

Lent 2020: Confession and coronavirus?

Lent seeks a change of heart that we may truly celebrate Easter. In preparation for this great feast many celebrate this "change of heart" in the Sacrament of Penance. Confession to a priest is an essential part of the Sacrament of Penance but what are we to do this year, when because of coronavirus, Church services are suspended and everyone is to stay at home? Pope Francis spoke about this situation recently and said that we should do what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says. The Catechism reminds us that the confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. Only God forgives sin and God, who is the Father of tenderness, always waits for the return of the Prodigal and always welcomes with a loving embrace - God's forgiveness is immediate! In our present uniquely difficult situation, when it is not possible to come to the Church for Confession, speak to God from your heart; acknowledge truthfully what you have done or failed to do, and with all your heart ask forgiveness with a sincere Act of Sorrow confident that God always forgives the contrite. Later, when coronavirus has released its grip, we can return to the Church and avail of Confession, and celebrate the forgiveness that has been so freely given.

You may find the following helpful.

An Act of Penance Lent 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Lord,
hear the prayers of those who call on you,
forgive the sins of those who confess to you,
and in your merciful love
give us your pardon and your peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

16:24-26

“Jesus said his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will save it. What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?’

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection:

When we speak of “taking up the cross”, often we think of uniting everyday difficulties and problems with the sufferings of Jesus. Although this in itself is praiseworthy, there is another important aspect to “taking up the cross”; it is making the decision to follow the way of Jesus, to live as he taught. This involves willingly entering into the struggle against evil, in my personal life and in the world around me. This we do in many ways, but the most important and effective way is by celebrating the Sacrament of Penance - this Lent, because of coronavirus, we do it with a sincere act of sorrow in our hearts. It is here that we formally renounce our sinful ways and are renewed in the spirit of Jesus. We take the way of the cross, as Jesus did, so as to share in his victory over sin and death.

Examination of Conscience

(This reflection is based on extracts from the Passion according to Saint Matthew).

“The elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and made plans to arrest Jesus by some trick and have him put to death.” (Matthew 26:3-4)

Have I spoken falsely of another?

Have I set out to destroy the character of another?

Have I twisted the truth to suit myself?

“Then one of the twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went the chief priests and said, “What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?” They paid him thirty silver pieces.” (Matthew 26:14-15)

Have I compromised myself for material gain?

Have I neglected love for ambition?

Have I allowed the circumstances of life make me bitter?

“Then Jesus came with them to a plot of land called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, ‘Stay here while I go over there to pray.....He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, ‘So you had not the strength to stay awake with me for one hour?’” (Matthew 26: 36; 40)

Have I prayed frequently and fervently or only when in difficulty?

Have I persevered in prayer?

Have I neglected to worship with God's people on a Sunday?

“Peter started cursing and swearing, ‘I do not know the man.’ And at once the cock crowed. Peter remembered what Jesus had said, ‘Before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.’” (Matthew 26: 74-75)

Have I denied my faith in Jesus by my actions, or by my silence?

Have I neglected to defend the good name of another?

Have I betrayed those who trust me most?

“Pilate said to them, 'What am I to do with Jesus who is called the Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!'.....So Pilate took some water, washed his hands in front of the crowd and said, 'I am innocent of this man's blood.....he handed him over to be crucified” (Matthew 27:22; 24; 26)

Have I shirked responsibility for my actions?

Have I been lazy, or neglectful of my responsibilities?

Have I turned a blind eye to that which is wrong?

“The soldiers took Jesus with them into the Praetorium....they stripped him...twisted some thorns into a crown.....made fun of him....they spat on him.”
(Matthew 27: 27-30)

Have I been violent in word or action?

Have I made little of others, put others down, been cynical or sarcastic?

Have I abused my own dignity or that of others?

"On the way out, they came across a man from Cyrene, called Simon, and enlisted him to carry his cross" (Matthew 27:32)

Have I been indifferent to the sufferings of others?

Have I lacked compassion for those who asked for my help?

Have I been bitter or resentful because of the cross I must carry?

General Confession of sins.

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,
They strike their breast saying:
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Act of Sorrow.

O my God,
I thank you for loving me.
I am sorry for all my sins,
for not loving others
and not loving you.
Help me to live like Jesus

and not sin again. Amen

Proclamation of praise.

We join with our Blessed Mother, Mary, in praise of God's mercy.

R/. The Lord has done marvels for me: holy is his name.

My soul glorifies the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her nothingness;
henceforth all ages will call me blessed. **R/.**

The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy his name!
His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear him. **R/.**

He puts forth his arm in strength
and scatters the proud hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
and raises the lowly. **R/.**

He fills the starving with good things,
sends the rich away empty. **R/.**
He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and his children forever. **R/.**

Concluding Prayer and blessing.

God and Father of us all,
you have forgiven our sins and sent us your peace.
Help us to forgive each other
and to work together to build your peace in our society.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Blessing.