

PRAYING LENT

From the *Online Ministries*, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY

Reconciliation and Healing

Lent is a wonderful time to celebrate the reconciling love and the healing graces our Lord offers us. Like all religious experience, it takes preparation.

Reconciliation is what God does. We prepare for it by opening ourselves up, by reflecting upon the areas of darkness in our lives into which God so deeply desires to shine a light. It might begin with the simple question: Where might God be offering me forgiveness and healing?

If my answer is, "I don't know," then I have some reflection to do. I can examine my life - what I have done and what I have failed to do - and see what graces are offered me there.

If I've come through that "era" of saying that any guilt, anything that makes me feel bad about myself, is a bad thing, to be avoided at all costs, then I might have a difficult time coming to genuine sorrow for my sins. If this is the case, I need to "go to work" on my reflection, asking God to rouse a sense of embarrassment, leading to deep sorrow, for any way I may not have been faithful, honest, loving, self-less or generous - in my relationship with God, with my family, with others. I can look at each of my responsibilities - as a

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citizen of a city and a country and the world, a neighbor, an employee, a member of a parish or congregation, as a parent or a spouse or as a son or daughter. God will always shine light into these important parts of our lives, to help us experience remorse and a genuine desire for forgiveness and healing. The point here is not ultimately to focus on ourselves. God always reveals us to ourselves, so

that God might reveal to us our need for a Savior. The focus is on God's reconciling, healing love. . Real love isn't our love for God, but God's love for us.

It may be that I have experienced troubling guilt - coming out of deep childhood trauma or a long-standing sense of shame This may plague my ability to feel good about myself at all, and therefore to be able to reflect upon my sins - the ways I fail at loving. I can still prepare for genuine reconciliation by preparing to

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better trust God's love for me, based upon two convictions:

- First, God's love is un-conditional. It is not conditioned on my being better, or my overcoming anything, or even my being good at all. God just loves me. I am always precious in the eyes of the One who made me and desires to embrace me with the gift of complete freedom, in everlasting life.
- Secondly, God knows everything, including what I'm struggling with or suffering under. The God of all compassion, understands me and loves me. It may be that the place where I need the greatest sorrow and desire for forgiveness and healing is my lack of trust in God's complete and unconditional love for me.

Visit the *Online Ministries* site: *Praying Lent*.

In addition to this resource for Lent, there are many others to support our journey through Lent. And, there is a **Lenten Daily Prayer** for each day of Lent.

www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/online.html

It may be that when I ask myself the question about where God might be offering me forgiveness and healing, I might first come up with a single thing that seems "big" to me. I might say, "I feel sorry for how I treat my spouse or my children." I might focus on a long established habit of self-indulgent sexual fantasy. I may feel most sorrow for what I fail to do - all the "good intentions" that never make their way into action.

Even in a place I might be most embarrassed, God loves me and offers me wholeness and joy.

It is so important not to stop there. None of the "big" things about which we might immediately feel sorry for sums up all of who we are before God and others. They may be very important in giving some clues or some leads in identifying some larger patterns. For example, if a "big" thing that worries me is that I tend to be "loose" with the truth, at times, I can ask what that means, what it reveals about me. I may discover that the real pattern of sin has to do with a deeper dishonesty or lack of integrity: hiding from God; leading a double life; not being who I really am called to be; trying to manage my life on my own terms; manipulating others for my own needs and desires.

When the Light of God's love shines into this level of self-awareness, then I am touched by a powerful experience of reconciliation. Even here, in a place I might be most embarrassed and feel most naked, God loves me and offers me wholeness and joy.

Celebrating Reconciliation

Reconciliation is what God does. Receiving it and celebrating it is what we do. For those of us who are Catholics, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a most natural way to celebrate God's reconciliation. We used to think of this sacrament as only about "confession" - that it was like a dumping ground for my sins, where I got forgiven, and I had to "pay a toll." One of the great recoveries in our Christian history is to re-discover the meaning of this sacrament.

It is God who forgives sins. And God forgives us the very moment that we come to the experience that we need forgiveness (which itself comes through God's grace). At that moment, I feel sorrow and a desire for forgiveness and healing. In that moment, I am reconciled with God. The reunion, the bond, the connection, the joy are all there. Three more things remain: to receive it deep within my heart, to celebrate it, and to participate in the healing process.

When I experience God's forgiveness and love, I am invited to savor it and let it touch me deeply. Experiencing compassion, patience, understanding, and forgiveness is itself transforming. If I fail to appreciate what I have just received - freely and undeserved - then I will take it for granted and risk moving on without a real healing happening.

Then, I need to celebrate the reconciliation I have received. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation - individually or in common - I have the wonderful opportunity to ritualize that celebration. In the Sacrament, my personal journey is joined with the

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mystery of God's saving love, as seen in the scriptures, and in God's desire to save us all. There, in ritual form (even if it is just me and the priest) I "step forward" and admit that I am a sinner, express my sorrow, and I name the places in my life where God is shining a Light into what I have done and what I have failed to do. Then, God's forgiveness is proclaimed "out loud" - for me to hear and rejoice in: "May God grant you pardon and fill you with God's peace."

An integral part of the reconciliation involves the healing process. Part of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to practice a "remedy" for the healing I desire. Often that will simply be prayer. Expressing my gratitude to God is one of the most important steps on the road to recovery from my independence from God.