

# Sacrament of PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

**A**s I continue this series of letters during the Holy Year of Mercy, I want to share with you some thoughts and (better yet) some actual experiences, which will help to explain why Pope Francis is highlighting the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, commonly called confession.

Pope Francis speaks very freely and he's quite straightforward in his teachings against pride and arrogance, isn't he? Have you noticed how people are drawn to him as he embraces for himself a life of humble approachability? He demonstrates in a very real way how to win the spiritual battle against despair – that cruelest of all the devil's lies. Pope Francis demonstrates hope in Jesus Christ as he lives his faith. He acknowledges how much Jesus has to offer in a world so filled with good possibilities, but so challenged by the distractions of daydreams dissolving into disillusionment.

Immersed in the life of his people, Pope Francis feels our strain in this daily struggle. He knows that unless there is a door that leads out of the confining darkness, the sense of defeat continues to weigh the spirit down. In the early days of his ministry, Pope Francis said that there is a door, a door that must open for going out as well as coming in. The door that opens for the Church to go out and engage the lost and

doubtful and despairing is the same door that opens for the one who comes in to seek a new beginning. It is the door that opens for the tired soul that is looking for a place to rest: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned..."

Confession is not easy, of course. Confronting your own sins, resolving to change, and admitting your faults before God and a priest is not easy, and the reluctance we feel beforehand is only natural. Undoubtedly that is why there are so many jokes about confession. Just like "whistling in the dark" we make jokes to deal with our own nervousness and fear, while on the other hand, offensive or blasphemous jokes often betray ignorance of the truth or reinforce a prejudice. But this most crucial moment has nothing to do with nervous jokes or cruel humor; this is a sacred sharing of a soul's journey to the Lord.

I remember that in one of my early priestly assignments we prepared the children for their first confession, and we also had six sessions for their parents. Adults learn

differently than children, of course, and so we spent time reading the Bible and sharing the Church's teaching about God and creation and the goodness that God's life is all about. And we read about Adam and Eve and talked about their original sin of arrogance and pride – the same sins Pope Francis is very straightforward about today!

We talked about the effects of sin on all human beings. And then we read about Jesus and his approachability and his way of forgiving and sending people off to a new beginning, set right with God. For five sessions we reminisced, and read, and talked. For the sixth session we had arranged several little offices for private confessions. We offered these men and women the opportunity right there, if they wanted, to go to confession themselves. We prayed and then said that they could come to the sacrament

## DAY OF RECONCILIATION

On Monday of Holy Week, Mar. 21, you are invited to join other Catholics in a statewide Day of Reconciliation. All parishes throughout the state will offer extended hours for the sacrament of penance and reconciliation on this day; please call your local church for specific details. A complete list of parishes can be found at [catholicnh.org](http://catholicnh.org).

or that they were free to leave. The confessions we heard were heartfelt unburdening of years of untold regret. Tears flowed freely and tissues were crumpled in strong and fervent hands as years melted away into the heart of God. At the end, words of gratitude



■ Bishop Peter A. Libasci is the Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Manchester.

## PASTORAL ASSIGNMENTS

Bishop Peter A. Libasci has made the following assignment:

■ **Father Charles H. Pawlowski** has been named pastor of St. Helena Parish, Enfield, and St. Mary Mission Church, Canaan, effective Jan. 9, 2016. This assignment is in addition to his position as pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, Lebanon. Father Johnny Vadakkan, M.S., has been recalled to ministry by his community in India.

■ **Father Michael S. Zgonc**, former parochial vicar of St. Elizabeth Seton Parish, Bedford, has been named priest-administrator of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish, Londonderry, effective Dec. 9, 2015.

■ **Father Brian Kennedy, CSs.R.**, former temporary administrator of St. Matthew Parish, Windham, has been named pastor of St. Matthew Parish, Windham, effective Sept. 17, 2015.

■ **Father Samuel Fuller, O.F.M., Cap.**, is a priest in residence at St. Anne-St. Augustine Parish, Manchester, and he is ministering with his Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters. This assignment was effective Aug. 1, 2015.

■ **Father Roger P. Bilodeau**, a retired priest of the Diocese of Manchester, has been assigned as confessor to the Sisters of the Precious Blood effective Nov. 6, 2015.

## DEACON ASSIGNMENTS

■ **Deacon Lee Abbot** has been assigned as temporary administrator of St. Mark Parish, Londonderry, effective Sept. 1, 2015.

■ **Deacon Richard Falardeau** has been assigned as temporary administrator of St. Mary Parish, Rochester, and St. Peter Parish, Farmington, effective Oct. 1, 2015.

■ **Deacon Frank Ottaviano**, a deacon new to the Diocese of Manchester, has been assigned to ministry at St. Anne-St. Augustine Parish, Manchester, effective Sept. 15, 2015.

■ **Deacon David Divins**, a deacon new to the diocese, has been assigned to ministry at Parish of the Assumption, Dover, effective Nov. 25, 2015.

■ **Deacon Kenneth Mayfield**, a deacon new to the diocese, has been assigned to ministry at Christ the King Parish, Concord, effective Nov. 25, 2015.

■ **Deacon John Turner**, a deacon new to the diocese, has been assigned to ministry at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Derry, effective Nov. 25, 2015.

such as, “I feel like a great big weight just came off my shoulders” were said over and over again. I will never forget its impact, year after year, for each new group.

And so with Pope Francis we come to understand a little bit more the reason for the Holy Year of Mercy

to be underscored with the sacrament of penance and the pope’s Missionaries of Mercy. During this year, I hope you will take an opportunity to receive the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, to open your heart and allow the Lord to fill it with his grace. ■



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