

The Gospel's Voice



Orthodox Parish of the Holy Transfiguration

Number 23, October 2017

THE MYSTERY OR SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE

The Lord Jesus is acting in the world today thanks to the Holy Spirit who makes the Church his Body. It is through the Church and through the work of the Holy Spirit that the Lord's forgiving and healing Hand reaches us: "*Receive the Holy Spirit,*" he had said on the day of His resurrection to His Apostles, "*those to whom you will forgive sins will be forgiven them*" (John 20: 22-23).

It is necessary that this forgiveness be desired and asked for; the parable of the prodigal son illustrates well the stages of this return from death to life (Luke 15/11-32):

1. The prodigal son "*returns to himself*" to see his falling away, and he takes the way back to the Father's House: it is conversion or "*metanoïa*".
2. He acknowledges his fault by saying: "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against You*": it is confession.
3. The Father who awaited him and who comes to meet him takes him in his arms without giving him time to finish his sentence: it is forgiveness.
4. The fattened calf is killed: it is the feast, the Eucharistic banquet.

It is up to us today to take the same steps:

1. THE METANOIA

It is an awareness, a sudden lucidity. The Greek word metanoïa means "*change of spirit*": it is an inner turning, a conversion, a discovery of its illness accompanied by a will to heal. The worst diseases are unknown. The metanoïa is a kind of awakening: "*Wake up, you who sleep; arise from the dead, and upon thee shall be Christ*" (Ephesians 5:14).

Sin is a state of lethargy, pre-death; repentance is the thirst for life, for living truly, for all the intensity of life that is in God. It is man's answer to the word of God Himself that is reported to us by the prophet Ezekiel: "*I do not want the sinner's death but become converted and live.*"

2. THE CONFESSION

When evil is done, the whole Body of Christ suffers, for "*if a member suffers, all the members suffer with it*" (1 Corinthians 12:26). When one sins, one does not only harm oneself but the whole Church. This is why the Apostle St. James tells us: "*Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed*" (James 5:16).

There are, in particular, three categories of sin which render man alien to God, and who from time immemorial have excluded from the Church the one who was faithful and who by one or other of these sins ceased to be so:

a) Apostasy, a sin against God

This fault consists in denying his Christ when, out of fear, one is ashamed to say that one is his disciple: "*He who denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father*" (Matthew 10:33). It was the fault of those who, in times of persecution, said they were no longer Christians; it is the fault of those who today, for fear of being "*badly seen*" by their unbelieving entourage, to follow the fashion of the day, to give the appearance of "*unbelievers*".

b) Murder, sin against people

It is not only the act of the one who kills but also of the one who hates "*for whoever hates his brother is a murderer,*" says the apostle John (1 John 3:15). To hate is to kill in spirit. The one who does not want to forgive but who "*molds*" in his rancor, commits the same fault. "*If you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your failings*" (Matthew 6:15). That is why St. Paul tells us, "*Never let the sun set on your grudge*" (Ephesians 4:26).

c) Fornication, sin against love and against oneself.

It is the search for carnal pleasure without love, without the definitive gift of oneself to the other; it is sin against the flesh (and not as some incorrectly say the sin of the flesh). It is the sin of him who "*sins against his own body*" (1 Corinthians 6:18), who sins against love, which in one way or another profanes love, love that is communion with God because God is Love (1 John 4:16). The one who profanes love rejects God, "*for God has not called us to impurity but to sanctification. Henceforth, who rejects this (that is, the sanctification of love), it is not a man whom he rejects, it is God, He who gives you the gift of his Holy Spirit*", (Thessalonians 4: 7-8) ... "*Glorify God in your body*" (1 Corinthians 6: 15-19).

Whoever has committed such faults must, after repenting, ask to be reinstated in the Body of Christ; it is necessary that this Body - the Church - accept to take it back in its midst, the

Assembly must forgive it. For this, the sinner must present himself to the Church and, acknowledging his fault, confess to the Assembly and the Church. That is why, in the early Church, confession was public. This, however, presented serious disadvantages as some could keep recollection of sins confessed and distrust the sinner even forgiven. The Assembly therefore delegated its president, bishop, or priest to receive the penitent and hear his confession.

Confession expresses the sincerity of repentance; it evokes the return of the prodigal son to the House of the Father. The priest who listens to him represents the Church, the suffering body of the whole Christ, the Assembly and his head the Christ: he is therefore only the humble witness.

3. FORGIVENESS OR ABSOLUTION

In order for the Assembly to reinstate its failing but repentant member, to reconcile it with both the other members and with their common Lord, it must transmit the forgiveness of Him who *"has power to forgive sins"* Christ, then, in the name of the Assembly, and in the name of Christ, the priest places his hand on his stole on the kneeling penitent's head, which represents the healing hand of Christ - *"All that you have said to my humble person ... may God forgive you in this world and in the next; that our Lord and God Jesus Christ, by the grace and abundance of His love for mankind, forgive you, my child, all your transgressions ... that the grace of the Holy Spirit holds you for loose and forgiven."*

It is absolution. The Holy Spirit, through the mystery of the Church, through the pardon of the assembly and its priest, has transmitted to the penitent forgiveness and healing of Christ. It is now *"whiter than snow"*. Saint Isaac the Syrian, a monk of the seventh century reminds us: *"A handful of sand in the immense sea is the sin of every man in comparison with the mercy of God"*. Another great monk of our century - he died in 1938, Silouane - said: *"Every man who has lost peace must repent and the Lord will forgive his sins. Then joy and peace shall reign in his soul,"* for he is reconciled with men and with God. Forgiveness is the reconciliation of man with his Lord, the restoration of the natural bond that makes the creature communicate with the Creator: *"It is God who in Christ reconciles the world, no longer taking into account of the faults of men and putting on our lips the word of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:19) ... *"The proof that God loves us is that Christ, while we were still sinners, died for us. If, being enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, will we be saved by His Life"* (Romans 5: 8-10). The forgiveness of God, through Jesus Christ, gives us the true life, deliver us from death. The forgiven sinner is once again a full member of the Body of Christ.

4. THE FESTIN

He can freely, as before, approach the Holy Mysteries, be in communion with the Body and Blood of Christ the Savior, drink from the Source of Living Water, and receive eternal life: the mystery of repentance leads to the mystery of the mystery, Eucharist; the sinner is healed and saved.

According to *Dieu est vivant*, Le Cerf, Paris, 2009, pp 362-366

Please note: Father IAN is our Confessor and he may receive your confession in the Church, at the beginning of the Liturgy.

Divine Liturgy

Every Sunday at 9.30 a.m.

Sunday October the 1st: St Ananias, Apostle and Martyr

Sunday the 8th: St Pelagia of Antioch

Sunday the 15th: The Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council

Sunday the 22nd: St Abercios, equal to the Apostles

Sunday the 29th: St Anastasia the Roman

Matins at 9.30 a.m. every week day.

The Orthodox Church of the Holy Transfiguration

Grande-Rivière N-O
Mauritius
(behind Garage BALA)

**Divine Liturgy every
Sunday
at 9.30 a.m.**

Web site:

<http://orthodoxchurchmauritius.org>

*Matins at 9.30 a.m. every
week day.*



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