

# Repent and Believe in the Gospel

*Paenitemini et Credite Evangelio*



*A collection of Lenten meditations  
for the people of God of Kokomo, Indiana  
on the healing and life-giving Sacrament of Reconciliation*

**Fr. Ted Dudzinski, Pastor  
Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Church  
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Ash Wednesday  
March 9, 2011**



## “Love Always Means Having to Say You’re Sorry”

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

### **Lent: A Call to True Love!**

*We adore You, O Christ, and we praise You, because by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world.*

“Love always means having to say you’re sorry.” Lent is a time for us to honestly confront our sins. In the Gospel of Mark (1:15), we are reminded of the words of Jesus: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*” It is not easy to develop this ability to say we are sorry and to believe that we will be forgiven as Jesus desires, especially as members of a culture and society that speaks a language and espouses a philosophy of life which is so completely different from our Christian way of life. Take for instance this line from the novel and 1970 film *Love Story* starring Ali MacGraw and Ryan O’Neal: “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” John Lennon comes closer to getting it right when he sings, “Love means having to say you’re sorry every fifteen minutes.” In following the way of Our Lord Jesus, the proper approach is, “Love always means having to say you’re sorry.” This is the reason Jesus came into the world – to make atonement for our sins and give us the means to tell our heavenly Father that we are sorry for our sins.

Sometimes we do not feel like we are making any progress in our relationship with God. This is not a very good place to find ourselves in. Of course, Our Lord does not want us living in the past, torturing ourselves endlessly over old sins. In fact, if we do not accept the Gospel or God’s forgiveness, that is a subtle form of pride. But honestly facing up to the wrong we have done and having real contrition for that wrong is healthy and very necessary. In fact, it is something that should grow over time as we grow in love of God. It is important to note that our love will grow and our relationship with God will get stronger after the tragedy of our sin, but it takes humility and sorrow on our part for us to open ourselves to God’s love.

Meanwhile, our own lives fall apart as a casualty of our unconfessed sin. That is how it is with sins: even when we look upon them closely, we always fail to fully realize their harmful effects on us and others.

What makes saints different is not that they never sin, but that they understand and experience the love of God in their lives so much that they see how wrong their sins are because they, more than anyone else, realize that sin is ultimately refusing God’s great love for us. St. Paul, for instance, never forgot how he had persecuted Christ and the Church. The saints work to

be faithful to the Lord in everything, unwilling to reject God's love and thus offend this loving and merciful God who they have finally come to know, love and serve.

If you are ever tempted to think your sins do not affect God, think of Jesus on the Cross. His love has been there always, even when we do not always feel it.

Lent is a time for us to honestly confront our sins. It is not easy to develop this ability. But Lent can help us start this habit which should develop as we grow in our love of God. Since "love always means having to say you're sorry," this should be the truest with God, who is the very author of love. To this end, it was my desire to write a collection of daily meditations for you this Lenten season. The meditations are short and accessible to all. The meditations flow from a perspective that knows the love, joy and healing power of the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation both as a Confessor and as a penitent (repentant sinner) who out of love desires to say he is sorry (confess sins), while seeking the forgiving and healing love of our heavenly Father, the Father of Mercies!

I pray that as you read the following pages of this collection of Lenten mediations, you will allow the *"Holy Spirit to teach you everything and remind you of all that Jesus told you."* Jesus promises us, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid"* (John 14:25-27).

To all who read this collection, may your questions be answered, may your love for God grow and become true, and may God bless you abundantly and give you His peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Ted Dudzinski". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Rev. Fr. Ted Dudzinski  
Pastor  
St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church  
St. Patrick Catholic Church

# Twenty-Six Lenten Meditations (Ash Wednesday to Laetare Sunday)

## **Introduction**

Each Ash Wednesday, we are reminded of the three pillars of the spiritual life – prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. All three of these things aim at helping us have an authentic conversion of heart – a conversion in which we turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel. In prayer especially, we come to know who God is, who we are as His creatures, and how we must transform our lives to be in conformity with His will. In prayer, we also become aware of the ways that we have not been faithful to His will and of the need to beg for His forgiveness and mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In short, prayer is instrumental if we are to fully appreciate the gift of this Sacrament. It is so easy to take this Sacrament for granted. In an effort to help you enter into prayer and approach this Sacrament of mercy as we embark on our Lenten journey, I wish to share with you the fruits of my own meditation on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is my hope that you will incorporate these meditations into your prayer life during these first days of Lent so that you might intimately encounter the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. If it has been a while since you have last gone to confession, I pray that these meditations will help you approach your heavenly Father who loves you. If you go sporadically, I pray that these meditations will help you see how Christ wishes to give you the graces necessary to overcome sin in your life by frequently encountering Him in the Sacrament. And if you already have incorporated regular reception of the Sacrament into your spiritual life, I pray that these meditations help you to come to an even greater appreciation of God’s great love and mercy. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, Christ wants us to turn to Him. May these meditations nourish you as we enter this penitential season.

Meditation is one of the three expressions of prayer (vocal prayer and contemplation are the others). It is a prayer that all of us are capable of – priests and laity alike. Meditation is so important to include in our prayer lives that the Catechism says, “Christians owe to themselves to develop the desire to meditate regularly” (CCC 2707). In meditation, we use God’s gift of reason to consider what the Church teaches and what God’s will is for us in light of that teaching. It is not meant to be merely an intellectual exercise; rather, it should be an expression of faith seeking understanding so that we might be more faithful to God’s will. It must lead us to a conversation with God in which we ask Him to make His will known and to give us His grace so that we might embrace and do His will – not just out of obligation, but out of love. I invite you to use these meditations to come to a greater understanding of the Church’s teaching on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to consider how those teachings should impact your life. As you pray them each day, enter deeply into your conversation with Christ and ask Him to help you and to motivate your heart to accept His will for your life. As well, if you are willing to commit

yourself to at least 15 minutes of meditation on these themes each day, you will find that you will be developing a habit of prayer that will enrich your life way beyond this Lenten season. As your pastor, I am presenting you with the tools that you need to go deeper in the spiritual life, to develop a habit of prayer, and to foster a greater devotion to the Sacrament of God's forgiveness and mercy.

For those of you who are experienced with meditation, I invite you to dive right in to the first day's meditation. If you have never done meditation before, that should not be an obstacle: I will provide you with step-by-step instructions to guide you as you develop the habit of prayer. At first, the steps may seem too mechanical, but as you grow in your prayer life, you will see that the structure is very freeing, and that once you have an understanding of the basics, the Holy Spirit will guide you in adjusting the structure to fit your own specific spirituality and circumstances.

STEP 1: Set aside the specific time that you will spend in meditation each day and then stay faithful to it; be reluctant to let other things take precedence in your life.

STEP 2: Identify a location that is quiet and free from distraction. We bring plenty of internal distractions; there is no need to add others by having the radio/TV/computer on while we pray. The advice of the Gospel still applies: "When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (Matthew 6:6).

STEP 3: Ask the Holy Spirit to assist you, since we do not know how to pray as we ought. The Catechism reminds us: "The Church invites us to call upon the Holy Spirit every day, especially at the beginning and the end of every important action" (CCC 2670). You can address the Holy Spirit in your own words or you can take advantage of rote prayers like "Come Holy Spirit" (included in the appendix). If you use a rote prayer, be sure to consider the words that you are saying and make them a true expression of what is in your heart.

STEP 4: Take a moment to acknowledge God's presence. He is always present, but by slowing down and acknowledging that fact, we are greatly helped in our prayer. By acknowledging that He is present and that He wishes to speak to me in this time of prayer, I can start to open up my ears and heart to be more attentive to whatever it is He may ask of me.

STEP 5: Make acts of faith, hope, and charity. At the beginning, these may take the form of rote prayers (also included in the appendix), but over time you may develop your own words to express the workings of these theological virtues in your heart. These three acts help to soften our heart to be more receptive to God's will. By exercising our faith, we come to realize what a great gift it is that God wishes to reveal Himself and His will to us in this time of prayer. By exercising our hope, we acknowledge that God is our supreme good, and as a result, we learn to value this time alone with Him above everything else. Through it, we also develop our trust in Him, that through this prayer, He will show us what is in our best interest, even if we don't feel

like that at the time. We will also learn to trust Him more – that He will give us all the graces necessary to do whatever He will ask of us, if only we would ask Him and cooperate with that grace. Finally, by exercising our love, we will be reminded that we are speaking with Our Father who loves us. As well, we will be more willing to follow through on the sacrifices that God may ask of us in our prayer, because we will be doing them for someone we love. As Saint Paul says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that one has died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14)

STEP 6: Slowly read through the Bible passage for that day. Do not rush. If the Holy Spirit leads you to stop on a certain word or phrase, follow His lead before moving on to the points.

STEP 7: Read through the first point. The material and questions in the first point are there simply to start your conversation with God about the topic. Do not just answer the questions using your own reason; speak with God about what He thinks. In addition to the questions contained in the point, ask yourself additional questions like:

- What is the Lord trying to tell me in this passage?
- Are there certain things in the reading that really resonate in my heart?
- What is God saying about how I should live my life in light of the reading?
- Have I lived my life in accordance with God’s will in this area thus far?
- What things might I have to change in my life so as to be in God’s will for me?
- What difficulties will I have to overcome?
- What means do I need to use to do so?
- Are there other things of my life that I will also have to change in order to make it easier to be faithful to God’s will?

STEP 8: As God places things on your heart, speak with Him about those things. If you are struggling with something He might be asking you to do, speak with Him about that and ask Him for His grace to help you understand better, to help you desire what He desires, and to help you persevere in whatever He may be asking of you. Thank Him for revealing His will to you. Commit yourself to following what He asks of you with your whole heart, mind, and soul.

STEP 9: Continue in the same way, going through the two or three points. If the Holy Spirit is focusing all your attention on one of the points, it is not necessary to split the time evenly between the points or even to get to the second point if you are still getting fruit out of the first point. Do not move on until you are no longer drawing fruit out of a point.

STEP 10: Write down one or two concrete resolutions (specific and measurable that you will do in the next day or so). They should be a direct fruit of your prayer and something that you can evaluate when you do your conscience examination before going to bed. Thank God for

making this known to you. Again, ask for His grace that you might persevere in this resolution, and beg pardon for the times you might have been negligent during this prayer.

NOTE: All Scripture passages are taken from the Ignatius Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version-Catholic Edition. If you prefer a different translation, feel free to refer to your Bible before moving on to consideration of the points. Just be aware that the points may be somewhat dependent upon the specific wording of the Scripture passage.

## **Meditation #1, Ash Wednesday**

The Miserere (Psalm 51:1-19)

*Have mercy on me, O God according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which thou hast broken rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance. O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on thy altar.*

**Point #1:** David asks the Lord to wash him **thoroughly**, or, in other words, to completely change him and to leave no traces of his former sin. Likewise, he asks for a **new** and **right** spirit. How many times do I go to confession trying to hold on to some aspect of the sin? How many

times do I really have no intention of changing/amending my life? Obviously, the answer is not to *avoid* going to Confession. When I feel this way, have I asked God to touch my heart and help me desire to change? What things can I do that might be helpful in motivating my will to change, even when I do not feel like it? David realizes that the Lord desires **truth** in our inward being. How can I be more consistent so that my thoughts, my words, and my deeds all express the desire to *permanently* turn away from these things that are contrary to God's will?

**Point #2:** The psalmist emphasizes, "For I know my transgressions". David awareness of his sinfulness with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11 &12) was the starting point for his repentance which he expresses in this psalm. Until Nathan helped David to reflect upon his own sinfulness, David was blind to the evil that he had done. How important is a daily examination of conscience to advancing in the spiritual life? How much more sensitive would my conscience be to ways I offend God if I examine my conscience daily and not just immediately before going to Confession? How does self-knowledge, particularly an awareness of my weaknesses and the areas that I tend to sin, actually help me to avoid near occasions of sin and to put in place extra lines of defense to avoid falling into sin? Humility is seeing in truth – do I humbly acknowledge my sinfulness before God or do I act like it is no big deal or that I have not sinned at all?

**Point #3:** After acknowledging his sinfulness, David turns to God, saying, "Uphold me with a willing spirit." He realized that he could not be faithful to his resolutions merely by his own efforts. He needed God's grace in order to persevere. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we not only receive forgiveness of our sins, but we also receive the particular graces we need to avoid those sins in the future. At the same time, we must have that **willing spirit** because God will not impose Himself upon us. Do I recognize the importance of Reconciliation in overcoming my habits of sin? Do I ask God for the grace to avoid those sins which I have confessed? Do I realize how dependent I am upon God's grace for growth in the spiritual life? If I find myself confessing the same thing every time I go to Confession, have I examined how well I have relied on God's grace instead of just my own efforts?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #2, Thursday after Ash Wednesday**

Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10)

*He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to the him, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he made haste and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

**Point #1:** When Zacchaeus finally encountered the Lord and acknowledged his sinfulness, he realized that his sins not only impacted his relationship with God, but that he had also hurt his fellow men. He knew that being right with God also required making restitution to those he had harmed due to his sin, which is why he resolved to give them half of his goods and restore their losses fourfold. Do I see how the penance that the priest gives me helps me to make this restitution? How does reception of the Sacrament help me to reconcile with those whom I have hurt through my sin? Do I truly try to make amends for my sins or do I approach the Sacrament merely to avoid the punishment due to my sin? Do I understand how these acts of restitution also indicate the sincerity of my contrition and purpose of amendment – that they are the “fruits that befit repentance” that we hear John the Baptist demanding of the Pharisees who approached him for a baptism of repentance?

**Point #2:** “And he **sought** to see who Jesus was.” In the beginning of this passage we hear of Zacchaeus’ desire to encounter Christ. Would he ever have reached the point of reconciliation and salvation coming to his house if he was not filled with that desire to see Christ, willing to do anything, including climbing a tree and fighting the crowd, in order to see Jesus? Do I have that same desire to encounter Jesus in the Sacrament? Do I go “only because I have to” or have I fostered a desire for that encounter in my heart? What sort of things can I do to increase that desire? Is my desire to encounter Christ strong enough to help me overcome the obstacles (busyness, laziness, pride, fear, etc.) that try to hinder me from that encounter?

**Point #3:** In addition to discouraging us from being reconciled to God out of a sense of shame, Satan repeats the lie that we have an unlimited amount of time to turn back whenever it is

convenient for us. The longer he can cause us to procrastinate in approaching the Sacrament, the further he can lead us away from God. In this Gospel, we hear Jesus showing the importance of not delaying our conversion, “**Make haste** and come down”. If I have been in the state of mortal sin, have I made getting to Confession a priority in my life, even if it meant adjusting my schedule to not delay my encounter with Christ? How has Satan led me even further away from reconciliation with God when I have delayed going to the Sacrament? How can a regularly scheduled confession (perhaps every other Saturday morning or the first Thursday of each month, etc.) help me avoid this procrastination?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

### **Meditation #3, Friday after Ash Wednesday**

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24)

*There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry.*

**Point #1:** Before returning to his father, the Prodigal Son probably experienced many of the same feelings that we experience before we go to Confession. Surely, he must have been

embarrassed (rooted more in his pride than in the truth that he was still his father's son). How could he go back after burning his bridges so completely? How can I go back after I have severed my relationship with God by committing mortal sin? For the Prodigal Son, how could he possibly return to his father when it had been so long since he had left – maybe his father would have taken him back if he had returned to him right away, but surely not now? It's been so long since I have gone to Confession that I do not even know how to do it – maybe I could have done it a while ago, but it would be too embarrassing now! How could the Prodigal Son return after he had committed what he thought to be an unforgiveable sin – not only squandering the inheritance on loose living, but essentially denouncing his Jewish faith by associating himself with the pigs? How can I return to the Father when I have committed such atrocious sins, perhaps even leaving the Church for a while? Yet, despite all this embarrassment that the Prodigal Son had contrived in his own mind, the truth was that the father never desired to belittle him in any way; he simply waited for him to return. How can I overcome my own self-inflicted feelings of embarrassment to embrace the truth of God's love for me and my identity as His son or daughter?

**Point #2:** We hear that the father in the parable **ran to** his son and saw him while he was still **at a distance**. Even though it had been a long time since his son had left, the father was still watching and waiting for his son to return. He was not waiting in order to gloat when his son finally returned or to scold him for his foolishness. Rather, he anticipated his son's return, looking for the opportunity to embrace and kiss him and restore him to his full dignity as a son. Likewise, God lovingly waits for our return, as do His priests who spend many hours in the confessional. Like the father in the parable who never stopped looking for his son even though day after day passed with no apparent result, the priest wants to be available when we finally do come to our senses, even if that means lots of time in the confessional when no one takes advantage of the Sacrament. Do I realize how much God desires me to return to him? Am I aware of the great love that our priests have for me personally as one of their lost sheep? Have I ever been afraid to go to Confession because I was afraid of the gloating and scolding that I expected from the priest? When I actually went, how did that expectation compare with God's great love that I *actually* experienced? How have I experienced God's love for me in the Sacrament?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #4, Saturday after Ash Wednesday**

The Adulterous Woman (John 8:3-12)

*The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in their midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

**Point #1:** What must have been going on in the woman's head as she saw all of her accusers walk away? Do you think she saw it as permission to return to her adulterous ways? Of course not! Yet how often do I avoid going to confession because I know that the priest will tell me that I need to stop doing whatever sin I might have confessed? Even if I do go to the Sacrament, what sort of rationalizations do I make? Do I secretly hope the priest doesn't give me too much advice in addition to my penance because I could no longer feign ignorance about what I needed to do to root out the sin? After going to Confession, am I still searching for some way to stay on "God's good side" while continuing to experience the (false) pleasure of sin? Christ tells the woman, "Neither do I condemn you; go, **and do not sin again.**" Have I come to the understanding (as expressed in Catechism #1431) that true repentance requires not only a turning away from evil, but also repugnance toward the evil actions I have committed?

**Point #2:** As we examine the actions of those who wished to stone this woman, we hear nothing of any of them leaving at Jesus' initial words of "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." It was only after Jesus began writing on the ground and they examined their own lives in light of what He had written that they began going away, one by one. Without that honest and thorough examination of conscience, they were unaware of their own sinfulness. So too, we need the aid of the Holy Spirit as we examine our own consciences to be aware of the ways that we have offended God. Do I invoke His aid as I do my examination of conscience before Confession? Do I give adequate time and thought to preparing for the Sacrament by doing a thorough examination of conscience? Like the scribes and Pharisees in the

Gospel, do I consider what God has revealed, particularly in the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, Sermon on the Mount, etc.?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #5, 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent**

Judge Not (Matthew 7:1-12)

*“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you. Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.”*

**Point #1:** In this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us, “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” As it applies to Reconciliation, God who created us without need of our permission will not save us without our permission. Our free acknowledgment and disclosure of our sins is necessary for the Sacrament, and Catechism #1455 reminds us that this admission also helps us look squarely at our sins, take responsibility for them, and open ourselves again to God and to communion of the Church. We cannot presume God’s mercy. Yes, He is God who loves us and *wants* to forgive us, but He will not force His love upon us. His love is so great that He always wants what is in our best interests, and that includes us asking for forgiveness when we have sinned. Am I so presumptuous of God’s mercy that I think He will forgive me simply because He already knows what my sins are? Do I hope to obtain His forgiveness without really having any sort of true conversion of heart? Do I postpone going to Confession because I mistakenly think “a loving

God would never allow one of His creatures to go to hell for a single mortal sin”? Do I invite the Lord into all the areas of my life so that He might transform them?

**Point #2:** In the first part of this passage, Jesus warns us against judging others, but His words are also insightful for how to take what we see as evil in others to examine our own consciences in that particular area. Have you ever noticed that the things that generally most irk us in others are things that we ourselves are battling against? Rather than judging others, how can I use these moments to examine my own conscience? Oh, how easily we can justify our own actions, while finding fault in those same actions when done by others! How can I grow in true humility so that the imperfections of others lead me to consider the truth of my own sinfulness? Can they help me recognize the rationalizations I make to justify all sorts of immoral deeds? When I go to Confession, do I mention times I have judged others?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #6, Monday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent**

Healing of the Paralytic (Luke 5:17-26)

*On one of those days, as he was teaching, there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed and they sought to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith he said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, “Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” –he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home.” And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, “We have seen strange things today.”*

**Point #1:** The Pharisees took issue with Jesus forgiving sins because they thought He was a sinner like them. They failed to recognize Jesus' divinity, and thus they said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" It is so easy for us to have the same attitude towards our priests – to be so focused on the reality that they are sinners too that we fail to recognize the divinity of Christ who is working through His priests. What can I do to exercise my faith more so as to recognize Jesus acting through his priests, despite their own limitations and sinfulness? Do I realize that the confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant? Do I see how the priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for me, a sinner? The Catechism reminds us that the priest is called to pray for the sinner and do penance with him; how can this knowledge help me to have more of a supernatural attitude towards the Sacrament?

**Point #2:** In this Gospel passage, we see the impact the healing had on the life of the paralytic – he went home glorifying God. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we also are healed. Do I also go home glorifying God? Do I live my life any differently after going to Confession? Do I bear witness to the ways God has transformed me? Do I go back to my home to be a leaven to my family? Do I glorify God by helping others to see the importance of encountering Him in the Sacrament? Do I share my conversion story with others – not so that they might honor me, but so they too may see the hand of God in their own lives?

**Point #3:** Faith always plays a key role in the various healings that we hear in the Gospels, and this passage is no different; it was the faith of the paralytic's friends that set this healing into motion – "When he saw their **faith** he said, 'Man, your sins are **forgiven** you.'" Likewise for us, it is so important to approach the Sacrament with a deep sense of faith. Is my faith strong enough to see how God is the one who takes the initiative in calling me to repentance – that He draws me and moves me by grace to respond to His merciful love? Do I have faith that God will give me the strength to begin anew? Do I believe that God really does want me to confess my sins and that He wants me to be reconciled with Him? Just as the faith of the paralytic's friends helped bring about forgiveness for their friend, how can I exercise my faith to aid my friends and loved ones in coming to experience God's forgiveness? Do I believe that God really can transform my heart, if only I would cooperate with His grace?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #7, Tuesday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent**

Call of Matthew & Jesus Came for Sinners (Matthew 9:9-13)

*As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

**Point #1:** Of all the titles referring to Jesus, "Divine Physician" is one of the most meaningful as it relates to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When someone goes to the doctor, he has already acknowledged his need for a doctor simply by being there. Likewise, the very act of going to Confession is an admission of our sinfulness and need for God's forgiveness. Furthermore, once we are with the doctor, it is necessary to tell him our symptoms so that he can diagnose the problem and prescribe the right medication. If, out of embarrassment, we fail to show the doctor the infection, he's not able to treat it. In the same way, we have to present the diseased parts of our life to the Divine Physician so that he might heal them. We may feel too embarrassed to tell the priest all of our sins, and we may even be tempted to only mention our venial sins and to hide our mortal sins. However, this not only means that our sin is not healed, but it also means that the infection spreads, and we are guilty of another mortal sin – sacrilege. Am I not aware that the Divine Physician and His instrument, the priest, have seen every type of spiritual infection? Why am I afraid to reveal all the areas of my life that need healing? What areas of my life do I refuse to let God touch? Just as failing to follow through on all the instructions from the doctor can result in serious physical consequences, do I realize the importance of following through on the penance and advice that the priest gives me? Doctor-patient confidentiality is essential for helping us overcome the fears of revealing such intimate and incriminating information about ourselves; how can the sacramental seal of confession increase my openness in revealing my sinfulness?

**Point #2:** In the call of Matthew, we see no hesitation on Matthew's part to respond to the Lord's call – he leaves everything immediately and follows Jesus. The Gospel does not say that Jesus called Matthew at a convenient time; rather, it was at the very moment when he was in the midst of his work in the tax office. Again, we see the importance of not putting off Confession to a convenient time. When the Lord calls, the only appropriate response is to follow Him **immediately**. If Matthew had not followed Jesus immediately, we cannot assume that he would later have come around to follow Him. What things are holding me back from responding to the

Lord's call to repentance? Is there anything in my life more important than a right relationship with God? Am I attentive to God's call to repentance throughout my entire day or do I only consider it during "spiritual times"?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #8, Wednesday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent**

Peter's Repentance & Judas' Despair (Luke 22:59-62 & Matthew 27:3-9)

*And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.*

*When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."*

**Point #1:** If we ever find ourselves in the state of mortal sin, we have to be very cautious that we do not fall into two of Satan's additional traps. The first of these is the despair that we see in Judas. Such an attitude really is a manifestation of pride – we are disappointed that we were not as great as we thought we were, not that we have offended God. Do I realize that this sort of attitude is contrary to God's goodness, to His justice, and to His mercy? The Catechism reminds us that it is in discovering the greatness of God's **love** that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin. When I experience a sense of despair, do I ask if it is motivated from that love or if the real motivation is self-love? Do I seek to renew

my trust in God in such moments? In those moments, have I thought about focusing on the crucifix and allowing my heart to be converted by looking upon Him whom our sins have pierced? The second trap that is really just another aspect of despair is to “live it up” – to commit all sorts of sins before going to Confession since I am convinced that I am going to hell anyways. What barriers do I put up after I sin that make it even more difficult to be reconciled with God? Am I aware of the effect each successive sin has on my spiritual life – that even after I go to Confession, the unhealthy attachment to creatures still remains to be purified in purgatory and I have additional habits of sin that I must struggle to overcome? How might I be motivated to avoid additional sins by considering how each and every sin causes additional pain for Christ on the cross?

**Point #2:** The repentance of Peter stands in sharp contrast to the despair of Judas. Again we see that Jesus takes the initiative to bring us back. Can you imagine the look of love that Christ must have directed at Peter to lead him to tears of repentance instead of cries of self-anguish? True repentance is not about the emotions we might feel while in the confessional. Tears of repentance may accompany true interior repentance, but they should never take the place of it. It entails the desire and resolution to change one’s life – independent of what emotion might go with it. Even if we don’t **feel** anything, that does not mean that God is not active in our lives, bringing to fruition the good work of conversion that He has begun in our hearts. Do I judge the depth of my repentance by the emotion that I feel either before or after going to Confession? Emotions themselves are neither good nor bad; how can I use them effectively to motivate my heart and draw closer to God?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #9, Thursday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent**

Separating the Sheep & Goats (Matthew 25:31-46)

*“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will*

*answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

**Point #1:** During the “I confess...” that we recite during the penitential rite at Mass, we not only call to mind the sins we have committed in our thoughts, in our words and in our deeds, but it is also necessary to consider the ways that we have sinned by what we have failed to do. In this parable, Christ reminds us of the seriousness of sins of omission; for He says, “As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.” It is so easy to limit myself to confessing sins that I have committed. Do I see how important it is to examine my conscience about things that I have neglected to do? Do I have a delicate conscience that is in tune with the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Do I ask Him to reveal to me God’s will for every aspect of my life? Do I realize that sin is acting contrary to that will – both directly disobeying God in sins of commission and ignoring His will in sins of omission? Is my whole life centered on knowing, loving, and serving the Lord in all that I do? Do I see that love of the Lord (the opposite of sin) is inseparable with love of my neighbor?

**Point #2:** In addition to affecting my relationship with God, all sin also has a social aspect – sin damages and sometimes breaks our communion with our brothers and sisters. The Sacrament of Reconciliation addresses both of these elements. As the Catechism reminds us, this reconciliation with God leads to other reconciliations which repair the other breaches caused by sin. It is in the cross that vertical and horizontal dimensions of reconciliation meet. There is no true reconciliation with one dimension without reconciliation with the other. Therefore, reconciliation is not just a personal thing between me and God; for I must also be reconciled with the community, the Church. Sacramental Confession accomplishes both of these things because the priest is entrusted with the authority to not only reconcile me with God, but also with His Church. Do I see the connection between reconciliation with God and reconciliation with my neighbor? Do I seek to restore my relationship with those I have harmed through my sin? Do I

mistakenly think that I can just tell God that I am sorry without taking advantage of the Sacrament He has instituted so that I might also be reconciled with His Church?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #10, Friday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent**

Removing Causes of Sin & Not Causing Scandal (Mark 9:42-50)

*“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. For every one will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you season it? Have salt in yourself, and be at peace with one another.”*

**Point #1:** It is so easy to misread the message of this Gospel. Obviously, Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation. If that is true, we must ask ourselves why He would use such stern words. One of the biggest lies of the devil is to minimize the seriousness of sin. If we realized what a big deal it was, we would not only avoid sin but even flee from even the occasions when we might fall into sin. This is the purpose of Jesus’ words. Likewise, in the course of saying our act of contrition, I promise to avoid whatever will lead me to sin. Do I take this part of the Sacrament seriously? Have I thought about the things that are near occasions of sin for me – events, times, or even certain people that I may surround myself with? If I find myself confessing the same sins every time, have I ever stopped to consider if I am avoiding the things that lead me to fall into that sin repeatedly? Do I leave Confession with a plan of attack for rooting sin out of my life completely, including what I can do to avoid the occasions of sin? Am I overly confident in my own ability to avoid sin when surrounded by temptations? What temptations do I freely subject myself to? Do I wait until I am knee-deep in temptation to cry out to God for help?

**Point #2:** The opening words of this passage speak of scandal – leading others to sin. My sins not only impact me, but they also give a poor witness to the loved ones in my life. In addition to the seriousness of avoiding scandal, there is also a serious obligation that all the baptized have to bear witness to Christ – to not only be His disciple, but to also be an apostle who leads others to encounter Him and accept the truth of the Gospel. As a married person, father or mother, this especially applies to my own family. It is not enough for me to encounter Christ in the Sacrament; I also need to lead the souls entrusted to me to encounter Him also. Do I avoid bearing such witness because I’m afraid of how my spouse/children will respond? Do I take my spouse and children with me when I go to Confession? Do we celebrate God’s forgiveness and mercy as a family? When there are struggles and disagreements in the family, do we seek to root out the source – sin – by going to Confession? How can I be a better witness of God’s mercy and love to my family and friends?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #11, Saturday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Lent**

Gethsemane – Watch & Pray (Mark 14:32-40)

*And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I pray.” And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch.” And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.” And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him.*

**Point #1:** How often does my battle against temptation end up like that of the Apostles in Gethsemane? Not only could the Apostles sense that danger was eminent, but Jesus point-blank told them to keep watch and pray. Yet they failed to stay awake. During that moment of difficulty, was their focus upon Jesus and His own commitment to the Father’s will or was it just

on their own efforts? Do I rely upon God's grace when faced with temptation or do I try to do everything through my own efforts? Do I stand on guard against temptation, or do I give Satan an easy target by failing to watch and pray? Do I take advantages of the graces available in the Sacrament in order to persevere in my prayer and to stay vigilant against the temptations from the devil?

**Point #2:** The Catechism defines sin as an offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth, and right conscience. It is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God. To say it another way, it is putting my will ahead of God's will – something which not only has damaging consequences for my soul, but which is completely illogical when I remember that I am the creature and He is the Creator. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus gives me the perfect model of how I should respond to temptation. First and foremost, he was engaged in prayer; for it is in prayer that I learn God's will and come to understand my place in the world as His creature. Secondly, despite the pending cup of His passion and death, nothing was more important to Jesus than doing the Father's will – His focus was not on His own will and desires, but on putting His will in line with the Father's. Due to His great love for His Father, it was unthinkable to do anything contrary to that will. Is there anything that I desire more than doing God's will? Do I nourish my love for God by developing an ever-deepening prayer life? Do I turn to prayer when faced with temptation? When God's will is difficult do I still turn to prayer and keep His will in the forefront of my mind?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #12, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent**

Woman with Alabaster Jar (Luke 7:36-50)

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for*

*she is a sinner.” And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “What is it, teacher?” “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

**Point #1:** Obviously, Jesus is not advocating that I go out and commit hundreds of sins so that I can love Him even more when those sins are forgiven. When I find myself steeped in sin like the woman in this passage, my response needs to be like hers – to love much, for, as Saint Peter reminds us, “Love covers a multitude of sins.” True love requires saying no to the things that are contrary to that love, and we can see the woman doing just that as she turns away from her sinful ways. When I sin, I focus on myself – my own desires and pleasure, but when I love, my focus is on Christ. Love laments the ways that I have offended the Beloved; it does not continue offending Him just because I have separated myself from Him. The problem with sin is that I give my love to creatures rather than to God who created me and is deserving of all my love. How can my love for God help me to avoid sin? How can it motivate me to repentance? After my sins are forgiven in Confession, do I respond with great love – a love which commits to not offending my Jesus in the future? Am I committed to removing the things in my life that are contrary to my love for Jesus? How **much** do I love?

**Point #2:** After Jesus forgives her sins, he says to her what the priest says to us in the confessional: “Go in peace.” How many times have I walked out of the confessional aware of the deep peace that only comes from being reconciled with God? How do I search for that peace elsewhere, only to still be left with that inner-turmoil? Do I realize what a great gift my conscience is – that the guilt that I experience after sin is actually the way God draws me back to Himself, and the peace I experience can only come by being reconciled with Him? How do I view the Sacrament of Reconciliation – do I dread going because I feel **shame** for my sins? Do I realize the difference between guilt and shame – that guilt is from God (leading me to the peace of reconciliation) and that shame is from Satan (leading to distress and further separation from God)?

**Point #3:** The Pharisee, like me when I am afraid to go to Confession, mistakenly thought that Jesus would not allow this sinner to touch Him if He knew what sort of woman she was. Yet Jesus knew that she had given herself to prostitution and He still loved her. When I have sinned, especially mortally, Satan tries to draw my attention away from the reality of how God sees me as His son or daughter. At those moments, I only see myself, as the Pharisee saw the woman, just as “that sort of” person who is a great sinner. Through these half-truths he hopes to prevent me from encountering Jesus in the Sacrament. Satan also tries to fill my head with these same sorts of thoughts towards the priest. How often have I hesitated to go to Confession because I was afraid of how the priest would view me, afraid that my confession would impact his other interactions with me at parish events? Do I realize that the priest is given special graces to not remember the sins he hears in confession? Do I know of the great love that my priest has for me and how much he desires to reconcile me with God and with His Church?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #13, Monday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent**

Jesus-Model of Forgiveness (Luke 23:32-34)

*Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place which is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right and one on the left. And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.*

**Point #1:** There at Calvary, I learn the great price to be paid for sin. Fidelity to God’s will is so important that failure to follow that will means death. Jesus recognizes my ignorance and prays for the Father to forgive me since I know not what I do. This does not mean that I cannot know God’s will or that I do not freely choose not to follow it. What it does to me is that I don’t realize what a big deal sin is. I trivialize it and ignore the costs that Christ pays on my behalf. Do I realize the impact that my sin has on my relationship with God and my relationship with His Church? Am I aware of how my sins lead others to sin? Do I see the bonds of slavery that I freely submit myself to when I sin? How can I show so little gratitude when I have been redeemed at such a price? When I see the faults of others, do I give them the benefit of the doubt and help them overcome their own ignorance of Jesus’ sacrificial love for them?

**Point #2:** At the cross, I not only see that the cost of sin is death, but I also see God's great mercy because He submits Himself to the punishment that is rightly mine. There is nothing I can do on my own that would reconcile me with God. The only thing that can do that is Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. So too, I would be in error if I thought the penance I do as part of my confession is what brings about that reconciliation. By themselves, there is no way a few prayers, offerings, works of mercy, or sacrifices could make up for the sins I have committed. Then what is the purpose of the penance that the priest gives me? The Catechism reminds me that the penance helps configure me to Christ, who alone expiates (makes satisfaction for) our sins. Performing my penance is important because it also shows my acceptance of Jesus' gift of forgiveness and my commitment to suffer with Him so that I might rise with Him. Do I perform my penance as soon as I can after going to Confession (even before I go home, if possible)? Do I try to unite my prayers and sufferings to Christ as I perform my penance? Do I simply do my penance mechanically, just to say that I have done it, or do I use it as a real opportunity to develop the habits necessary to persevere in the conversion begun through my confession?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #14, Tuesday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent**

Healing of Lazarus (John 11:33-44)

*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, deeply moved again came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice. "Lazarus, come out." The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

**Point #1:** In this beautiful account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, it is important to see that Jesus does not restore him to life only to leave him bound in his burial cloths. Rather, He commands the other mourners to unbind him and let him go. Likewise for me, I am not only restored to the life of grace through the Sacrament, but I am also freed from the bondage to sin. This is not to say that I will not have to fight temptation and that I will no longer experience concupiscence (the tendency to sin). Rather, it means that I receive all the grace I need through prayer and the Sacraments (especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation) to avoid sin in my life. His grace is sufficient, but I must take advantage of it. In moments of temptation, I must cling to Him. Saint Paul says that power is made perfect in weakness and that I can do all things **through** Christ who strengthens me. Therefore, if confession seems not to be making a difference in my life, I have to ask myself if I am relying on God’s grace to overcome temptation or if I am trying to do it all myself. Even if I am not in the state of mortal sin, do I realize how helpful the Sacrament is for overcoming my bondage to sin? After confession, do I try to remain in my “burial cloths” or do I seek to truly live my life anew in Christ? Do I realize that once I am bound by sin, I need the assistance of others to remove those lingering effects of sin? Do I help others in my life to overcome the areas of their lives where sin holds them hostage?

**Point #2:** In the death of Lazarus, I am again reminded of the consequence of sin – death, and in the same way that Jesus wept due to His great love for His friend, so too He weeps for me when I choose spiritual death. Am I aware of the great love that Christ has for me? Having experienced that love, why would I ever choose to separate myself from Him through sin? When I commit sin, do I fail to consider the extreme consequences for my soul that go along with that choice? Do I realize that all sins have consequences – that there is no such thing as “private” sin?

**Point #3:** In the person of Lazarus, we see the state of our soul when we have committed mortal sin and have experienced the loss of sanctifying grace. Once he was dead, there was nothing Lazarus could do for himself. If he was alive, he could have made his way to Jesus to seek his healing, but because he was dead, all the initiative was with Jesus – He had to come to Lazarus. He had to remove the stone that stood as a barrier from Lazarus being reunited with Him. Jesus was the one who called Lazarus to come out, even though it would have been difficult for Lazarus since he was wrapped in the burial cloths. Jesus did all the “heavy lifting”, but Lazarus still had to respond and actually come out of the tomb. Do I see the many ways that I am like Lazarus? Am I grateful for Jesus’ great love and His initiative in seeking me out? Do I show that gratitude by responding to His call to leave behind my deadly ways? Do I turn to Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation before I have actually gotten to the point of committing mortal sin? What “rocks” do I have in my life that I allow to prevent me from being reconciled with God? Do I realize that the only thing that will separate me from the love of Christ is my own free will to not allow Him in my life?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #15, Wednesday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent**

Institution of the Sacrament (John 20:19-22)

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."*

**Point #1:** None of the seven Sacraments is an "invention" of the Church. For each Sacrament we can turn to Scripture to see that Christ was the one who instituted the Sacrament. The Gospel account above describes how the Resurrected Christ gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation. When we realize that this narrative describes the events that took place on Easter Sunday, we can understand better where the Sacrament fits into God's overall plan for salvation. This is the commission of the Church to perpetuate the work of divine salvation accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus not only has the authority to forgive sins, but He also has authority to share that part of His mission with His priests. He makes it clear that He is sending them out, not to do their own thing, but rather the specific mission He was giving to them – "as the Father has sent me, even so I send you." Then He gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit, "the Sanctifier", the person of the Trinity who is associated with making us holy. Yes, priests, like those first Apostles, fall into sin too, but that does not undermine the authority and mission that Christ has entrusted to them. Do I recognize how Christ acts through His priests, or do I fail to respond with faith when speaking with the priest in the confessional? Do I see how the Sacrament of Reconciliation is connected to Christ's death and Resurrection? Despite knowing that the priest acts based upon the authority of Christ, do I allow the devil to sow seeds of doubt in my mind?

**Point #2:** When Jesus entered the room, the first thing He said was, "Peace be with you." That peace was so connected to the Sacrament He was instituting that He said it again after showing them His hands and side. Those wounds bear testimony to how my peace (my reconciliation with God) took place – through Jesus' offering of Himself on the cross. What a great gift! Do I appreciate all that Christ has done for me? Do I realize the great price that He paid so that I might again experience true peace? Do I hold the Sacrament of Reconciliation in great esteem as that great gift through which I have peace or do I merely look at it as a "necessary evil" to get rid of my guilt? What do I do to maintain that peace once I have received it in the Sacrament?

**Point #3:** Christ tells His Apostles, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” He has established the **ordinary** means for being reconciled to God and His Church. It would be foolish on my part to say that I go directly to God and that I do not need the Sacrament, when He is the one who established this means for being reconciled. What an expression of pride to think that I know better than Jesus! Furthermore, how do I have the certainty that I have been forgiven when I do not have the direct and objective knowledge of it that comes through the Sacrament? God said that He would forgive it if they forgave it – case closed. Do I realize what a gift the Sacrament is for knowing with complete certainty that my sins are forgiven? Is there really any reason to doubt if I have been forgiven when Christ’s words are so clear? What can I do to make sure that thoughts of my past sins do not fester in my mind after they have been forgiven in Confession? Do I appreciate the gift of the priest through whom I am reconciled to God?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #16, Thursday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent**

God Instructs Sinners (Psalm 25:1-22)

*To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in thee I trust, let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. Yea, let none that wait for thee be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. Make me to know thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation; for thee I wait all the day long. Be mindful of thy mercy, O Lord, and of thy steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, or my transgressions; according to thy steadfast love remember me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord! Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great. Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose. He himself shall abide in prosperity, and his children shall possess the land. The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant. My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn thou to me, and be gracious to me; for I am lonely and afflicted. Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. Consider how many are my foes, and with what*

*violent hatred they hate me. Oh guard my life, and deliver me; let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in thee. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for thee. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.*

**Point #1:** There is nothing more apparent throughout all the Scriptures than God's steadfast love – so much so that John says God **IS** love. **Steadfast** love emphasizes the point that God is unchanging – He does not love me any less when I have offended Him. Putting conditions on love is something I do as an imperfect creature; it is not a characteristic of God's love for me. For Him, no sin is unforgiveable except the one that I do not seek to have forgiven. What sins in my life do I not present to Him to forgive – either out of presumption, despair or fear? Knowing that God loves me first, while I am yet a sinner, should I not be motivated to return that love and run into His open arms and be reconciled with Him? What fears and inhibitions do I have that prevent me from embracing that love? Even if I have made Confession a regular part of my spiritual life, do I do it mechanically as some sort of obligation or do I do it to encounter the God who loves me? The Scriptures remind us that perfect love casts out all fear – if fear hinders or even prevents me from going to Confession, have I asked myself what is lacking in my love of God, or do I simply allow my fears to consume me? Is my love for God as unchanging as His love is for me, or do I make it dependent upon which priest is confessing or the mood I am in at the time?

**Point #2:** In Confession, it is necessary that I humble myself. Sometimes, humbling myself may be what I most dread about going to Confession, but it is important to realize that humility is essential so that I might be receptive to the instruction that God provides for me there. Thus the psalmist emphasizes that He leads the **humble** in what is right and teaches the **humble** His ways. Even if I regularly receive the Sacrament, I must avoid developing a Pharisaical attitude in which I make light of my own sin because I compare myself to others. Do I confess my sins in a straight-forward manner without adding comments to make myself come across as holy to the priest? Do I see the importance of **frequenting** the Sacrament since I am always in need of God's instruction in His ways? Do I realize that I not only should frequent the Sacrament, but that I also should be growing in humility as I do so, not in self-righteousness? Frequent Confession of a humble penitent (every 2-3 weeks or at least once a month) is not something that the Church stopped encouraging after the Second Vatican Council. Even if I might have been under the opposite impression, do I recognize the many graces that God wishes to give me in the Sacrament, even beyond the forgiveness of my sin? Do I realize how I need that help and guidance, or have I fallen into the trap of self-sufficiency? How can I approach the Sacrament with greater humility?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## Meditation #17, Friday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent

The Blessing of Forgiveness (Psalm 32:1-11)

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledge my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to thee; at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. Thou art a hiding place for me, thou preservest me from trouble; thou dost encompass me with deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you. Many are the pangs of the wicked; but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

**Point #1:** **Blessed** is he whose transgression is forgiven. **Blessed** is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity. Rather than seeing Confession as a burden or an obligation that I have to endure, I need to see the Sacrament for the blessing that it is. Seeing it as a blessing, how can I be content with just going to Confession once a year? All the precepts that the Church requires of me are actually for my own good. If I fail to experience the blessing of this Sacrament at least once a year, there are **serious** ramifications in my spiritual life. But having received that blessing, why would I want just the minimum? As the psalmist says, "When I declare not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long." If I were feeling pain, I wouldn't wait to go to the doctor until it was so bad that the only solution was surgery. Then why would I ignore the pain, the groaning of my soul, to be healed of sin? Yes, scheduling an annual physical is important, but if I am sick, I do not wait until the appointment for my physical to deal with the current sickness. Neither should I wait to go to Confession until I "annually have to" just to check something off of my spiritual to-do list. Do I **desire** to receive the blessing that God wants to give to me? How do I try to ignore the pain I have caused in my conscience? Regardless of the frequency that I go to the Sacrament, do I approach it as just a spiritual check-off list? Do I hear the groaning of my conscience or am I deaf to it since I seek to cover up the pain with remedies (sports, TV, the internet, alcohol, pornography, etc.) that turn out to be only snake oil sold by the secular world?

**Point #2:** The psalmist advises not to be like a horse or mule without understanding. If I fail to see any transformation in my life after receiving the Sacrament, is it because I do so without any understanding? Do I understand that the Sacrament not only takes away my sins but it also gives me the graces I need to avoid future sins? Out of embarrassment, do I tell the priest only what I *have to* (mortal sins) so as to avoid going to hell? Do I only go to Confession when I feel like I *have to* (that is, when I have committed mortal sin)? If the answer to these questions is yes, can I see why my sins are not yet rooted out of my life? Do I expect to see a change in my life if I am only seeking to avoid punishment? Fear of the Lord is the **beginning** of wisdom, but the **perfection** of wisdom is love. What can I do to purify my motive for approaching the Sacrament – to move from going merely out of a fear of punishment to a desire to being reconciled with my beloved, whom I have offended? How can this higher motive encourage me to approach the Sacrament in more than a minimalistic way? Horses and mules do what they are supposed to out of fear of the whip, but responding out of a motivation of love is something much greater and more human. Is love of God my primary (and only) motivation?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #18, Saturday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Lent**

Prayer of a Penitent (Psalm 38:1-22)

*O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath! For thy arrows have sunk into me, and thy hand has come down on me. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me. My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness, I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my loins are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart. Lord, all my longing is known to thee, my sighing is not hidden from thee. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me. My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my kinsmen stand afar off. Those who seek my life lay their snares, those who seek my hurt speak of ruin, and meditate treachery all the day long. But I am like a deaf man, I do not hear, like a dumb man who does not open his mouth. Yea, I am like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth are no rebukes. But for thee, O Lord, do I wait; it is thou, O Lord my God, who wilt answer. For I pray, “Only let them not rejoice over me,*

*who boast against me when my foot slips!” For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me. I confess my iniquity, I am sorry for my sin. Those who are my foes without cause are mighty, and many are those who hate me wrongfully. Those who render me evil for good are my adversaries because I follow after good. Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation!*

**Point #1:** The psalmist says that my wounds grow foul and fester because of my own foolishness. It is in that foolishness that I can deceive myself into thinking that it does not really matter if I commit a particular sin since I can just go to Confession afterwards. Do I realize the scandal I cause to others if I treat the Sacrament in this way? It is the same as saying it does not really matter if I cut off one of my fingers since I can always go to the doctor and get it sewn back on. Likewise, I would not think of cutting off a healthy leg simply because the other leg is full of gangrene, but how many times have I fallen into the temptation of committing additional sins simply because I have fallen into the same sin earlier or in some other area of my life? The psalmist continues and says that my iniquities have gone over my head. Do I realize how quickly that can happen? Do I procrastinate in going to Confession, simply because I think it is not too bad yet? Do I realize that it is at those very times that I am most susceptible to falling into mortal sin? Sin tends to follow a cycle or pattern. Do I turn to the Lord as soon as I see that pattern developing, or do I wait until there is no soundness left in my flesh and no health in my bones? Do I realize that the very thought of Confession is God’s inspiration, His grace inviting me to confess my sins? Do I recognize how having a regularly scheduled Confession time (every 2-3 weeks or once a month) can help me deal with the problem (my sin) before the cycle completely develops?

**Point #2:** The psalmist concludes by begging the Lord to not forsake him, to not be far from him, and to make haste to help him. God never forsakes us, and He does make haste to help us. Our salvation is something incredibly important and urgent to Him, and He offers His help (grace) to those who ask Him. The issue is not God forsaking me; it is me forsaking God. It is not that He has not drawn near to me, but that I have distanced myself from Him. It is not that He does not make haste to help me; it is that I either refuse to ask for His help or I do not accept it when it is available. There are so many opportunities to go to Reconciliation here in Kokomo – so many opportunities to draw near to God who draws near to me in the confessional. Do I take advantage of them? Do I blame God for feeling far from Him or do I realize how I have chosen that myself through my sins? When I am far from God, do I despair and allow Satan to convince me that God has abandoned me, or do I renew my trust in the Lord and call upon Him in the confessional? The Lord hastens to my aid for my salvation. Do I hasten to Him when I am in need of that help? Have I become so smug about my own level of holiness that I don’t feel it necessary to call upon the Lord and ask for His help, or do I see how I am in need of the

Sacrament regardless of my age or past efforts? Do I realize that the more I grow in holiness, the more I rely upon God and ask for His help – not less?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #19, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent**

The Lord Sets My Feet upon a Rock (Psalm 40:1-2, 6-8, 11-13, 16-17)

*I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire; but thou hast given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering thou hast not required. Then I said, "Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart." Do not thou, O Lord, withhold thy mercy from me, let thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness ever preserve me! For evils have encompassed me without number; my iniquities have overtaken me, till I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to help me! But may all who seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee; may those who love thy salvation say continually, "Great is the Lord!" As for me, I am poor and needy; but the Lord takes thought for me. Thou art my help and my deliverer; do not tarry, O my God!*

**Point #1:** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God", and in contrast, the psalmist says that my iniquities overtake me till I cannot see. It is so easy to underestimate the damage caused by one sin. The more sin I commit, the more barriers I am putting up between me and God and thus the harder it is for me to see God. It is also incredibly easy to see how quickly sins multiply and become more and more serious – there is less than a chapter between Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit and Cain killing his brother Abel! How many times do I subject myself to temptation or "allow just a little venial sin" in my life because I have fallen for the devil's trick? I am so sure of myself that I will know when to stop, or I presume that I will repent at a later time. Like Saint Augustine before his conversion, I ask the Lord to change me, but not yet. I want to determine when it is convenient for me to repent. I presume that I will have the opportunity once I have "gotten all the sin out of my system." At the same time, I fail to see how each sin hardens my heart, how each sin makes it more difficult to see God's will and more difficult to see the path that brings me back to reconciliation with Him. Why do I tolerate ANY sin in my life, even venial sin? Reflecting on

my own experiences between confessions, do I not see how each sin made it more difficult for me to approach the Sacrament? Am I aware of the urgency of being reconciled with God or do I make it just one of the many other things that I need to do?

**Point #2:** In addition to removing sin so that I can more clearly see God, the Sacrament of Reconciliation also gives me an open ear so that I might be more attentive to His will for my life. After I have been to Confession, God desires that I maintain that open ear even more than He desires sacrifices and other offerings. I have the responsibility after going to Confession to be more attentive to His will and to especially listen for His voice as He speaks to me through the Scriptures. Delving daily into Scripture, I can keep His will ever before my eyes. In the Old Testament, God told the Israelites to keep His words upon their hearts and to talk of them when they sat, when they walked, when they lied down, and when they arose each morning (see Deuteronomy 6). Do I seek to keep that word ever before my eyes? Do I realize how much I can avoid sin simply by incorporating daily prayer and reading of Scripture into my routine? Focusing on what I am supposed to do is one of the best ways for avoiding the things I am not supposed to do. As I pray with the Scriptures, do I ask the Holy Spirit to convict me in the areas that I still must improve in my life? Do I avail myself to the formation opportunities in my parish? Am I attentive to homilies and other instruction from my priests in which they guide me along the Lord's path and lead me away from sin?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #20, Monday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent**

The Lord Deals with Us According to His Love, Not Our Sins (Psalm 103:1-14)

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger*

*for ever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.*

**Point #1:** Do I realize that in raw justice, a single sin – whether mortal or venial – would be sufficient to prevent me from being with God forever in heaven? As Saint Paul reminds us elsewhere, the wage of sin is death (see Romans 6:20-23). At the same time, I can draw great hope and consolation from the knowledge that my God is not only all-just but also all-merciful. The psalmist not only says that God does not deal with me according to my sins, but he also says how God *does* deal with me – as a father who pities his children. From this vantage point I can properly understand the role of the penance that the priest asks me to do after I go to Confession. I may ask myself how a few Hail Marys or Our Fathers (or whatever prayers, sacrifices, or other penance I am asked to do) measure up to the seriousness of whatever sins I have confessed. The short answer is that they do not, nor are they meant to. From Saint Paul (see Romans 3:24), I learn I am justified by God’s grace as **gift**, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. But God does not force that gift upon me. Through my penance, I do not make-up for my sins through my own efforts, but rather, through it I freely accept Jesus’ gift and **cooperate** with His grace to bear fruit that befits repentance. I cannot make satisfaction for my sins except **through** Him; I need to do my penance closely united to Him who gives me the strength to carry it out and have it bear fruit. What is my attitude towards the penance that I am given? Do I seek to carry it out only through my own efforts? Do I thank Jesus for helping me carry it out? Do I ask Him to make it bear enduring fruit in my life? Do I fully appreciate God’s great gift of mercy? Do I show that appreciation through other voluntary forms of penance such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (and not just during Lent and Advent)? Do I take full advantage of the penance I am given to learn self-denial and self-control so that I am less likely to fall into the same sin when confronted with a similar temptation in the future?

**Point #2:** The psalmist tells me that the Lord pities those who fear him. Do I have a true understanding of what it means to fear the Lord? It is not the same thing as being afraid of Him; rather, as one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, it is that response of a great love in which I am all the more careful to avoid anything that might offend my Beloved. It is not a fear of punishment, but a fear of offending Him – just as a child who loves his father fears offending him. These are the souls that the psalmist says the Lord pities. The psalmist also adds that God knows my frame. God knows my heart and my effort, for I hear in Hebrews that, “We have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.” I cannot give up just because I find myself

confessing the same sins every time I go to Confession. The Lord, in all of His mercy, knows my tendency to sin and has pity on me. But I must fear offending Him more than I fear anything else, for Saint Peter reminds me as well that love (of Him whom I fear offending) covers a multitude of sins. Do I have a proper and holy fear of the Lord? Do I ask the Holy Spirit to nourish this gift that He has given me, especially in the Sacrament of Confirmation? How should I respond when I feel discouraged for saying the same sins each time I go to Confession? When faced with temptation, do I turn to the Lord for strength, especially aware that He has been tempted in the same way, but without sin? Jesus was completely focused on doing God's will and feared offending the Father even more than He feared the cross. What can I learn from His example regarding my own fear of the Lord?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #21, Tuesday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent**

There Is Forgiveness with the Lord (Psalm 130:1-8)

*Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice! Let thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.*

**Point #1:** All the most important things in my life require preparation, and the amount of preparation tends to be directly proportional to the importance of that thing. So too it should be as regards the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If it is as important as it should be in my life, I need to give it adequate preparation. From the psalmist, I can see that I should be attentive, that I should wait for the Lord, and that I should call upon Him. As regards my preparation for Confession, I do need to be attentive to how I am responding to God's graces in my life and how I have fallen into temptation. Being attentive doesn't just mean the few minutes I have before I go into the confessional; it means **daily** being attentive so that I can root out sin in its earliest stages – thus the importance of a daily examination of conscience at the end of each day (or even better, an examination at midday and one at the end). I also need to wait for the Lord; that means that I need to come early enough before going to Confession so that I can spend at least 10 to 15 minutes waiting and calling to mind my sins. Just as the anticipation and desire to meet a loved one grows as the time of their arrival get closer, so too these last moments of preparation should

foster my love and contrition as I await my encounter with Christ in the Sacrament. Finally, I need to call on the Lord – I need to invoke the Holy Spirit so that He might guide me in doing my examination of conscience. Do I try to do the examination on my own or do I ask for the Holy Spirit’s help? Do I merely call to mind my sins or do I also thank God for the graces He has given me for the times I have been able to resist temptation? How much preparation do I give to this Sacrament? Do I wait until the day of my confession to consider my sins or have I incorporated a daily examination of conscience into my spiritual life? When I go to Confession, do I try to rush in and rush out, or do I give it adequate time, prayer, and preparation so that it might have the greatest impact on my spiritual life?

**Point #2:** The psalmist begins by saying that he **cries out** to the Lord out of the depths. How can I develop such a fervent desire to receive the Sacrament? Do I anticipate going to Confession? Do I **long** for it? The psalmist continues by saying that my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning. What sort of longing that watchman must have, for when the morning comes the darkness is banished and the watchman can finally then take his rest. Surely, he counts down the minutes and the seconds until that moment comes. Do I have that same desire towards the Sacrament? Do I long for the darkness of my sin to be banished so that I can see things as they truly are in the light of God’s grace? Do I desire to receive the Sacrament so that I might be freed of my heavy yoke and experience the true rest that He alone can give? Finally, do I ask God to strengthen my hope so that I might stir into flame the desire of the kingdom of heaven and eternal life and place my trust in Christ’s promise of salvation?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #22, Wednesday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent**

If We Confess Our Sins, God Is Faithful & Just (1 John 1:5-10)

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we*

*deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

**Point #1:** As I mature both physically and spiritually, there is a real temptation to think that I no longer sin. Particularly, as regards physical maturity, I may think that I am too old to sin. But just the opposite is true! Even though I may no longer experience strong desires or temptations about the sins I might have committed in my youth, it does not mean that I no longer sin. In reality, it is only the types of sin that tend to change with age, and not the tendency to sin itself. It is rather common to struggle most with sins of sensuality in youth, sins of vanity in middle age, and sins of pride as I grow older. Every stage of life comes with its own struggles and temptations. Even though the sins I commit now may not have passionate external expressions, they are still sins – perhaps even serious sins. Thus, Saint John reminds us for every stage in our life that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. As I grow older (and hopefully wiser – especially spiritually), the sins in my life should become **MORE** apparent, not less. Hopefully, there is less sin in my life, but at the same time, the closer I grow to God, the more I should come to recognize the sins that I might have not realized in the past. How have my “dominant sins” (the main things I repeatedly struggle with) changed throughout the different stages of my life? Am I attentive to the ways that I sin in my thoughts and words, or do I only focus on **external** manifestations? Do I consider the purity of intention of the things I do – even if I am doing something that is externally good, what is my motivation for doing that thing? If my sins are not becoming more apparent as I age, have I considered the possibility that I have gotten farther away from God and thus those sins are less visible to me (or do I fall into the delusion that there must not be any sin because I don’t see it)? Do I need to examine my life more closely to uncover the sins that I may not realize are there?

**Point #2:** Saint John says that God is light, and in Him there is **NO** darkness **at all**. Jesus calls me to be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect. Therefore, if there is still **any** sin in my life, I must work at rooting it out. I shouldn’t tolerate **anything** in my life that is contrary to God. Therefore, I should desire to go to Confession frequently so that every obstacle, no matter how small, might be removed and so that nothing prevents the **total** transformation that God demands of me. What sins do I tolerate in my life? Am I content with removing the manifestations of sin in my life, or am I willing to do the hard work of pulling it out by the roots? Do I desire the perfection that I am called to, or am I simply content with not committing mortal sin? Not committing sin is the starting point, but there’s so much more to the spiritual life that God calls me to. Do I want to remove everything in my life that is not of God? Do I give my heart to God alone or do I tolerate some darkness by giving my heart to my own whims and pleasures? Am I actively searching for the areas of my life that still need to be transformed, or am I content to

stay on the surface in my examinations of conscience and in my confessions? Do I truly **want** to be holy?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #23, Thursday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent**

Repent and Turn Again to the Lord (Acts 3:17-21, 25-26)

*“And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness.”*

**Point #1:** Conversion is a life-long task. In this passage, Peter is speaking to a group of Israelites, a people who had turned away from God repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. Yet he does not heap guilt upon them for having fallen again. Rather, he acknowledges that they acted in ignorance, and he simply calls them to turn **again**. The hard part about turning again is overcoming my own pride which almost cannot bear going to Confession and saying the same thing again. It is hard to admit that I have fallen for the devil’s same tricks and tactics. It is hard to acknowledge that I am as weak and dependent upon God’s grace as I actually am. That is what actually prevents me from turning again – not God’s unwillingness to take me back if I do turn again. Jesus told Peter to forgive his brother seventy times seven times each day – do I really think that God will not take me back when I turn to Him? Why am I reluctant to present the same things to Him if those are the areas needing healed? I would not hesitate to go to the doctor a second or third time if I caught the same illness again. Actually, I might even go to the doctor as **soon as** the symptoms emerged because I remember how much better I felt after I took the medicine he prescribed. Why am I so reluctant to return to the Divine Physician to receive another dose of His spiritual medicine? In what ways does my own pride prevent me from turning to the Lord? How can I overcome this egotism? How can I use the memories of past confessions to motivate me to turn again?

**Point #2:** If a child rebels against his family or even if he completely denounces those family bonds, he is still his parent's son. So too it is with me and my relationship with God. Regardless of the sins I commit, I am still a son/daughter of the covenant. God still wants to bless me, and the grace of conversion He gives me is itself a great blessing. I must come to my senses to live in a way that is coherent with my identity as a child of God. How does Satan try to make me forget who I really am and how valuable I am to God? Do I see how the Sacrament of Confession restores me to my full dignity as a child of God? At the same time, I must be careful to avoid the opposite extreme. A child who manipulates his parents by constantly referring to his status as their son in order to get his way never really valued that status in the first place. So too, if I become indifferent to sin – thinking *it doesn't really matter since I am a child of God and He will always take me back* – then I do not really appreciate what it means to be that child of God. Do I value being a child of God? When I fall short of that dignity, do I ask Him to help me act in a way that is fitting for His child? How can I use my status as a child of God to motivate me against sinning in the first place?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #24, Friday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent**

The Lord is Redeemer (Isaiah 43:1-2, 4, 18-19, 25-26)

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities. I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*

**Point #1:** As Isaiah reminds me, the Lord does not just cover up my sins so that they can no longer be seen; He actually removes them entirely – He blots them out for His own sake. If I am ever afraid of approaching the Sacrament, I can draw great confidence from the sacramental seal that has been put in place to not only protect me but also to invite me to be completely open with the priest. Would I be willing to reveal all my flaws to a psychologist or show all my wounds to my doctor if I were not confident that they would not reveal these things to others? How much more so this is true for the priest who is bound to absolute secrecy about everything I tell him? Am I not aware that priests are often given a special grace to forget everything they hear in the confessional? Imagine what that would be like if they had to carry the burden of all the sins that they hear. If God completely forgets the sins and He gives His priest the grace to do the same, shouldn't I try to do the same? I should not tell others about what is said in the confessional – either by me or the priest – nor should I constantly be bringing it up in my own mind since doing so rarely, if ever, helps me to grow in my spiritual life. Recalling things I learn about myself for avoiding near occasions of sin and strategies for avoiding evil are very different than letting the devil throw past sins into my face. They are forgiven! Therefore, I should not dwell on them. Do I fully trust in God's mercy? Do I respect the seal of Confession? Am I willing to bear my entire soul to God in the full confidence that I gain from the seal? Do I seek to remember and apply the advice that the priest gives me or do I only focus on the sins I confessed?

**Point #2:** Isaiah speaks of God having done all these amazing things for Israel – redeeming them, calling them by name, being with them as they pass through waters, and even preventing them from being burned by the fire – all these things so that He could be close to His people when they called upon Him. He has given them a great gift and done all the heavy-lifting, and all they had to do was call upon Him. Yet Isaiah says that Israel **wearies** God by failing to call upon Him. It is like having a relative fly here from the opposite side of the world (taking on all sorts of expense and effort to get here) and me being unwilling to open the door to my house when he pulls up in the taxi. What ingratitude! Do I appreciate the extent that God was willing to go to so that I might come back and be reunited with Him? He was willing to become a man, subject Himself to all sorts of humiliation, and to suffer and die on the cross! Aware of all that, is it really too much of a burden? Is it really too difficult for me to call upon Him by asking for His forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Isaiah reminds me that God has not burdened me with offerings – all He asks is that I call upon Him in the Sacrament. Do I appreciate that gift – that He has made it as easy as possible for me to come back to Him? Will I weary my God any longer?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #25, Saturday of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Lent**

The Strength That Comes From the Lord (Matthew 26:26-28 & Luke 22:31-32)

*Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

*"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."*

**Point #1:** Most Sacraments are received only once (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders) or just a couple of times, depending upon the circumstances (Matrimony, if a spouse dies, and Anointing of the Sick). However there are two Sacraments that I am not only **allowed** to receive more than once, but that I am **encouraged** to frequent: the Eucharist and Reconciliation. Both of these Sacraments are rooted in the cross. At the Last Supper, Jesus' very words in giving us the Eucharist show its connection to Reconciliation, that the blood in the cup is poured out for the **purpose** of the forgiveness of sins. Drawing near to Christ in the Eucharist also means that I need to draw near to Him in Reconciliation. I cannot expect to take full advantage of all the graces of the Eucharist if I do not also take full advantage of all the graces of Reconciliation. Do I seek to encounter Christ frequently in both of the Sacraments? Do I show my appreciation for the gift of the Eucharist by frequenting the Sacrament of Confession so that I might receive the Eucharist worthily? Do I realize how the Eucharist also gives me the graces I need to overcome the sins that I have confessed in Reconciliation?

**Point #2:** God knows the ways that Satan tries to keep me from returning to God after I have sinned, and He does not abandon me to overcome those obstacles on my own. Without His grace, my faith would be so shaken that I would not turn back to Him, but He continues to offer me that grace. What He promised Peter He has also promised me – that He has prayed for **me** so that **my** faith will not fail after I have sinned. Even if I have turned my back on God and sinned mortally, He does not abandon me. He continues to draw me to Himself so that I might respond to His merciful love with repentance. Even if I am in the state of mortal sin, I can still fall back upon my faith which inspires my repentance. Satan tempts me to additional sins after I have fallen the first time because he knows that each additional sin (even if it is venial) weakens my faith. I must stand on guard so that I do not let sin weaken my faith to the point that I do not repent. As Jesus told Saint Paul, His grace is sufficient for me (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). He has prayed for me, and I must take advantage of that grace to avoid additional sins that will keep me even further from the Sacrament. Do I see the impact each additional sin has on my faith? Am I

aware of the strength that Christ offers me (even after I have sinned) if I would but let Him transform my weakness? After committing sin, do I stand on guard against additional sin? Do I open the gate of my heart to all of Satan's army merely because one of his soldiers has gotten past my guards into the courtyard of my heart?

**Point #3:** Not only has Jesus prayed for me (like Peter) that my faith might not fail, but that prayer also comes with the instruction to strengthen my brethren when I have turned again. Jesus does not just want me to turn to Him; He wants my repentance to be the means for leading others to that same reconciliation. I am to be a witness to the power of His transforming love. Having been in the same situation as my brothers and sisters, I am in a unique position to help them overcome their fears and hesitation about going to Reconciliation. There have been many people in my own life who have helped me to encounter Christ; my brothers and sisters **deserve** the same thing from me. My spouse and children have been especially **entrusted** to me so that I might lead them to heaven. How can I fulfill this mission if I do not lead them to Reconciliation and bear witness to its impact through my own life? I cannot force them to go, but my love and witness should **compel** them to go just as Paul's own love for Christ compelled him to do great things (see 2 Corinthians 5). How do I witness to my spouse, children, and others about God's mercy in the Sacrament? Can they see how it has transformed me and brought me joy? How can I encourage those I love to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation? How can I do so in such a way that they feel that they are compelled out of love and not just being forced into it or given a guilt trip to the point that they go? Do I love my spouse and children to the point that I cannot help but share this message of mercy and reconciliation with them since I want what is best for them?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## **Meditation #26, 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday)**

The Reality of Deadly Sin (1 John 5:14-21)

*And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin which is mortal; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal. We know that any one born of God does not sin,*

*but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

**Point #1:** One of the greatest dangers I face once I come to recognize my own sinfulness and need for reconciliation is to think that all sin is the same. Either I fall into the trap of minimalizing the seriousness of some sins and thus underestimate the **urgency** and utter **need** I have for Confession, or I become scrupulous to the point that I think everything completely severs my relationship with God. Saint John tells me where the truth lies: “There is sin which is mortal” and “All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal.” The Catechism says that mortal sin is “a grave infraction of the law of God that destroys the divine life in the soul of the sinner” and that “for a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be present: grave matter, full knowledge of the evil of the act, and full consent of the will.” The world will try to tell me that those three conditions are never present, but my conscience knows otherwise. I do not have to know all the consequences of an action to know that it is contrary to God’s will. Nor do I need hours and hours of deliberation to freely consent to a sin with my full will – a split second could be sufficient. A conscience that just recognizes that something is a sin without recognizing the seriousness of that same sin is not doing its job, and if I am honest with myself, I can only blame this deformation of conscience on myself for failing to listen to my conscience in the past. Have I failed to properly form my conscience through the study of my faith (Scripture, Catechism, etc.)? Is my conscience sensitive enough to distinguish between mortal and venial sin? Have I been inclined to accept the rhetoric and faulty logic of the world which denies the existence of all sin, but especially the existence of serious sin? If I ever find myself outside of the state of grace, do I realize the urgent need I have to go to Confession? Do I adjust my schedule to make sure that I can go at the earliest possible moment, not just the most convenient? Knowing that all wrongdoing is sin, do I also seek to root out venial sin from my life?

**Point #2:** This final meditation falls on Laetare Sunday. Laetare is a Latin word meaning “rejoice”, but what does that have to do with Reconciliation? Everything. Ultimately, I rejoice in the joy of the Resurrection. By His Death and Resurrection, Jesus has not just taken away my sins, but He has enabled me to share in the joy of His Resurrection. On this Sunday in the middle of Lent, I anticipate the events we will celebrate at Easter. At the same time, I recall that when Jesus comes again at the end of time, it will not be to forgive sins, but to take the souls who are united with Him into heaven. I have this one opportunity. This is my chance to be reunited with Him through the Sacrament. I may have 70 to 80 years to be ready for that moment or I may only have a few hours. I must take advantage of the Sacrament now. I cannot wait. I also need to pray for my brothers and sisters (and do other spiritual works of mercy) so that they also might not put off their repentance until it is too late. In heaven, I will be united

with Jesus in His Resurrection, but I first must be united to Him in His death. As Saint Paul says, “If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (see Romans 6:8). Being united with His death means that I must put to death the old man – I need to turn from my evil ways. I cannot expect the joys of heaven if I am not willing to endure the pain of detaching myself from the things that will prevent me from getting there. On this Laetare Sunday, I must rejoice that God loves me so much that He sent His only Son to suffer and die for me so that I would not perish in my sin. I cannot be indifferent to such love. I need to turn to Him, and then there will be great joy throughout all of heaven since I am that repentant sinner spoken of in the Gospels (see Luke 15:10). What must I do today to enter into that joy? God wants nothing to separate me from Him. What will I allow to separate me from the love (and joy) of Christ? Will it be tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness or the sword (see Romans 8:35)? Do I recognize how much love and joy I bring to my Father by returning to His loving arms?

**MY RESOLUTION** (as a fruit of this meditation):

## Conclusion

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this Lenten collection of meditations is intended to help every Christian see his or her self as God does. Our consolation is that *“God chose us in Him before the world began, to be holy and blameless in His sight, to be full of love”* (Ephesians 1:4). This Lent, the Holy Spirit is calling us to “true love” – a love that is always desirous to say, “I am sorry.” After all, Jesus Christ came into the world to save all people from Satan, sin and death. His purpose and His ministry was our reconciliation with the Father. This reconciliation was accomplished by Jesus’ death on the cross. Thanks to His saving work on the Cross, we now have the possibility to experience forgiveness, peace and reconciliation with God and man. We simply have to open ourselves to the Easter gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation given to us by the Risen Christ, as the Gospel of John records: *“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jesus) said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he 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’”* (John 20:19-23).

I pray that you have found the God of mercies and all consolations in this collection of Lenten meditations based on Sacred Scripture, and in Him a love that never ends. May this love of God be fully realized in your life each time you visit the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation and hear these words of forgiveness pronounced over you by the priest who acts in the person of Jesus Christ, the High Priest:

“God, the Father of mercies,  
through the death and resurrection of His Son  
has reconciled the world to Himself  
and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins;  
through the ministry of the Church  
may God give you pardon and peace,  
and **I absolve you from your sins**  
**in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.”**

May the peace of the Lord be with you this day and every day.

## Extra Readings Related to Reconciliation for Your Own Consideration in Prayer

### **A Merciful & Gracious God (Psalm 86:1-7, 11-17)**

*Incline thy ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am godly; save thy servant who trusts in thee. Thou art my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to thee do I cry all the day. Gladden the soul of thy servant, for to thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For thou, O Lord, art good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on thee. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; hearken to my cry of supplication. In the days of my trouble I call on thee, for thou dost answer me. Teach me thy way, O Lord, that I may walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name. I give thanks to thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify thy name for ever. For great is thy steadfast love toward me; thou hast delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. O God, insolent men have risen up against me; a band of ruthless men seek my life, and they do not set thee before them. But thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and take pity on me; give thy strength to thy servant, and save the son of thy handmaid. Show me a sign of thy favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because thou, Lord, hast helped me and comforted me.*

### **Teach Me O Lord, Thy Statutes (Psalm 119:1-12, 15-17, 25-30)**

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! Thou hast commanded thy precepts to be kept diligently. O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping thy statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all thy commandments. I will praise thee with an upright heart, when I learn thy righteous ordinances. I will observe thy statutes; O forsake me not utterly! How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to thy word. With my whole heart I seek thee; let me not wander from thy commandments! I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed be thou, O Lord; teach me thy statutes! I will meditate on thy precepts, and fix my eyes on thy ways. I will delight in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word. Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live and observe thy word. My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to thy word! When I told of my ways, thou didst answer me; teach me thy statutes! Make me understand the way of thy precepts, and I will meditate on thy wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to thy word! Put false ways far from me; and graciously teach me thy law! I have chosen the way of faithfulness, I set thy ordinance before me.*

### **I Will Call Upon the Lord (Psalm 141:1-10)**

*I call upon thee, O Lord; make haste to me! Give ear to my voice, when I call to thee! Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice! Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord, keep watch over the door of my lips! Incline not my heart to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity; and let me not eat of their dainties! Let a good man strike or rebuke me in kindness, but let the oil of the wicked never anoint my head; for my prayer is continually against their wicked deeds. When they are given over to those who shall condemn them, then they shall learn that the word of the Lord is true. As a rock which one cleaves and shatters on the land, so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol. But my eyes are toward thee, O Lord God; in thee I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless! Keep me from the trap which they have laid for me, and from the snares of evildoers! Let the wicked together fall into their own nets, while I escape.*

### **The Blessing of Forgiveness (Romans 4:7-8)**

*“Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.”*

### **The Good Thief Repents (Luke 23:39-43)**

*One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

### **Catechism of the Catholic Church #1420-1498**

*During this Year of the Catechism, it is especially fruitful to turn to these rich paragraphs that deal directly with the Sacrament of Reconciliation.*

## Appendix-Helpful Prayers

### Veni Sancte Spiritus

Come, Holy Spirit, come  
And from your celestial home  
Shed a ray of light divine!

Come, Father of the poor!  
Come, source of all our store!  
Come, within our bosoms shine!

You, of comforters the best;  
You, the soul's most welcome guest;  
Sweet refreshment here below;

In our labor, rest most sweet;  
Grateful coolness in the heart;  
Solace in the midst of woe.

O most blessed Light divine,  
Shine within these hearts of yours,  
And our inmost being fill!

Where you are not, man has naught,  
Nothing good in deed or thought,  
Nothing free from taint of ill

Heal our wounds, our strength anew;  
On our dryness pour your dew;  
Wash the strains of guilt away:

Bend the stubborn heart and will;  
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;  
Guide the steps that go astray.

On the faithful, who adore  
And confess you, evermore  
In your sev'nfold gifts descend;

Give them virtue's sure reward;  
Give them your salvation, Lord;  
Give them joys that never end.  
Amen. Alleluia.

### An Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three Divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; I believe that Your Divine son became man and died for our sins, and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the Holy Catholic Church teaches, because You revealed them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

### An Act of Hope

O my God, relying on Your infinite goodness and promises, I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of Your grace, and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer.

## An Act of Love

O my God, I love You above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because You are all-good and worthy of all love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of You. I forgive all who have injured me, and I ask pardon of all whom I have injured.

## A Prayer Before Confession

“O Lord, may I know myself; may I know You!” May I know my own selfishness, ignorance and weakness, and know, too, that You are ready to lift me up and sustain me as I climb toward the spiritual heights You call me to attain. May I distrust myself and trust in You!

Enlighten my mind, that I may see all my sins clearly; soften my heart, that I may be truly sorry for them; give me the grace and courage to confess them sincerely, and thus obtain Your pardon, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

## Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins, because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they offend You, my God, who are all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.

## Prayer after Confession

O almighty and most merciful God, I give You thanks with all the powers of my soul for this and all other mercies, graces, and blessings bestowed on me, and prostrating myself at Your sacred feet, I offer myself to be henceforth forever Yours. Let nothing in life or death ever separate me from You! I renounce with my whole soul all my treasons against You, and all the abominations and sins of my past life. I renew my promises made in Baptism, and from this moment I dedicate myself eternally to Your love and service. Grant that for the time to come, I may detest sin more than death itself, and avoid all such occasions and companies as have unhappily brought me to it. This I resolve to do by the aid of Your divine grace, without which I can do nothing. Amen.