

11 April 2021

### Sermons: Absolution

*Jesus said, "Receive the Holy Spirit, If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).*

Some of the most profound moments of my Priesthood have come during my celebration of a Sacrament. I recall at one Baptism, when as I poured the water over the baby's forehead and invoked the Trinitarian Formula, it struck me how this was the moment when this child became a member of the Church. I remember a Mass, when as I prayed the words of consecration over the bread and wine, I became deeply aware of how this was the means by which my parishioners received the Body and Blood of Christ. Yet, many of my most profound experiences have come during a Confession. I recall one occasion when someone who had been away from God and the Church for over twenty years was struggling to end a sense of disconnection from everything in life. A long list of serious sins was recited punctuated by expressions of guilt and remorse. After we talked for a while, I said the words of absolution and I suddenly understood their power as all those sources of separation from God and the Church were gone. The look on the person's face when we were done was unforgettable.

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples the authority by which sins are forgiven. Over the centuries, this power has been passed on to their successors (the Bishops) and their assistants (the Priests) which has enabled the Church to become a source of healing for countless people.

The importance of unity was a theme found throughout the latter part of John's Gospel. In his response to Philip, Jesus described his unity with the Father in these words: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (**John 14:10**). Later, Jesus asked his disciples to be included in the unity which existed between himself and the Father: "may they also be in us" (**John 17:21**). This unity was to be manifested in the bond between disciples as Jesus asked that "they may all be one" (**John 17:21**). Yet, in the Passion story, this unity was destroyed by sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ was physically and spiritually separated from his disciples. Judas betrayed him. Peter denied knowing him three times. The Beloved Disciple was inside with Annas when he questioned Jesus but never intervened. At the Cross, the Beloved Disciple witnessed the death of Jesus along with the women and when told by Mary Magdalene about the empty tomb went to it. However, when the Risen Christ appeared to them, the disciples were hiding in a locked room for fear of the authorities.

Jesus began the restoration of unity between himself and his disciples with his first words "Peace be with you" (**John 20:19**) which communicated no judgement or condemnation for their failures. He then gave them the mission he was given by his father. Finally, he breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and gave them the authority by which sins are forgiven. This indicated the main focus of their mission was the communication to all people that the source of discord within their lives (sin) was overcome by Christ and that by the power he granted to his disciples unity could be restored through them.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, many people are feeling a sense of separation from God and other people. There are the occasions when something was said to a loved one in frustration or anger about not wearing a mask. There are the times people have acted without consideration for the safety of those around them. There are the occasions when the information provided by medical experts changes and individuals stop believing them. On an individual and collective level, many people feel they are being pulled apart by forces they cannot control. It can be hard in such a stressful situation to take time to examine where we are at in our relationships with God and the Church. Yet, it is for this reason that doing so is so important. Sacramental Confession enables Catholics to reflect upon their lives, identify where they maybe heading in the wrong direction and do something about it. No gap between us and God and His Church is so great it cannot be bridged. Hearing the words of Absolution is a tangible reminder disconnection with God is not a permanent condition. The power to forgive sins in Christ's name is a great privilege for a Priest and a reminder he is to always be a source of healing in the world.

Message for Website  
Fr. Michael Basque

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After the incident I described earlier in my reflection, the person thanked me for hearing their Confession. I felt I was the one who should be thanking that individual for the privilege.

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