

HOMILETICS

• D. TITHER, C.S.S.R.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (AUG. 4)

CONFESSION -- RENEWAL OF BAPTISM

"Anyone who thinks he is standing should beware lest he fall." (Epis.)

The theme of today's Mass is the very real possibility of failure, of not being saved, even for a baptised Christian. The Epistle warns us that the failures of the past could happen to us. The Gospel tells us of the terrible consequences of failure for the Jewish people—the destruction of their City. But, should we sin, should we suffer shipwreck, there is still a way back, a sacrament given us by Christ, to restore the divine life given us at Baptism.

Baptism made us new men in the Risen Christ. If we are loyal to our Baptism, we will die to selfishness and to sin, and rise with Christ to a totally new life, a life of love and unselfishness. Sad to say, we sometimes fail, we sometimes sin.

But God is rich in mercy. His love for us is patient. To the unfaithful Christian who has belied his baptism, the Lord offers a new Baptism, a new immersion in the death and resurrection of the Lord. This is the Sacrament of Repentance, of Reconciliation.

In order to show us the close connection between this Sacrament and Baptism, Our Lord gave us the Sacrament of Repentance on the night of His Resurrection. In Baptism, the death and resurrection of

Our Lord were first applied to us. Our Lord gave us Confession as a Second Baptism. Through it we may recover the Divine Life we received in Baptism, if we have lost it by mortal sin. Or we may reinforce that divine life we received in Baptism if we have weakened it by our venial sins.

We are so used to this Sacrament, it's just so routine for us, that we've lost our sense of wonder. You recall how Our Lord cured a paralytic to prove by a visible miracle, that He'd worked an invisible one when He said: "Your sins are forgiven". The people, astonished beyond measure, thanked God Who gave such power to men. And well, they might be astonished. This was the first time such words had been heard on earth. Sin had gone on for thousands of years, but never once had God broken the silence. Not once before had He assured a sinner that he had got back the divine life he lost in sinning.

What must we do to receive this Sacrament well? We must do what we did at Baptism (what was done for us at Baptism by our godparents). At Baptism, we turned away from sin, and we turned back to God. We renounced sin, we promised to be loyal to the Person, Christ. At Confession, we must do the same — turn away from sin and give ourselves to God. If we look at it in this light, it will never become routine, we will never take it for granted. It will never become in our thinking just a kind of automatic device by which our sins are periodically wiped out.

It's not a matter of just getting rid of our debts, it's precisely meant to help us lead the Christian life more fervently. It's by no means a question of just getting out of God's bad books, it's meant to put us into His good books. A few suggestions.

Our examination of conscience should be much more than checking up with a list of sins in grandmother's prayerbook—the same list, maybe, that we used for our first confession. Let's look beyond our faults and see their causes—our selfishness, maybe, or our pride. We wouldn't think much of a farmer who just looked at the weeds, on his farm and did nothing about it. And if they were deeply rooted weeds like cogon we wouldn't think much more of him if he just cut them off at ground level. It would look all right for a day or two but, then

it would be as bad as ever. Let's get down to the causes of our sins, in an honest, adult way.

The Christian life is much more than avoiding faults. It's a matter of getting the attitude of Christ, with Whom we become one at baptism. Rather than torture ourselves, searching anxiously for every fault, let's contrast our behaviour and attitudes with those of Christ Our Model. And then, not from human shame, not from anger or disappointment with ourselves, but through motives of real contrition, let's wish we had the humility, the charity, the purity of Christ. And then, we'll really profit from this Second Baptism, we'll not stumble through life as mediocre non-descripts. We will not, at death, be faced by a God we've never really known.

Dear God, in the Name of Jesus and for the love of Jesus, let's see this Sacrament for what it is — a Second Baptism.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (AUG. 11)

REPENTANCE

“O Lord, You chiefly show Your Almighty Power by being merciful and forgiving.” (Collect)

Without doubt, of all the miracles Jesus worked during His lifetime, the most spectacular was the raising of Lazarus, four days after his death. But, a still greater wonder happens every time a person who has lost the divine life by serious sin regains it by repentance. It is a greater wonder than the creation of the world. This word repentance is used to describe two things — the attitude of mind by which we detest our sins, and the Sacrament of reconciliation — the second baptism. This should cause no surprise. The essential thing in the Sacrament is precisely sorrow for sins. It is as indispensable for the Sacrament as its water for Baptism or bread for the Eucharist.

No Catholic thinks it is enough for us to confess our sins to a priest and receive absolution. All of us know that unless we are truly sorry, the absolution is useless. But, provided of course that we intend

to approach the Sacrament, repentance can itself restore the divine life, even before absolution.

Between God and sin, there can be no compromise. God just must hate sin, because it is separation from God. Christ, the Visible Image of the invisible God, revealed to us His Father's mercy. He looked on sinners with kindness. But, He did not do this because He approved of their sins. God loves the sinner only to draw him out of his sin and back to Himself. The words used in the Community Prayer today are indeed encouraging. God chiefly shows His Almighty Power, in this life, by being ready to pardon the sincerely repentant — the manifestation of His Justice is reserved for the next life. "His Mercy is above all His wonderful works." Ps 102.

God alone can give repentance — it's something quite beyond our unaided powers. Just as God alone can create the world, so He alone can perform this unheard of operation — the re-creation of a man's heart. As He says "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take away the stony heart out of you, and give you a heart of flesh" Ez. 36,25-26.

The very foundation of the Sacrament of Repentance is this astounding truth: God is capable of changing a human heart, of turning a sinful heart into an innocent one, by the repentance, the complete reversal, that He alone can give. And this is the greatest manifestation of His Divine Power.

While hating sin with infinite loathing, He longs to use this power, and restore sinners to His love and life. "As I live", says the Lord, "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Ezech. 33,22. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow." Is. 1,18.

St. John the Baptist was the forerunner, preparing the way for Our Lord's Coming. And the only preparation on which He insisted was repentance — a complete change of heart. "Repent, because the Kingdom of God is at hand." And when Our Lord came, His very first sermon was in the same words: "Repent, . . . at hand." He had come, He said, "to save that which was lost." Luke 18,10. And when His enemies were scandalized: "This man receives sinners and eats

with them", He answered them with the parable of the lost sheep. "When he has found it, he (the Good Shepherd) will lay it upon His shoulders, rejoicing. And coming home, call together his friends and neighbours, saying: "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say to you that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents more than over ninety nine who do not need repentance." Luke 15,1-10.

Our Lord reserved the most beautiful of all his parables — the Prodigal Son, to highlight the prodigy of divine power, which is repentance. In a sense, repentance is the greatest virtue, because repentance is love, once dead, but now restored to life.

It is in our power to thwart and frustrate the immense longing of God to give us this gift. We are free to this extent — we can resist God's offer. Ask Our Lady, whose Assumption we honour on Thursday, to intercede for us, so that we'll never be so hard-hearted or obstinate. Remember the threat of her Son to those who refuse to repent or approach Him in the Sacrament of Repentance: "Except you do penance, you shall perish".

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (AUG. 18)

CONFESSION — CONTACT WITH CHRIST

"He took him aside . . . and put His fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue." (Gospel)

Every Sacrament is an act, a gesture of Jesus Christ, living that in His Church. You remember how the Apostle Thomas refused to believe in the Resurrection of Our Lord unless he touched Him, put his finger into the wounds in Jesus' hands, and his hand into the wound in His side. Our Lord gave way to his demands, but He said: "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed." This last sentence concerns ourselves. We cannot see Christ, but we believe in Him. We believe in Him, without seeing Him. But, in the Sacraments, we touch

Him, we contact Him. He is there at work, to purify us, to heal us, to strengthen us. Just as He touched and cured the blind, the paralytics, the feverish; just as He blessed His disciples, breathed on them, broke bread for them, just so in the Sacraments we are absolved, healed, purified, fed, and blessed by Him. We meet Him, touch Him just as truly as if we were the one described in today's Gospel.

We see this clearly in a Sacrament like Communion, perhaps some of us do not see it so vividly in Repentance, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Perhaps some of us regard this Sacrament as a necessary evil, something to be got through with as little trouble as possible. If only we saw it for what it really is — the intimate meeting of a repentant sinner with his Merciful Lord, the laying of our sins and weaknesses at the feet of the One Who loves us in spite of our past sins, a personal contact with Our loving Saviour Who has been longing for this meeting.

None can deny that Jesus hated sin. He spoke strongly, even fiercely against sin. He called those who obstinately refuse His message "a wicked and unfaithful generation". *Matt.* 16,4. He warned them of eternal punishment: "And thou, Capharnaum, dost thou hope to be lifted high as heaven? Thou shall fall low as hell. For if in Sodom had been wrought the miracles wrought thee, it might have stood to this day. And I say this: It shall go less hard with Sodom on the day of Judgment than with thee." The same fate, eternal exclusion from His love, awaits the uncharitable: "Depart from me, ye accursed".

But, alongside His energy in opposing sin, He insistently promised forgiveness for those who repent. Even more than His words, His actions tell us of this readiness to receive the repentant. To the great scandal of His enemies, He associated with former sinners, ate at their table, travelled with them. You remember the once sinful woman who burst into the house of Simon the Pharisee where Jesus was a guest. Without a word to anyone, she went straight to Our Lord, and full of contrition, began to wash His feet with her tears, and dry them with her hair, kissing them. Simon was shocked that Jesus should let a sinner touch Him so intimately. He was brought to his senses when Jesus reminded him that those who are forgiven more, love more.

"Many sins have been forgiven her, because of her great love". Think of this scene when you approach Christ in the Sacrament of Repentance.

On another occasion, an adulteress, caught in her infidelity, was dragged before Jesus. With her sin so publicly exposed, her intense shame and embarrassment can easily be imagined. The horror of the punishment (stoning to death) added to her terror. But, how everything changed when she came into Our Lord's presence! She soon realised that even though He hated sin intensely, He loved the repentant sinner even more. The fact that He cared, and showed He cared, silencing and scattering her accusers, brought her calm and repentance. "Has no one condemn you?", He asked. "No one, Lord". "Neither will I condemn you. Go and sin no more".

Maybe the simplest and best way to discover if we appreciate what being a Christian means is to see what is our attitude to this Sacrament. If we're neglecting it altogether, we're just dead branches, fit to be cut off and burned. If we're abusing it, by deliberately hiding serious sins, or by not having real repentance, we're just securing for ourselves a ringside seat on the edge of hell. But, taking it for granted that we're sincere, that we're not making bad confessions, there is still an alternative. It is one thing to slip into a Confessional and get the business over with a minimum of trouble, and quite another to approach the Sacrament with a real awareness that this is a most intimate personal contact with the Merciful Christ.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (AUG. 25)

THANGSGIVING

As often as you do this, you do it in memory of Me".

(Canon of the Mass)

One day a miner was preparing for work in a coal mine. King Albert of Belgium walked up to him and asked him if there was anything he wanted for himself and his comrades. "Sir", said the miner, "we want people to respect us".

We all want the respect of other people. We should all respect others. Especially we should respect those who love us and do good to us. One of the best ways we can show our respect to such people is by being grateful to them: by saying thanks to them. Above all we should respect God. He is our Father. He has redeemed us and loves us with a Father's love. One of the best ways we can show our respect for God is by being grateful to Him: by saying thanks to Him.

The Jewish people in the Old Testament continually gave thanks to God. Often they recited the Psalms. The Psalms are beautiful prayers of thanks to God. Through them the people thanked God for His wonderful actions in the world. They thanked Him for the things He did to prepare the world for the coming of Christ. "Sing to the Lord a new song for He has done wonderful things".

The coming of Christ was the climax of God's intervention in the world. Our Lord told His contemporaries: "The eyes are blessed that see what you see. For many a prophet and king desired to see what you see and did not see it". Yes, they should be thankful to God because they could see and hear Him. Many a prophet and king in the Old Testament desired this favour, but they died before Christ came into the world.

By our Baptism we have become members of Christ. We share His Divine Life. So we, even more than those of Old Testament times should thank God. St. Paul tells us: "We ought to give thanks to God always". I Thess 1,2.

Our Lord often gave public thanks to God. Before the multiplication of the loaves, at the raising of Lazarus from the dead, He gave thanks. At the Last Supper, before changing the bread into His Body and the wine into His Blood, He gave thanks. And today at every Mass, Our Lord changes bread into His Body and wine into His Blood. And at every Mass He again gives thanks to God. And we thank God too together with Christ. We call the Mass the Eucharist, because Eucharist means "thanksgiving".

Now that we have the Mass in the vernacular, we have all noticed how important a place thanksgiving has in the Mass. For example, the Canon, the most important part of the Mass, begins with the "Pre-

face". The Preface is a solemn prayer of thanksgiving to God. "It is truly right and just, it is our duty, it is our salvation to thank you always and everywhere, to thank you Lord Holy Father, through Christ Our Lord". These are the opening words of this beautiful prayer.

Many people do not thank God as they should, because they do not *remember* what God has done for them. But in the Mass, when we should be thanking God, we do remember what God has done for us.

After He had changed bread into His Body and wine into His Blood at the First Mass, Our Lord commanded His priests: "Do this in memory of Me". And if you listen to the prayers of the Mass today, you will see that immediately after the Consecration of the Mass, we do remember what Christ did for us.

First, we remember His Passion. We remember how He suffered on the Cross for us, how He died a bitter death to deliver us from sins.

Then, we remember His glorious Resurrection from the dead. We remember how, through His Resurrection, He won for us a new life. We remember that if we are loyal to Christ during life, then His victory over death will become our victory too.

Lastly, we remember His glorious Ascension. We remember that He ascended into Heaven to prepare a place for us. We remember that one day He will come again to take us to our everlasting home in Heaven.

Yes, dear brethren, at each Mass we remember Christ. We remember what He did for us. And because we remember, we thank God for His mercy and love.

One of the obligations of our christian lives is to say "thank you" to God. When we thank Him, we praise Him, we show our respect for Him. The Holy Mass is the best opportunity we have of thanking God, for it is THE prayer of thanksgiving to God. And at Mass we remember what God has done for us. And having remembered, we are prompted to thank Him.