

Trinity VI (7 July 2024)

“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother...”

In the Name...

When I was a child, I doubt I knew the word “reconciliation”. Everyone knew what “confession” was: I grew up in a nominally Methodist household, but Hollywood has made sure everyone knows what confession is: you kneel in the box and tell the priest your deepest, darkest, secrets. Ironically, the Roman Church has moved away from using the term “confession”, replacing it with the word “reconciliation” when referring to the Sacrament. Their argument is that the emphasis should not be placed on the negative (“Oh, Lord, I am so awful.”), but on the positive: “Oh Lord, thank you for making me whole.”

The truth is, we cannot have one without the other! There is no reconciliation without confession first, just as there is no Easter without Good Friday. But Our Lord is speaking very pointedly here: this is not, “Oh, go to confession at Lent, on your deathbed, or whenever you find it convenient.” This is, “Take care of this before you receive the Body and Blood of Christ”! That is how seriously the Early Church took receiving the Holy Communion while not being in a state of sin! Sin is a word modern Christians don’t like to talk about. I am convinced that many 21st century Christians do not believe that sin exists, or if it does, it only exists in classes of people who they are not!

The only way for the Church to grow, and by that I mean both the Church Catholic, but also our parish, is to repent of our sins. Repentance is what Christ taught. He never said to blame others for all eternity. Each one of us has to take responsibility for our own sins. There are three parts to reconciliation: repentance, confession, and amendment.

Repentance is when we decide that we have committed a sin. This seems like it should be obvious, but it may not be. Sometimes we think we are justified in a particular sin we choose. Other times we might know intellectually that something is a sin, but we are just not ready to excise it from our lives.

The second step is Confession. This can be sacramental confession, when we tell it to a priest, but it does not have to be. As Anglicans, we have a general confession built into our mass. This is why I wait a moment after the invitation to confession before I start our General Confession. It is not enough time for you to do a proper examination of conscience, but hopefully it is enough time to recall something important that you have previously decided you want to confess to God. As far as sacramental confession, Anglicans live by the philosophy “that all may, some should, none must”. If there is something particularly egregious in your life where you would like help from the Church by way of Her priest, you might consider sacramental confession.

It is why our priests generally give some words of advice or counsel, and do not just throw five Hail Marys at you and send you on your way.

Finally, amendment: this is where you decide that you are going to change your life and not commit the same sin again. Obviously, there is the chance that one will slip up, but the intention has to be there to change one's life. We should not confess a sin just long enough to be forgiven today if we intend to commit the exact same sin again tomorrow.

It is a great privilege to receive the Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but one that some people get very lackadaisical about. I invite you to take it with the seriousness that Our Lord, the Creator of all things, deserves.

+In the Name...