

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



Confession

Wednesday, third week of Lent



Reading: John 8:1-11

Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. So, when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again, he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, **Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.**

Commentary

The evening of Easter day, the disciples were huddled together in fear after the crucifixion of Christ. Then the Risen Jesus appears among them speaking words of peace and forgiveness (John 20:19-23) and breathes on them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ then institutes the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) as he says to the Apostles: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

The sacrament of confession is an immense gift to the Church: Christ comes to us bringing words of forgiveness and peace when we most need them. The First Letter of St John (1:9) states with admirable clarity, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” In sum, the act of confession is a gift inextricably woven into the fabric of Christian discipleship.

In the Early Church, confession was a public affair, with sins being confessed before the whole church community. However, over time many began to see the practice of private confession as pastorally very powerful. Here the priest acted as the representative of Christ and the whole Christian community.

The act of making a sacramental confession is a powerful way of being honest about ourselves before God and intimately to receive his forgiveness. There is immense power in frankly speaking about one's sins so that we are more able to receive a word of forgiveness.

The human tendency is to hide, keep secret or justify those things which we feel ashamed of and do not want others to know. Will we still be lovable if we are honest about these things? What will others think of me? What will God think? It's so easy to operate in the world with a stream of self-condemning thoughts, which hold us back from living the abundant life Christ has called us to live. In the gift of sacramental confession, these thoughts are silenced by the sure and healing words of Christ who, like the woman caught in adultery, says to us: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."

Meditation

Write down the ways have you failed to live fully and for which you need a word of forgiveness.

Read through John 8:1-10 slowly and meditatively. Imagine you are in the scene.

What is the atmosphere like?

What expressions are on the people's faces: the crowd, the woman, Jesus?

Are there any words or phrases that particularly stand out? Why?

What effect do the words Jesus words have on you?

Speak aloud those things which you wrote down at the beginning.

Receive the forgiveness Christ offers.

Prayer

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you and against our fellow men,
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.

We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past;
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.