



RECONCILIATION

**To all the Priests, Ministers of Forgiveness and Reconciliation
To all my Brothers and Sisters of the Church at Edmundston,**

Since April of 2002, in his Apostolic letter *Misericordia Dei*, Pope John Paul II called on us to revise our way of celebrating forgiveness in our Churches. He recalled the general discipline of the sacrament: "Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church" (a). This general rule helps us understand the exceptional character of absolution given to a group of the faithful without prior individual confession.

When I became bishop in 2003 I witnessed the work done by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, concluding with the publication of the Decree of January 30, 2008, which makes it practically impossible to continue our practice of general absolution. In our own Province, the dioceses of Moncton and Bathurst have already stopped the practice of this form of celebrating Reconciliation.

To allow us to explore the possibilities we now have concerning the celebration of Reconciliation and Forgiveness, I invited Father Raymond Vaillancourt, C.J.M., provincial of the Eudist Fathers and a specialist in sacramental theology, to facilitate a session where together we could deepen the question further. This session was held at the Diocesan Centre November 3.

We were reminded about the richness of our community celebrations of forgiveness, these past decades. It is essential for us to keep these community celebrations of forgiveness that have such a great value as an undertaking of forgiveness and conversion.

In the *Ordo (Liturgical Calendar)*, p. 139, we read that at the beginning of Lent "A well-prepared Bible service can lead people to repentance and forgiveness. While such a service may be celebrated at any time during Lent, it is particularly recommended in each parish and community at the beginning of the season and during the two weeks before Easter. Coming at the end of lent, this celebration signifies a new return of the faithful toward God and toward one another in the love and pardon of the Lord Jesus." This celebration could even be held on Ash Wednesday which is a reminder to one and all that the blessing and receiving of ashes is a penitential celebration of forgiveness.

Insistence should be put on the penitential undertaking as a call to conversion, a call to reconciliation with God, with oneself, with others and with creation. In this spirit it would be well to read the responses to the Gospel call that are suggested in the *Rite of Penance* (CCCB, 1975, pp. 19-20):

1. Mutual forgiveness takes many and diverse forms;
2. Sharing and different kinds of mutual aid, as well as a sincere effort to curb one's selfishness;
3. Refusal of injustice and fighting for greater justice in our interpersonal and social relationships;
4. Apostolic commitment, which supposes a spirit of service and of gift of self;
5. Prayer, a sign of hope in the future that God opens up to us, beyond our breaks and confrontations.

For those who feel the need for it, they could be offered the possibility of an individual meeting with the priest at the end of the community celebration, or during the following weeks of Advent or Lent.

I hope that all our Christian communities realise that the love of God is so great that he forgives each time that we sincerely ask him: He remains for ever our Father of mercy and kindness.

May the Spirit of the Risen Christ help us celebrate Forgiveness and Reconciliation according to the forms that the Church offers us.

+ Claude Champagne, O.M.I.
Bishop of Edmundston

November 16, 2009