. Life now is about healing, restoring, and affirming. Death, darkness and bullies have no place in this world.

Do you remember the story of Peter denying Jesus three times? The authorities had seized Jesus. Peter had been following at a distance. He was quickly recognised but he denied knowing Jesus three times and the cock crew.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples for the last time, after his resurrection, he took Peter aside. In Gospel of John we hear how Jesus asked Peter one question three times: “Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?” Jesus was restoring Peter. This mirrors the three times Peter denied Jesus before his death. Not only had Jesus forgiven Peter, but Jesus was restoring or building Peter back up.

For most of us, loving ourselves in a healthy way is an underdeveloped skill and spiritual practice. We train in loving God through worship and prayer, and we train in loving our neighbours through service and fellowship. However, when it comes to loving ourselves, it can feel like we do not have many practices on which to draw. Except we do. The Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Apart from our relationship with God, our relationship with ourselves is the most important relationship we will have in this life, and our relationship with ourselves is informed by God’s love for us.

All we want as parents is the best for our children. We want them to have good friendships, to do well at school but most of all we want our children to be happy – to feel loved and valued throughout their lives. We can feel that we are the only ones who could ever really love our children, as they deserve but God loves them so much more than we do. He wants the same things we want for our children – for them to love themselves.

God is love and when we love our children God is present because where there is love, there is God.

God’s love is not passive his love is active today. Jesus displays God’s love when he seeks the lost and heals the sick. The resurrection shows us that Christ still seeks us today. Christ still heals today. That is why he gave us the sacraments of healing and restoration. Like with Peter, Jesus seeks us out and wants to build our children and us back up again.



Your First Reconciliation– Fr Colin

If you asked someone on the high street what Catholics do they will refer to a few things: gay marriage; contraception; child abuse and confession.

You are going to put your children in front of a priest and get them to say the very thing they least like about themselves. To people on the high street, that is madness! To some on the high street it may even be seen as cruelty. So why on earth does the church do this?

This is what we are going to try to unpack over the next 40 minutes or so. First a funny testimony from a first confession.



Funny Testimony

David Wells clip SLIDE



If you were a Catholic as a child, reminisce. What is it that you remember about this sacrament as a child? It does not have to be profound. It can be the room, the smell, the queue, what you were taught to confess, how you were prepared or what prayers you were taught to remember. If you are not a Catholic or didn't experience it as a child – have a listen because we want to draw out from us a little bit of our understanding from our childhood first.



What was your first reconciliation like?

SLIDE

Q: *What is it that you remember about this sacrament as a child?*



The Prodigal Son– Aseel

We are going to look at one of the most famous short stories of all time. Nowhere did Jesus express more beautifully, what happens in the sacrament of Reconciliation than in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

We're going to take 3 sentences from it and we're going to use it to try to illustrate an understanding of this sacrament. There is a lot more to the sacrament than what we are going to be talking about tonight.

The story is taken from the 15th chapter of Luke's gospel. Have a little listen...

Read the Story: Luke 15: 16-20

“He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when **he came to himself** [to his senses] he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and **I will say to him**, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” **So he set off** and went to his father.”

So we are going to explore three phrases:

1. “he came to himself” or “came to his senses”
2. “I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned’”
3. “So he set off and went to his father”

He came to his senses – Fr Colin

I am sure we are familiar with this bit. This is the most painful part of an argument. It's the bit of an argument where you catch yourself thinking, "shut up" or it's the bit in the argument where you catch yourself thinking, "how did we get on this? We were arguing about something else a minute ago."

You know that argument it starts about something trivial and before long, somebody's saying "well you've never liked my mother!"

It is a horrible moment, it is a painful moment when you catch yourself and you know within yourself. It is coming to our senses. Another word for it is "**conversion**" – it is the point where you catch yourself.

You may have also argued with people who have not reached that stage and there is almost no talking to them.

Now, all sorts of experiences bring you to your senses. The things with coming to your senses is that you did not ask for it. People do not get up in the morning and say, "Today I'd like a conversion experience." This is painful.

You are going to be brought into a place that is going to tell **you** that you are part of the problem. It is always much easier if the argument is over there. If I can push the problem over there to another nation, another race, or another child in my class or another colleague or my brother who will not talk to me. If I do that, I can remain out of this place. Coming to your senses is a much more painful place.

The first thing in this sacrament is that we begin by coming to our senses. You might have learnt about this as a child as **examining your conscience**.



The church is very much aware of numbers of people using the sacrament of reconciliation has dropped significantly in this country. Here is one of the reasons why.

If you were taught to recite sins that you had not committed and then you went to confession and confessed them, what you learnt unwittingly was that it was not real. Of course, we need to teach our children about sin and they need to identify what is sin and what is not. But, sometimes we stay with the sins we were taught as children and as we got older we didn't believe them and so then we didn't believe the sacrament.

So if you found yourself as a fourteen year old, repeating the sins I used to say as a child like: I've been disobedient to my parents; I fought with my brother; I didn't pay attention at Mass. Then, I did not then believe it anyway, my sins and I did not come to my senses about them and then I began not to trust the sacrament. In other words, I was not looking for healing because I did not need healing for those things.

When we did not come to our senses, it unwittingly undermined the rest of it. So let us have a look at the rest of it.

He rehearses his apology - Aseel

Prodigal Son goes on in the story and says, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

He rehearses his apology. You know when you have really said sorry you have usually rehearsed it. As a parent, when your child says sorry and means it, it is so incredibly moving. You cannot help but say, "of course it's alright; of course it is... we can get another Mercedes!" I do not have a Mercedes!

I have something I would like you to do at home:

I want you to go home tonight, find someone you love and start an argument, a proper one. Drag out all the family history that you know still irritates you. Bring it all out from the past; throw it all out; put it all out on the table; be aggressive; be rude and then try to nice your way out of it without saying sorry. I watched this once.

You know you cannot get away with it – not saying sorry. It is a painful thing, but we have to say the words. You have to **confess** aloud.

Now, sure, we can say the words to God ourselves and we can rehearse them and apologise to God. As we do at the beginning of Mass, “I confess to almighty God and you my brothers and sisters that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do. Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.”

However, we are also part, through baptism, of a body. Therefore, there is a sense where our sin hurts one another and so one of the purposes of the sacrament is to heal the body. I cannot go round to every one of you and say sorry.

So the Church established a sacrament that enabled me to go to a priest, who sit on behalf of all of you, and say, “I know what I did hurts everyone.” In the early church, publicly known sins were often confessed openly in church, though private confession to a priest was always an option for privately committed sins.

So we have got to rehearse the words and we have got to say them. And yes, we can say them in the privacy of our relationship with God, but we also belong to one another through our baptism, so this sacrament is going to reunite us.

I was really taught this by a 3 year old. One night I was giving my daughter a bath. You know when a child gets warm at that age and starts to relax. She suddenly began to cry and a child at three cries with her whole body. I said, “what’s the matter?” I pick her up out of the bath, wrap a towel around her and ask her “what’s the matter, darling?” I was struck by this because she was normally such a happy child, always smiling, laughing and singing. She was crying from a depth within her. She said, “Poppy didn’t bite me.”

It suddenly made sense, you see the week before we were round her grandparents and she came running into the room saying, “the dog bit me.” As punishment, Grandad gave the dog a little kick and the dog went away said, as dogs do, and lay in his basket.

She knew she was wrong and at the age of 3, she was introduced to her conscience.

It took her a week but she knew, even at the age of 3, that she has to say the words. How who taught her that? A programme on reconciliation? No, it is deep within our children because we have taught them by our example.

She knew she had to get it straight, it was hurting her and in the bath, she was able to let it go and say the words.



Set off to the Father – Fr Colin

So now and again, we have to come to our senses. What do we do with that pain? Well, somehow, somewhere we are going to have to share it. We are going to have to say the words. The Church has been doing this for a long time but there are places around the world where people pay thousands of dollars to get access to this kind of experience. So we come to the last bit which what would you have done with that girl as she wept in the bath.

(IN A LOUD VOICE) “Right get to your bedroom; wait till your dad gets home.”

Of course, you would not. You would not because you recognise her sincerity, because she has come to her senses. You would have said, “You big girl, it is a very big thing you did. I know some grown-ups that don’t do that.” You would have been proud of her just because it was sincere.

We are taught through this story of the Prodigal Son that God is going to do exactly that for us.

Where did you learn anything else? Where did we learn to hide this vulnerability, this brokenness of ours?

Our capacity for brokenness is the very thing that brings us to God. He delights in it.

St Teresa of Calcutta once said, “Some saints described themselves as terrible criminals because they saw God, they saw themselves – and they saw the difference.”

Yes, I think God welcomes the sincerity of an apology from our bedrooms, from the solitude we enjoy. Yes, I think God welcomes the apology that we join in corporately in Mass, recognising his mercy.

Sometimes though, we need to be healed to the community and we need to seek someone on behalf of that community, to say the words to. And it is the church that tells us it should be the priest.



Why do I have to confess to a priest (2 minutes)

Robert Barron Clip SLIDE

We are embodied creatures and so we need that physical encounter and communication to receive the full power of Christ’s word. The priest acts in Persona Christi, the very person of Christ, speaks the words and by the power of those words, Christ’s forgiveness is mediated.



Discussion (10 minutes)

SLIDE

Have a chat about what you have just heard.

Q: Why do you think we need to go to a priest to hear confession?

Q: Why are priests the only ones who can forgive sins? YouCat #236

No man can forgive sins unless he has a commission from God to do so and the power given by him to ensure that forgiveness he promises the penitent really takes place. The Bishop, in the first place, is appointed to do that and, then, his helpers, the ordained Priests. [1461-1466, 1495]

Q: May a priest later repeat something he has learned in confession? YouCat #238

No. Under no circumstances. The secrecy of the confessional is absolute. Any priest who would tell another person something he has learned in the confessional would be excommunication (excluded from the sacraments). Even to the police, the priest cannot say or suggest anything. [1467]



Restoring Dignity - Aseel

The sacrament of reconciliation really is a method for dealing with the rubbish in our lives. It was not intended to make us feel guilty. It was supposed to set us free.

Children need to be able to say sorry and get their dignity back. Damien Lundy, a religious brother of the De La Salle Order who used to work with young people, would teach the young people to recite their own name and then say the following prayer. So in my case “I’m Aseel and I’m OK because God doesn’t make rubbish, but he collects it.” This sacrament is intended to set us free.

Do not let this sacrament make you or your children feel worse about yourselves. The intention is that it should set you and them free so that they can go about their life with dignity that refuses to listen to all the message of the high street that tell them they are no good.

This is about dignity not guilt. It is about love.

As it says in 1 Peter 4:8 “Love covers a multitude of sins.” As the lost son was received back by his father with open arms, so “reconciliation” means: we are at peace with God again.

It does not seem like a modern thing to go to confession; it can be difficult and may cost a great deal of effort at first. But it is one of the greatest graces that we can receive again and again in our life – it truly renews the soul, completely unburdens it, leaving it without the debts of the past, accepted in love, and equipped with new strength. God is merciful, and he desires nothing more earnestly than for us, too, to lay claim to his mercy. Someone who has gone to confession turns a clean, new page in the book of his or her life.

That is why we are given a **penance**, not because we need to pay a price for our sin, because that price has been paid on the cross. Penance puts us back on the right path but making us love one another again and build up the body of Christ through acts of charity or praying or fasting or supporting the poor spiritually and materially – living resurrection.



How do I go to confession video clip

SLIDE