

March 29, 2009

God is love. God created us because of His love and He has destined each of us to participate in His life and love now, to share His love with others, and to live forever in a blessed union with the Trinity and with each other.

Sin pulls us away from God's plan that we share His life and love now and live in loving communion with one another. Sin pulls us into the loneliness of isolation.

We could say that we live in a tension. We each desire the peace, joy, and serenity that come from communion with God and each other. Yet, we often find ourselves pulled in another direction, into attitudes and actions that destroy our communion with God and each other.

St. Paul described the tension within us this way: "I cannot even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do but what I hate. The desire to do right is there but not the power. What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend. My inner self agrees with the law of God, but I see in my body's members another law at war with the law of my mind; this makes me the prisoner of the law of sin in my members" (Rom 7:15-23).

If we are to grow in the love of God and of one another, it is helpful for us to understand our inner tensions. We need to acknowledge that we have within ourselves attitudes, habits, weaknesses, and sins that need the mercy and healing of God. We need to bring to Jesus, not only our sinful actions, but also our attitudes of mind and habits of heart that are in need of His healing touch. The Sacrament of Penance is the privileged place in which we cry out to Jesus, the Divine Physician, for forgiveness and healing.

**“If we say ‘We are free of the guilt of sin,’ we deceive ourselves; the truth is not to be found in us. But if we acknowledge our sins, He who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong” (1 Jn 1:8-9).**

**In Hebrew, Jesus’ name means: “God saves.” His name expresses both His identity and His mission. Since God alone can forgive sins, it is God who, in Jesus, His Eternal Son made man, saves us from our sins. In His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, Jesus conquered sin and death and became the source of forgiveness and ultimate healing for all.**

**During His lifetime, Jesus gave the apostles authority over unclean spirits and power to cure diseases. After His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to the apostles and said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Jesus breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (Jn 20:21-23).**

**Through the bishops, the successors of the apostles, and the priests whom they ordain, Jesus continues to extend His healing and forgiveness in our time and place. We confess our sins, express our sorrow, and receive peace and reconciliation through the words of absolution.**

**During this coming fifth week of Lent, most parishes will arrange for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance whereby the faithful come together to reflect upon God’s Word, express their penitence, and confess their sins to any of the number of priests who are available to convey the mercy and forgiveness of Jesus, Our Savior. I invite you to use these opportunities to experience the depth of God’s healing love for you. Experience the joy and peace of communion with our loving God and communion with one another in the Lord.**