



From A Bishop's Journal (775)

“To Learn Anew the Benefit of Individual Confession” (3)

It would serve no purpose to blame pope John Paul II for having ended the practice of collective absolution and keeping it only for exceptional situations, and having brought us back to individual confession. Divine forgiveness is much greater than anything we can imagine or do to receive it. Divine forgiveness surpasses the blessings everything a human being could do to obtain it. I would like to quote, here, from the Song of Songs: “Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked.” It is not by what we must do that matters in receiving forgiveness, but by discovering the unfailing goodness of the God of all kindness for all humans and in a very special way, for every sinner who has broken the covenant existing between God and our brothers and sisters.

Discovering Justice

Individual or community celebrations of forgiveness can help us measure the seriousness of our actions. I have discovered a prayer of an international organisation for solidarity and development, that could help us root our penitential act and help us become aware of all those bonds that unite us to God, to the cosmos, and to humankind. It is a guidepost along the path to justice: “Creator God, you hold the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains in your hands, because all creation is yours. Give us the grace to cherish this world of yours, and the wisdom to take care of its riches. Keep us from wanting to control what belongs to others, and from longing to possess what is of the common good. Help us discern the abuses of power, and give us the courage to speak out when the truth is spurned. Protect us from self-satisfaction in the face of arrogant destruction and arouse in us sacred anger where the fires of war are kindled through envy. Give us a heart of gold so we can face suffering with compassion, and an iron will to forcefully denounce injustice. Guide our every step to you; help us find new paths so that friends and strangers together, we discover justice and find the treasure of the Eternal.”

Exercise in Trust

We are not always at the point of having every individual confession resemble a dialogue between husband and wife! So much reserve holds us back. It is much more an “act of faith” than an “act of

love” that seems to be at the root of the penitential encounter. Still, when we consider it seriously, the individual approach can be a personal response to a personal undertaking by God on our behalf. It is such a grace to discover forgiveness as a particular sign of Jesus’ friendship, and to understand that Jesus came to us to reveal and carry out the Father’s dream, that God loves us and wants us to be happy. It is so good to discover the words and actions Jesus used to reveal and carry out the Father’s dream to gather the whole world together in love. It is so good to learn how to perform acts of reconciliation. The catechetical programme on the sacrament of forgiveness is an excellent tool to make us rediscover the sense of forgiveness, and it is a welcome “instrument” to rekindle our hope in the divine mercy.

Today... at Your House!

The Gospel story of Zacchaeus is always timely. Zacchaeus lives in Jericho, and earns his living as a tax collector. But Zacchaeus is a thief, he often demands too much money of his clients, and he pockets the difference. Needless to say that the people despise him. He is pointed out on the street, because of his evil way. One day, news is spread that Jesus will be coming through Jericho. Zacchaeus decides that he will not miss seeing the man everyone is talking about. Since he is short, Zacchaeus climbs a tree in order to see what is going on. “Anyhow,” he says to himself, “Jesus doesn’t know me.” He ignores that he is like a lost sheep that the good shepherd is looking for. The crowd flows on... and on... and on. Suddenly, Jesus stops under the tree, looks up, and says: “Come down, Zacchaeus, I mean to stay at your house today.” – “It is Jesus calling me, and he wants to come to my house. What an honour!” Without hesitating, Zacchaeus climbs down from the tree and welcomes Jesus to his home. The door is joyfully swung open, and with Jesus the light of God enters his house and especially his heart. He discovered that Jesus does not reject him because of all the many bad things he has done. This is such good news! Who cares about those who laugh at him. “He has gone to a sinner’s house as a guest.”

A New Man

As he looks at Jesus, Zacchaeus realises that causing harm to others is bad. It is as if a blindfold had fallen from his eyes, and for the first time he sees himself as God sees him, with kindness and love. He believed in Jesus and decided that he wanted to set himself right. “Because of Jesus, I cannot keep this stolen money,” he tells himself. “I have to give back what I have stolen. If I have defrauded anyone in the least, I pay him back four-fold. Now Jesus will be my friend, and I want to follow everything he asks.” And now, Jesus had transformed him and Zacchaeus became a new man. Jesus came to save what was lost, Zacchaeus was glad to open his door and, with Jesus, the light of God penetrated into his house. Zacchaeus wanted to set his life in order, and he became a new man. Jesus transformed him.

Come and Save Us

The [French] hymn *Viens nous sauver* [“Come and Save Us”] is a fitting conclusion to our reflection on God’s forgiveness: “Lord, come and save us. You know us and love us. Come and save us. Look

at us, Lord: you see our sins; look at us, Lord, and forgive us. Why hide your face? Why turn away, Lord? To whom would we go? Come, Lord, rise up, and we shall be saved; come, Lord, rise up and deliver us from your anger. You shall welcome us. To whom shall we go?"

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