

Insights in Liturgy

Why General Absolution?

By FATHER ROBERT J. KENNEDY

There is no limit to the ways in which God manifests his loving mercy to us. In a simple "I'm sorry" from someone who has hurt us, in an act of helpfulness and love, in a patient word of understanding, God reveals his reconciling power in the folds and paths of our daily lives.

resurrection of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:10-20).

However, the mystery of reconciliation is so broad and deep that its celebration, its accomplishment takes many forms: from a husband and wife sharing a glass of wine by the fireplace to a communal penance service of several hundred participants.

pression of three sacraments to say it all — Baptism, Eucharist and Penance. But even these three have not been given us by the Church in the recent revision. These will help us to celebrate, even more fully, this rich gift of "welcome home" from the Father.

A key and controversial form of the Sacrament of Penance is the third one: the Rite for Reconciliation of Penitents with General Confession and Absolution.

This form is seen by the Church as an exceptional form, to be celebrated in "particular, occasional circumstances" determined by the local bishop, and in cases of emergency, by the reconciling minister. There are certain conditions for such celebrations which will be discussed next week. For now, however, let us look at the dimensions of the mystery of reconciliation celebrated in this form of Penance.

Christianity is a radically communal faith: we cannot consider ourselves as Christians apart from an intimate identity with our brothers and sisters in faith. As members of the one body of Christ, we live and move and have our being in fellowship with one another. Thus, the Church is the reconciling community in which all Christians must constantly recognize the need to establish peace through mutual forgiveness.

A form of General Confession and Absolution tries to ritualize this communal dimension more clearly and celebrate our solidarity in faith and encouragement for each other. No sin is ever a private sin. No matter how private or hidden a sinful action or attitude might seem, it not only alienates us from the community of the Trinity, but it also alienates us from our brothers and sisters in the faith and disrupts the harmony of the human community. If these are the dimensions of our sin, they are also the dimensions of the call to repentance and reconciliation. If we frequently join together to commit injustice, it is thus only fitting that we should help each other in doing penance so that freed from sin by the grace of Christ we may work with all people of good will for justice and peace in the world.

Thus, it is good that the celebration of General Confession and Absolution confront us with the word of God, so that our souls might be laid bare in sinfulness before the mercy of God. It is good that all who wish to be reconciled confess their frequent acts of sin and injustice in common general confession. It is good that all are given a common penance so that all might work as one in healing the wounds caused by our sin. And it is good that the Church speaks its single word of absolution over the one congregation, united

state. God has not changed. God cannot change. God is love — everlasting, enduring, immutable. What has changed through Christ is man's state. Man is now brother of Christ, son of the Father. It remains only that each individual change and modify his attitude toward God and life accordingly. Reconciliation is an interpersonal affair, demanding change on our part, not God's. He does not become reconciled to the world. Rather, "God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself." Thus Paul called the proclaimers of the good news "ambassadors." Ambassadors are sent to nations at peace with one another. The task of God's ambassadors is to invite each individual to change, to be reconciled to God.

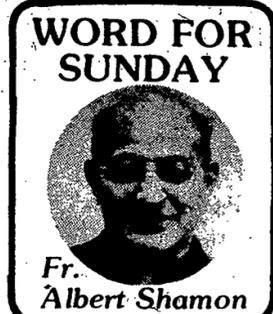
The parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates the steps in reconciliation. Both sons in the parable are sinners, as are all of us. That is the human condition. One son knows this and shapes his attitudes accordingly; the other refuses to acknowledge this fact and will not change his life in any way.

For both, God comes forward: He welcomes the younger and He pleads with the elder. God is open to all sinners — those who know they are and those who do not.

In the younger son, we have the human element: lack of purity of intention. He is converted, because he is miserable and, all things considered, his father's house is still better than his present lodging with swine. With such imperfect contrition, he begins his examination of conscience ("coming to his senses at last") and decides what his confession will be ("Father, I have sinned"). However, the father's welcome is so warm, the penitent loses the thread of his prepared confession. He doesn't even get a chance to make it. The roles are reversed. It is no longer the quality of the penitent's sorrow that counts; it is God's love and His pardon.

Unfortunately, very often the sacrament of penance is treated as if God's pardon were merely the response to confession — as if the initiative were all human and not, as it is, God's coming forward. His celebrating of His welcoming, recreating, and healing love.

How rarely, sad to say, does the sacrament of reconciliation give one the true impression of introducing someone to the joy of the Father!



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Lk. 15:1-3, 11-32. (R1) Jos. 5:9-12. (R2) 2 Cor. 5:17-21.

Next Sunday's first reading is probably a theological fragment inserted into the Book of Joshua after the Babylonian Captivity. The incident narrated occurred after the crossing of the Jordan and before the fall of Jericho. It took place at Gilgal, destined to become one of Israel's most important sanctuaries.

The Gilgal Pasch ended the Exodus and corresponds to the Egyptian Pasch (Ex. 14), which had begun the Exodus. The Gilgal Pasch marked the passing away of the old order and the beginning of the new. The manna ceased and the produce of the land was used. Thus Israel passed from her infancy, in which God did everything for her in the desert, to her adulthood, in which she was to do everything in communion with God.

Likewise the sacraments of the New Testament are meant to be more than signs, like the manna, of God's free initiative. They are that, but they are also signs of the need for man's cooperation. Thus in presenting the bread and wine at Mass, the priest refers to the elements as given by the earth (God's part) and made by human hands (man's part). As the eucharistic elements (wheat and grapes) are gifts of God's earth and become bread and wine because worked on by men, so the sacraments are meant to be signs of God's goodness worked upon by the recipient.

St. Paul underscores this fact especially in regard to the sacrament of reconciliation or penance. He says, "The old order has passed away." What was the old order? It was the Jewish idea that reconciliation demanded a change in God. Jews prayed that God be reconciled to us, change His attitude toward us!

St. Paul said, this old order has passed away. "Now all is new!" What's new? Man's state. God has made a change in man's

NEW AUXILIARIES

SHARING SUPPER

Washington, D.C. (RNS) — Two pastors in the Rockville Centre, N.Y., diocese have been named by Pope Paul to be auxiliary bishops to Bishop John R. McGann. They are Msgr. Gerald Ryan, 53, pastor of St. Raymond parish, East Rockaway, and Father James Daly, pastor of St. Boniface parish, Elmont.

The Northeast Divorced Catholic Group has planned a "Sharing Supper" at the Georgetown Commons Clubhouse, Fairport, beginning 7:30 p.m., Sunday, March 20.

Those attending should bring table service, a dish to pass and \$2. For reservations, the number is 223-2414.

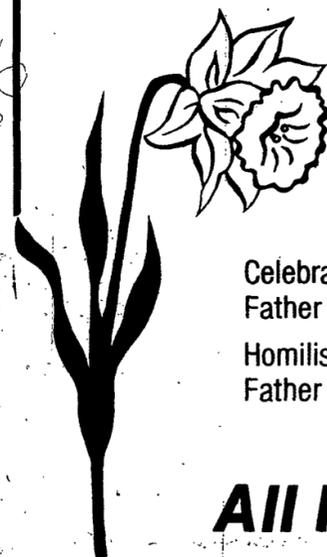
Liturgy of Hope

CANCER SUNDAY MARCH 27th.

Corpus Christi Church

864 E. Main St. Roch., N.Y.

11 A.M. MASS



Celebrant: Father James B. Callan
Homilist: Father Joseph W. Dailey

All Invited

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VISITING LECTURERS, SUMMER '77

- Rev. Marcel Gervais, "Prophetic Vision — Integral Grasp of God, Man, Creation"
Monika Hellwig, "Jesus, the Liberator, the Free Man"
Rev. Thomas Heath, O.P., "Values and the Scriptures"



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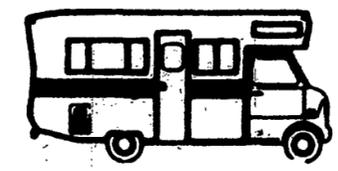
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