

Teachings of the Ordinary Magisterium – *Sacramental Guidelines* – Kenan Osborne – pp. 104-105

The Sacrament of Holy Reconciliation.

There are several main documents which present the teachings of the ordinary magisterium on the sacrament of reconciliation. The primary document is, of course, the revised ritual for this sacrament, with its three liturgical forms and a fourth form to be used in the emergency of death. There are also other documents: (1) *Normae Pastorales: Sacramentum paenitentiae*, issued by the Sacred Congregation of the Faith [1972], a document which provides norms for general absolution; (2) a letter from the same congregation [Jan. 14, 1977] to the bishops of the United States, with additional comments on the pastoral norms for general absolution; (3) a joint declaration from two congregations, the Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments and the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, *Sanctus Pontifex*, which discusses first reconciliation prior to first Eucharist; (4) a clarification on first reconciliation, *In quibusdam Ecclesiae partibus*, which the two congregations sent to the bishops of the United States; and (5) *Omnis utriusque* of Lateran IV, with its regulation for annual confession. All of these documents contain certain aspects of the ordinary magisterium. Finally, the revised code of canon law has a section on the sacrament of reconciliation, with a variety of canons. This, too, is part of the ordinary magisterium.

These documents do not exhaust the material of the ordinary magisterium on the issue of the sacrament of penance. Of major importance are those parts of the Vatican II documents which set up norms for sacramental celebrations. These norms were cited above in the section of sacraments in general, but they apply with vigor to the celebration of this sacrament. A major norm was this: communal celebration of the sacraments is preferred to more private celebrations. This conciliar norm, however, has been juxtaposed with almost an opposing regulation by the ordinary magisterium which time and again stresses “private” confessions.

Religious education teachers must continually realize that all the above documents are ordinary magisterium, that is, they are official documents, but they do not *per se* represent any immutable teachings of the church. Immutable teachings might be included in these documents, but the documents themselves are official, but changeable. The changeable material in these documents should be presented to religious education students as official, but changeable.

Recognize Sin – Praise God’s Mercy – U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults – pp. 242-243**RECOGNIZE SIN—PRAISE GOD’S MERCY**

The Sacrament of Penance is an experience of the gift of God’s bound-less mercy. Not only does it free us from our sins but it also challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and forgiveness for those who sin against us. We are liberated to be forgivers. We obtain new insight into the words of the Prayer of St. Francis: “It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.”

By the help of God’s grace, our call to holiness will be clearer when we recover an awareness of the reality of sin and evil in the world and in our own souls. Scripture will be enormously helpful in this since it reveals sin and evil clearly and fearlessly. Scriptural realism does not hesitate to pronounce judgment on the good and evil that affects our lives. The New Testament is filled with calls to conversion and repentance, which need to be heard in our culture today.

If we say, “We are without sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong-doing. (*1 John 1:8-9*)

In our churches, we behold Jesus nailed to the Cross, an image that reminds us of his painful sacrifice to bring about the forgiveness of all our sins and guilt. If there were no sin, Jesus would not have suffered for our redemption. Each time we see the crucifix, we can reflect on the infinite mercy of God, who saves us through the reconciling act of Jesus.

Despite society's efforts to downplay the reality of sin, there is an instinctive recognition of its existence. Children generally know, even when not told, when they have done something morally wrong. Adults readily admit the evil of terrorism, unjust war, lies, unfair treatment of people, and similar matters. Society as a whole must also learn to admit the evil of abortion, physician-assisted suicide, and obtaining stem cells from embryos, which results in the death of embryonic human life. Denying evil corrupts us spiritually and psychologically. Rationalizing our own evil is even more destructive.

Jesus laid the foundation for the Sacrament of Penance during his ministry and confirmed it after his Resurrection. When Peter asked the number of times a person should forgive, Jesus told him that there should be no limit to forgiving. Jesus forgave Peter his triple denial, showed mercy to the woman taken in adultery, forgave the thief on the cross, and continually witnessed the mercy of God.

Jesus entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Church. The Sacrament of Penance is God's gift to us so that any sin committed after Baptism can be forgiven. In confession we have the opportunity to repent and recover the grace of friendship with God. It is a holy moment in which we place ourselves in his presence and honestly acknowledge our sins, especially mortal sins. With absolution, we are reconciled to God and the Church. The Sacrament helps us stay close to the truth that we cannot live without God. "In him we live and move and have our being" (*Acts 17:28*). While all the Sacraments bring us an experience of the mercy that comes from Christ's dying and rising, it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation that is the unique Sacrament of mercy.

God is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*) – Pope Benedict XVI – Paragraph 25.b

The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time caritas- agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter "by chance" (cf. *Luke 10:31*), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the Letter to the Galatians is emphatic: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (*Galatians 6:10*).