

## RECONCILIATION AND REPARATION

(J.F.M.H. – 1.6.2017)

In the Old Testament the word reconciliation is the Hebrew word '*kapar*', (pronounced kaw-far'). The most commonly translated word for *kapar* is the English word atonement. When the word atonement is broken down to its historical parts (a-tone-ment) it means a condition without tension. When Christ died on the cross for us, He removed the tension between God and us. (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21) His shed blood, and reconciled the conflict between the Father and us. The Jewish Scribes well understood that only God could forgive sins, and questioned the point among themselves when Christ told the paralytic man who was let down through the roof. Christ said, "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" *Jesus showed that He had this power by saying to them "Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say "Rise, take up your bed and walk?" But that you might know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - He said to the paralytic- "I say to you, rise take up your bed and go home.' And he rose and immediately took up his bed and went out before them all; so they were all amazed and glorified God saying 'We never saw any thing like this.'* (Mark 2:5-12) That incident changed the situation between God and sinful human beings forever. Forgiveness of sins became a ministry of a son of Adam (the Son of Man). God, who alone forgives sin, begins to forgive in the Son of Man, His Son made flesh. Jesus the Son of Man continues this ministry through His Church in His anointed priests, empowered at ordination to forgive sins in His name.

Christ came on Earth to save mankind. He gave His Church that same task. However, if she was to fulfil that task in its entirety, not only was it necessary for the Church to preach the Gospels and Baptize, she also needed His power to forgive sins committed after Baptism. St. John tells us how this was done. After His Resurrection, Christ passed this power to His apostles, "*Receive you the Holy Spirit, whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained.*" (John XX. 22,23) They were given the power of retaining sins as well as forgiving them; they were to be judges. What they judged would be upheld in Heaven. That was a tremendous power. A power no Earthly King or legal system could ever give to the judges it appointed.

Baptism is the first justification we receive, with it all our sins are forgiven. It is also the point of entry into the realm of the supernatural which works entirely by God's grace, and which asks of the person baptized no more than that he turn away from sin and turn in faith to Christ. The sacrament of Reconciliation is different. A baptized person who sins again, sins against God, to whom since his baptism in the name of the Most Holy Name of the Trinity, he belongs. He also betrays the Church of which he is now a member. Thus the new atonement has in it the character of a legal trial, with accusation, sentence and satisfaction. Priests, with Christ's tremendous authority to forgive or retain sins, just like other legal judges given authority in legal matters, make their judgements according to a set of rules. They listen to the evidence before they make it, and before they pass sentence. The evidence includes a statement of the offence itself, and the fact that the person to be forgiven has contrition, that is sorrow for the sin committed and a firm purpose of not offending God again. Of course, one more thing is required, and that is that the person forgiven carries out the penance demanded of them by the priest. The Catechism of the Catholic Church Paragraph 2487 reminds us that **every offence against justice and truth entails the duty of reparation, even if its author has been forgiven.** This debt is paid either in this life or in the next. So it is as well we remind ourselves of our need to offer up reparation for our own sins and those of our fellow human beings. We do this through Christ at every Mass. The Church, with Christ's love for us and by virtue of the power of the keys, has also given us Indulgences, the remission of temporal punishment due to sins after they have been forgiven.

When Christ was hanging on the cross, one of the two thieves crucified with Him spoke to Jesus. "*We are getting what we deserve for what we did...Remember me, Jesus, when you come into your kingdom*" (Luke 23:40-42) Jesus in His love for all repentant sinners who turn to Him, replied, "*Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*" (Luke 23:43) The good thief by his confession became the first canonized saint. We don't know the name of the thief but he is normally called "Dismas" (a name which comes from the Greek word '*dysme*' meaning 'dying'). Christ's love for us as repentant sinners who confess their sins to Him through a priest is no less than it was for Dismas. Death and destruction are not of God, but of the Devil. It was the Devil who brought death into the world. He wills to reign in the hearts of men, bringing hatred into their hearts and turning them from the beauty of Love and Peace, of Joy and Truth. It was Jesus who taught us to say "*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" It is He who is the Eternal Victor as He demonstrated some 2000 years ago when He rose from the dead. He defeated Satan, sin and death on our behalf that all might come to the knowledge of Salvation. It is a sad scene on which we have

to look. No matter if we consider those who do not love Jesus or follow His teaching because they do not believe He is God the Son, or those who believe it yet claim to love Him and follow His teaching. If the sins of unbelievers strike us as the more startling and repulsive there is yet a greater formal want of love in the coldness of believers. We wound the heart of Jesus more keenly and acutely by our sins than those who do not believe. He can look on them with the forbearance of pity, rather as we look on someone who does not know what he is doing. But we who call Him Lord and are His own familiar friends, how deep are the wounds that we inflict upon Him! At Mass, how weary, distracted and irreverent we often are, though our faith tells us, that what we are witnessing is the same Sacrifice as if we stood with Our Lady and St. John at the foot of the Cross!

In a special way, reparation belongs to the poor. Christ Himself chose to identify with them. He was poor, lived a life of reparation, and redeemed the world as a pauper, when He might have chosen to do so as a King. Poverty suited Him. There was something conformable in it, to His infinite wisdom that He did not find in the wealthy. The rich suffer from a misfortune they, seem not to recognize. It is more difficult for them to get to heaven. However nothing is impossible to God so all is not lost, for them, or anyone else. All of us have a roll in life to serve God in this world, and be happy with Him forever in the next. For the wealthy, it is to be, like Christ, the servants of the poor. Immense is the reparation that can be made by the rich should they do this. It makes them welcome to Our Lord.

History, and unfortunately modern news, is full of examples of evil. Wars, acts of terror, kidnapping, and hijacking, the harming of others both morally and physically are all offences against both God and mankind. Some years ago one of our parishioners (Pierrette Plumridge, herself a person with experience of being interrogated by the S.S. during the war) told us of a note that showed how one victim of the Holocaust, recognising what was happening in a Concentration Camp as a grave offence against God, acted in the way of Christ, who prayed for His persecutors. *"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."* (Luke 23.34) The note was found beside the dead body of a girl at Ravensbruck. It read *"Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill will. Do not remember all the sufferings they have inflicted upon us; remember the fruits we bear, thanks to this suffering - our comradeship, courage, generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this. And when they come to judgement, let all that we have suffered be their forgiveness."* Such examples of loving can occur in every age and nation, so too do acts of reparation and reconciliation. The Devil has existed in all ages of man; and God the Son who is infinitely loving has not only shown us the way we should act, but taught us to pray, *"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."*