

4 Lent B

March 14, 2021

St. Patrick

This midway point in our Lent, the New Testament Letter to the Ephesians teaches us clearly: **“It is by grace that we have been saved.”**

Pope Francis has made a renewed experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, that is, “confession,” as his prayer intention for this month of March (1). It fits well for us this Lenten Sunday as the Ephesians’ Letter stresses that **“God is rich in mercy.”**

Soon after Pope Francis was elected Bishop of Rome, he was teaching a large group and he asked them—and also us this Sunday—to answer the question: *“When was the last time I went to confession?”*

In my 20s, soon after I was ordained a priest—well, without telling anyone else, I had come to the conclusion that I could go to God directly, and simply tell God I’m sorry for my sins. Then, they would be forgiven. I wondered what the reason for telling my sins to a priest.

In the first parish where I served, a treatment center for alcoholics called me and wondered if a young man could come to me for “his 5th Step”? I didn’t know what they were talking about.

The young man came to see me. After he had made a thorough personal inventory, the 5th Step in AA told him to do this: “Admit to God, to ourselves, and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” This young man was a Catholic. If he had to tell his wrongs to “another human being,” it made sense for him to do so with a priest.

This young man was comprehensive in his confession—honest and humble. He told me that AA is blunt: If you don’t make this 5th step, “admission to another human being,”—well, you’ll go back to drinking, or using drugs. The weight of guilt in life would be too much.

Pope Francis puts it like this: When a person “finishes confessing, he leaves [feeling] free, great, beautiful, forgiven, clean, happy.” That young man left me also feeling hopeful.

Alcoholics Anonymous—AA—is not Catholic fellowship. It has a broad spiritual embrace. But, that experience with the 5th Step brought me to a new appreciation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, “confession.” We have a treasure in it.

The very first chapter of Ephesians tells us beautifully (and it’s one of my three favorite Bible verses): **“In Christ and through his blood we have been redeemed, and our sins forgiven, so immeasurably generous is God’s favor to us”** (1:7).

Yes, St. Patrick’s, we *are* forgiven. We need only to speak from the heart asking God for forgiveness. It’s there for the asking—if it comes deeply from within.

However, I have a hunch that a lot of folks are carrying around a burden—I call it a “backpack”—of remorse, of misery, of guilt. If you are weighted down with that remorse, I invite you *this* Lent to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In this sacrament, we celebrate the Risen Jesus taking off from our shoulders *that* burden of guilt. It’s a sacred sign, a sacrament. Sometimes, afterwards, I feel I need to pick up that backpack and carry around that guilt a little longer. I need to. I deserve it. No, the sacrament celebrates we don’t have to pick up that burden of guilt again. As Pope Francis puts it, **“the center of confession is not the sins we declare, but the divine love we receive...”**

Ten days ago I went to confession. I, too, felt embarrassed, uneasy about going to a priest I know well. However, I’m very grateful for this sacrament. I’ve been weighted down by that backpack way too much in my life.

Don’t we want to celebrate this Easter—after such a hard year, especially—standing straight, free...and yes, fully forgiven? Oh, we at St. Patrick’s—we might say that *we’re* too progressive...we’ve grown beyond that...that’s the old church. Perhaps...unless you might feel the weight of remorse. Then, I invite you, this second half of Lent, to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Our “Alleluia,” then, might be more than just an Easter word.

(1) For this, and all subsequent quotes from Pope Francis, see <http://feedproxy.google.com/~r/catholicnewsagency/dailynews/~3/1DFYPbBye6Q/#noredirect>.

General Intercessions

March 14, 2021

4th Sunday of Lent

Keep before us, your church, that you love us so much you gave your only Son to save us, not condemn us; we pray to you, O Lord—

This weekend marks the 8th anniversary of the choice of Pope Francis as Bishop of Rome. Grace him that he might preach the Gospel fearlessly—by word and by example; we pray to you, O Lord—

Lead our St. Patrick Parish to discern wisely new leaders in our elections for the Parish Pastoral Council; we pray to you, O Lord—

Restore those who are weary, worn, or sad; we pray to you, O Lord—

Give everlasting life to those who had died with their hope fixed on you, especially as we remember Donald Walraven; and all those who have died from Covid-19; we pray to you, O Lord—

