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• I INTRODUCTION

- A This is one of two Sacraments whose names were changed after the Vatican Council
 - 1 Both changes are very important to correct our understanding of the Sacraments
 - a **"Confession" was changed to "Reconciliation"**
 - b **"Extreme Unction" ("unction" means anointing) was changed to "Anointing of the Sick"**
 - 2 The changes improved confused impressions regarding these two Sacraments that flowed out of the ignorance and superstition of the Dark Ages
- B Wrong Names for this Sacrament
 - 1 **"CONFESSION" -- the title seems to accent my admitting my sins**
 - a This admission is what many people feel is the heart of this Sacrament even today
 - (1) Yet this can't be an accurate title or an accurate description
 - (2) **Confessing, my admission of failure, is not needed for the Sacrament!**
 - b We need to understand what the Sign is for this and for each Sacrament
 - (1) Remember, the Sign is an action not a thing
 - (a) A thing can't fully represent a person
 - (b) An action can
 - (2) The action must be that part of the ceremony which is absolutely needed for the Sacrament
 - (a) If omitted for any reason, the Sacrament is not conferred
 - (b) Other parts may be omitted and the Sacrament will still offered as a visible sign of an invisible reality
 - (3) Most Sacraments have many ceremonies -- but only one is essential
 - (a) **Baptism**
 - [1] Inessentials
 - [a] Anointing(s) -- there can be two
 - [b] Giving the Baptismal candle
 - [c] Giving the Baptismal robe
 - [2] Essential
 - [a] Immersion in water alone is required (with the proper words accompanying it, of course)
 - [b] Pouring and sprinkling are acceptable substitutes for this
 - (b) **Confirmation**
 - [1] Unessential ceremonies
 - [a] Questions by the Bishop
 - [b] The exchange of a sign of peace
 - [2] Essential -- anointing for mission
 - [a] It must be done with oil
 - [b] Water won't suffice
 - c **In an emergency, the "confessing" can be fully omitted**
 - (1) In a battlefield before a major fight
 - (a) A whole army can be absolved

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- (b) No soldier need make a "Confession," none need make an individual admission of sin publicly (out loud) to anyone
- (2) In a hospital in an emergency
 - [1] No confessing is needed
 - [2] Absolution can be offered
- d Therefore, what I admit, "confess," cannot be the heart of the Sacrament
- e Therefore the Sacrament should not be called "Confession"
- 2 **"PENANCE" -- this title seems to stress our acting to correct a wrong.**
 - a **The word is usually understood to refer to an action of punishment or reparation which must precede restoration or pardon**
 - (1) I commit a crime like speeding
 - (2) The gravity of the crime determines the gravity of the fine
 - (a) The faster I speed, the higher the fine
 - (b) Additional crimes (going through a "Stop Sign,") add additional fines
 - (c) When my fine is paid, I am OK again -- I am forgiven
 - (d) We must realize this is not how God's law operates
 - [1] God's justice is not patterned on ours
 - [2] Many misunderstandings regarding Christianity are based on improperly identifying the two
 - b Traditionally: most priests suggest something like "say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys"
 - (1) The penance is heavier when something serious is mentioned
 - (2) It can be much lighter on some other occasions
 - c **Again, granting a penance is not needed in an emergency**
 - (1) It need not be assigned in
 - (a) A war situation
 - (b) A hospital or other medical emergency
 - (2) **General absolution can be given to all penitents in these situations**
 - (a) Their sins are forgiven completely and forever
 - (b) **God does not have several types of forgiveness**
 - [1] The situation can be confusing -- the person is told to confess the unmentioned sins on the next private opportunity
 - [2] This suggestion can give the impression that the sins were "suspended" but not really "forgiven"
 - (c) While these sins are forgiven, the Church is always trying to call us to a better life
 - [1] Our lives are not likely to improve if we sin, do nothing at all, and are forgiven
 - [2] Therefore, the Church invites us to use confession as an opportunity to grow by examining our (forgiven) past sins and accepting responsibility for them and discovering avenues to undo the harm they caused to others
 - d **"Penance" was never intended to be a fine paid for sins**
 - (1) Rather it should be an act performed to help us become better
 - (2) **A very different view of the action often results from the new understanding of this Sacrament**
 - (a) I realize I have hurt you, failed to love you as I was called to love you
 - (b) I accept my responsibility for your harm, for the damage that resulted in your life

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- (c) I want to live better
- (d) With the priest, I try to find a way to make amends
 - [1] To put back into your life some of what I have taken from it
 - [2] To function better in the present and future than I have in the past
- (e) Examples:
 - [1] I resolve to call a friend and find out how he or she doing -- if I'm too self centered
 - [2] A parent can go to a children's movie with one of her/his children that he/she tends to overlook, to take for granted more than the others
- e The priest's suggestion could be called "An Act of Improvement" rather than a "Penance"
- **C Why didn't they change the name to "FORGIVENESS"?**
 - 1 Because this is not **the Sacrament of Forgiveness -- Baptism is**
 - a Each of us professes this truth every Sunday
 - b We say that we believe in "**one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins**"
 - 2 We say this and don't understand how rich the teaching is that underlies the claim
 - a **Easter is God's "Sacrament" telling us His actions are not based on ours**
 - (1) **He forgives because He forgives, because it is of His nature to be forgiving**
 - (2) **He does not forgive because we are good**
 - (a) On the contrary, He forgives because we are bad!
 - (b) He forgives because He is good
 - (3) **And He will never cease to be good**
 - (4) **So He will never cease to forgive**
 - b Once "immersed" in His forgiveness, I **am forever forgiven**
- **D The name given the Sacrament is "RECONCILIATION"**
 - 1 It's a strange term posing some problems
 - a With whom am I reconciled?
 - b If I'm forgiven, why do I need reconciliation?
 - 2 "Reconciliation" is with whom?
 - a God reconciles with us before we do anything
 - (1) Christmas is God's Sacrament of this
 - (2) Baptism is our acceptance of that reconciliation
 - (3) **This Sacrament can help me accept the Reconciliation from God when my experience of it has weakened because of my actions**
 - b We usually need to be reconciled to ourselves
 - (1) **We are all very fragmented within ourselves**
 - (a) There are traits and acts in us which we accept
 - (b) There are traits and acts in us which we reject
 - (2) But we are called to accept ourselves as whole persons
 - (3) By remembering that God forgives us as we are, we can use this Sacrament to help us be reconciled with ourselves — a prerequisite to being reconciled with others
 - c And we always need to be reconciled to the Church
 - (1) Some of our actions have **weakened our bonds to Church members**
 - (2) Other actions may have **broken these bonds**

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- (3) We need to be reconciled
 - (a) Christianity is always lived in community
 - (b) This communal need is real and practical and crucial for us
 - (c) In this real, practical arena, we need reconciliation for what we have done to each other
 - (d) This reconciliation reminds us of our need for others to be ourselves
- II CLUES TO THE NEW TITLE:
 - A The traditional teachings on forgiveness offer the first clue: they show that this Sacrament offers more than forgiveness
 - 1 Case one: if we have "perfect contrition," (sorrow,) and no confession
 - a All sins are forgiven
 - b They are forgiven without Confession
 - 2 Case two: Confession with no contrition
 - a There is no experience of forgiveness
 - (1) Even with Confession
 - (2) Even if "forgiven" by the Pope
 - b **There is no magic to the Sacraments; God respects our free will**
 - 3 So why do we need to confess?
 - a Again, God doesn't have two kinds of forgiveness
 - (1) "Brand X" if there was no Sacrament of Confession -- the poorer variety
 - (2) The "Real Thing" experienced through the Sacrament of Confession
 - b With Baptism we receive forgiveness
 - (1) **We die, we drown**
 - (a) We are dead to self
 - (b) Romans 6:5
 - [1] If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.
 - [2] 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--
 - [3] 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.
 - [4] 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.
 - (c) Since we are dead, we are also dead to any accusation of sin
 - (2) Jesus rises in us -- to live eternally
 - (a) We die, He rises in us
 - (b) From that moment on, the Father sees only His Son when He looks at us
 - 4 It should be clear that Baptism is the Sacrament of Forgiveness
 - 5 What then is this Sacrament? What is Reconciliation?
 - 6 **Of course any experience of Jesus leads to an experience of forgiveness**
 - a We are saved by faith in Him
 - b Faith is not "believing about" -- our usual understanding of the term
 - c **Faith is "committing to," "believing in"**
 - (1) I base my life on what He has done -- forgiven me

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- (2) Not on what I have done -- sinned
- (3) I do not base it on my efforts to try to be good
- (4) I base it on His gift of goodness
- **B** Some of the old Church rules add still more light upon the new title
- **1** When was Confession required by Church law?
 - **a** It was not "once a year during the Easter season!" — this law combined two separate Church rules or guidelines
 - (1) Once a year people were urged to celebrate Confession
 - (2) The Easter duty referred to the Church's urging each individual to receive Communion during this season
 - (3) A loving Church offered two different guidelines, designing each for a different group
 - **b** "The Easter duty" (Older Catholics are still aware of this obligation) was separate from the call to annual Confession
 - (1) It was a guide intended for saints, not sinners, when it was added to our Catholic rules
 - (2) The cultural thinking of the Dark Ages (when religion was tainted by superstitious fear of the unknown) made these saints think they were unworthy of Communion
 - (3) This concept was both right and wrong
 - (a) It was right in that they were unworthy to receive it
 - (b) It was wrong in that they forgot they are to receive it, not because they are worthy, but because Jesus wants them to receive it
 - (4) The Church begs them at least once each year to share in this awesome mystery
 - **c** The requirement for a yearly Confession was a guide put in the rules to help sinners
 - (1) The Church urged them, "Please don't stay away any longer than a year from knowing God's forgiveness and love"
 - (2) We must remember that this request can be traced to a loving God and Church
 - (a) The Church is pleading with all God's Prodigal children to return to His family
 - (b) They are urged to come back to the peace God wants for them and died to give them
 - (3) This rule applied only if Confession was needed -- it did not apply to everyone!
- **2** Another rule said Confession was needed, was only required, before Communion in cases involving serious (Mortal) sin
 - **a** So only those with serious sin needed annual Confession
 - **b** A correct understanding of "Communion" explains the new title given to Confession
 - (1) In Communion we receive the whole Body of Christ
 - (2) Our fellowship, union, common-union, includes Jesus in His glory
 - (3) But it also includes the whole Church
- **C** We need, after serious sin on our part, to be reconciled with the whole Church
 - 1 Our bonds of unity, of community, were weakened or broken
 - 2 Before undergoing an action that testifies to community, ("Communion,") these bonds should be reestablished
 - 3 The reconciliation, then, is with Jesus and through Him with the whole Church
- **III** THE HISTORY OF THE SACRAMENT
 - **A** There is no clear mention of the Sacrament in Scripture
 - 1 James 5:14

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- a Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.
- b 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
- 2 Matthew 18:15
- a "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'
- b 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
- c 18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
- 3 John 20:19
- a When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."
- b 20* After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
- c 21* Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
- d 22* When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23* If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
- 4 Forgiveness was clearly experienced as a living reality in the early Church
- 5 And yet, Christians in this early Church remained human -- Paul's letters reflect a variety of problems
 - a Of **belief -- the dead stay dead**
 - b Of **worship -- it was chaotic**
 - c Of **conduct -- incest was tolerated**
- 6 No action like what we call Reconciliation was done by Church leaders
- 7 Indeed, there is no clear pattern of Church leadership in most of the New Testament
- B The persecutions caused a problem in the Church, leading to the need for this Sacrament
- 1 The very first persecutions were localized, not suffered throughout the entire Roman Empire
 - a At first, the new Christian Church was tolerated by both the Empire and the Jewish religious leaders
 - b **The first notable persecution was done for political, not religious, reasons**
 - (1) **The Christians were seen by outsiders as a "weird" secret group**
 - (a) There were rumors of infant sacrifice -- talk about dying with Christ
 - (b) There were rumors of cannibalism -- talk about "eating His flesh and drinking His blood"
 - (c) These were just rumors since the sect was kept secret -- because of the unity of the community
 - (2) **During Nero's reign, there was a devastating, major fire in Rome -- about 1/4 of city destroyed**
 - (a) People began blaming Nero for fire
 - (b) People began grumbling for relief
 - (3) **Nero used the Christians as scapegoats, blaming them for fire**

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- (a) But his persecution was **confined to Rome**
- (b) And it didn't last too long
- (c) Very ancient Christian traditions hold that both St. Peter and St. Paul died in Rome during this persecution
- 2 The Emperor Diocletian began the first persecution that raged throughout much of the Empire
 - a **A test was devised to ferret out Christians**
 - (1) Suspected Christians were hauled before a public tribunal or meeting
 - (2) They were ordered to curse Jesus before the assembly
 - b **Not all Christians stayed loyal**
 - (1) Rather than suffer or die, many did curse Jesus
 - (2) And other Christians, in the public crowd, witnessed this
 - c **This public apostasy broke the individual's bonds with the Church**
 - d After denying Jesus, some later repented and returned
- 3 Their return to the Church posed a great problem
 - a **Did they need to be re-baptized?**
 - (1) Eventually, the Church answered this problem "No!"
 - (2) This decision is retained in the Creed: **"one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins"**
 - b **They might not need to be re-Baptized, but they did need something!**
 - (1) They had not broken their bonds with Jesus
 - (2) But they had broken their bonds with the Church
 - (a) These are human bonds
 - (b) They can be
 - [1] Strained
 - [2] Weakened
 - [3] Snapped
 - (c) And these bonds were affected in a negative way by those who publicly denied and cursed Jesus
 - [1] Some were scandalized
 - [2] Their failure made it easier for other Christians to fail
 - [3] Their failure made it more difficult for others to succeed in witnessing
 - c **When they repented and returned, they would gather with the Church for the Eucharist**
 - (1) Remember, they were about to celebrate their unity with the Church
 - (2) Before receiving these fellow Christians into their own hearts through the Eucharist, they needed to amend the hurt they had done to them
- C **A ceremony of Reconciliation was used to bring them back to the Church**
 - 1 **This ceremony was very different from our experience of the Sacrament today**
 - a They appeared before the whole Church assembled around the leadership, the Bishop
 - (1) And they **announced their major faults**
 - (2) They **sought to make amends**
 - (3) And they were **reunited with the whole assembly**
 - (4) This drastic set of actions was not used for all sins,
 - (a) It was reserved for major ruptures with the Church

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- (b) At first this list of major ruptures was very small -- only seven
- (c) It clearly did not include many sins some moralists consider major today
- b Only then could they share in the Eucharist
- 2 People knew that all the other human sins were forgiven by the love of Jesus
- **D This basic pattern of Christianity continued in the early Church**
 - 1 Regular failures, sins, occurred, and yet the Christians considered themselves forgiven by Jesus
 - 2 Only a few major problems which affected the morality and unity of the entire community were reserved for the Sacrament
 - 3 Example for doing this was set by St. Paul in First Corinthians
 - a He offers several important guides in one teaching
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 5:1
 - (a) It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you?
 - (b) 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment 4 in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus,
 - (c) 5 you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?
 - (d) 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.
 - b By excommunicating the man, Paul is trying to achieve two different goals
 - (1) The welfare of the individual sinner
 - (2) The welfare of the community
 - c Excommunication is done for the welfare of the person
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 5:5:
 - (a) "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."
 - (b) Its whole purpose was saving the individual
 - (c) It was not intended to punish
 - (2) If only we'd remember that purpose today
 - d Excommunication also is done for the welfare of the Church, the community
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 5:6
 - (a) "Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?"
 - (2) Tolerating the sinner openly can imply a toleration of the sin
 - (3) Others can be affected by this sign of approval of the sinner and conclude the action is permissible
 - e References to "yeast" certainly have meal overtones
 - (1) "With such a man do not even eat."
 - (2) This is probably a Eucharistic reference
 - (3) This man must do something before he can share in the community meal again!

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- E Putting a person out of the community is not an action of punishment
 - 1 This is "ex-communication"
 - 2 The action is not taken to damn the person
 - 3 Nor does the action break the contact between Jesus and the Christian
 - 4 Matthew 18:12
 - a "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?"
 - b 13 "And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray."
 - c 14 "Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."
 - d 15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."
 - e 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector"
 - f 18 "Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
- E Reconciliation was not used for "mortal/venial sins"
 - 1 Rather it was reserved for a select list of major sins
 - a **About six or seven**
 - (1) Murder
 - (2) Rape
 - (3) Incest
 - b **These actions were deemed so grave, they broke the association with the Church**
 - (1) They offered **serious scandal**
 - (2) And they weakened the social fabric
 - 2 Several corollaries were included in this practice
 - a It could be received only once in a life time!
 - b From then on, the person was considered a second class Christian
 - 3 Because of these aftereffects of the Sacrament, people began putting off the Sacrament until they were dying!
 - a This changed their understanding of another Sacrament — The Anointing of the Sick
 - b **A person would wait until he was dying before calling for a priest**
 - (1) He confessed, absolved, reconciled
 - (2) Then he was anointed for death!
 - c **"Anointing of the Sick" became misunderstood, therefore, as "Extreme Unction"**
 - (1) The sacrament was intended to show God's desire for healthy living
 - (2) Instead it became a Sacrament preparing individuals to die
- G Slowly, during the Dark and Middle Ages, changes occurred with Confession
 - 1 These changes began with monks in Ireland who made the Sacrament a source of spiritual growth
 - a The Sacrament was to be received very frequently
 - b And it was to be used for all sins

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- c Specific penances were given for specific sins
- 2 No one is sure why they switched this Sacrament so that it became an instrument.
 - a Not of Reconciliation, (since the bonds with the Church were not broken)
 - b But of spiritual growth
- 3 From Ireland, the monks spread this use of the Sacrament back to the continent
 - a Perhaps this usage responded well to the Dark Age mentality of superstitious fear -- my guess
 - b The Sacrament assured the recipient of peace with the feared, punishing God
- H Much later, reacting to the Reformation, the Council of Trent made some changes
 - 1 It reacted to Protestant criticisms of the Sacrament
 - 2 Absolution was to be given before the penance was performed
 - 3 Lay confession was forbidden
 - 4 Now the Sacrament was to be celebrated privately to a priest
 - 5 But anonymity was not yet part of the Sacrament
- I Anonymity is a relatively recent side effect that resulted from attempting to solve a problem
 - 1 A screen was placed to separate the priest from a woman
 - 2 It was placed not for her sexual safety; anonymity was a side effect
- IV THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION
 - A Reconciliation is made with the Church, with the community
 - 1 These ties were weakened or broken by sin
 - 2 This is an automatic effect of sin, of all sin, even private
 - 3 I am less a person to serve your needs
 - B Understanding this resolves the puzzle often thrown at Catholics:
 - 1 "I don't need a priest for forgiveness -- I can go directly to God. All I have to do is pray"
 - 2 Actually that's not the best statement--
 - a A priest isn't needed
 - b God comes directly to us!
 - c He does this before we pray!
 - 3 Matthew 5:23
 - a "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.
 - b Something still needs to be done after I am forgiven
 - c Forgiveness without reconciliation can become a mockery
 - (1) I can steal from you and say "sorry" to God
 - (2) You're still out your money
 - (3) True sorrow demands that I make some adequate amends with those I have hurt in the community
 - 4 Since the social nature of Christianity has been lost, our need for Reconciliation with others is not understood
 - C Remember what a "Sacrament" is
 - 1 It is a visible sign of the invisible Jesus
 - 2 The focus is not on what we do

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- a Confessing is not part of the sacramental sign
- b The Sacrament should not be an occasion of shame and fear with priests yelling and condemning
- 3 *This Sacrament is our meeting Jesus who always is reconciling us to the Church! (and to Himself and the Father)*
 - a It is a visible sign of His enduring invisible reality
 - b This Reconciliation, each Reconciliation, should help me better understand and experience Jesus
 - (1) He is waiting to reconcile before I enter the presence of the priest
 - (2) He set up the Church to set up this Sacrament so that I might know that regardless of how badly and how often I have fractured my relationship with the Church, He reconciles me anew to that community of love
- 4 Like all the other Sacraments, Reconciliation should be an experience of joy
- D The "Matter for Reconciliation"
 - 1 The matter must include more than the Ten Commandments
 - a These guides are in the Old Testament
 - b We can keep them perfectly and not be Christian at all
 - c Breaking these commandments is a guaranteed sign I am not loving
 - d But not breaking them does not help me see whether or not I am loving my neighbor as a Christian is called to do
 - 2 The matter needs to include the Commandments Jesus gave
 - a Mark 12:28
 - (1) *One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"*
 - (2) *29 Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;'*
 - (3) *30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'*
 - (4) *31 The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*
 - b John 15:12
 - (1) *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."*
 - c Am I allowing God to love me?
 - d Am I loving myself?
 - e Am I loving others?
 - f Am I loving all others?
 - g Simply not hating does not mean I am loving
 - h Remember the Parable of Judgement
 - (1) Matthew 25:31
 - (a) *"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory."*
 - (b) *32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*
 - (c) *34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'*

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- (d) 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.
- (e) 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'
- (f) 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ...
- (g) 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'
- (h) 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
- (i) 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,
- (j) 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'
- (k) 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'
- (l) 45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'
- (m) 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
- (2) Not responding to a need in another is a sign that means I am not loving that person
- (3) This is still true when I have not been asked for this help
- E The Rite of the Modern Sacrament is ignored more than followed
 - 1 It calls for a celebration
 - 2 The rite echoes those of most Sacraments
 - a It begins with a formal greeting
 - b Then it includes a scripture sharing
 - (1) There is a problem -- the reading should be based on this person's needs
 - (2) This can't be done in an anonymous meeting
 - (3) And it is hard to do before the sins are admitted
 - c Only then does the person Confess
 - d The priest offers spiritual advice
 - e He suggests some act of reconciliation and improvement
 - f The person publicly declares a desire for reconciliation
 - (1) Sorrow and guilt are not Biblical prerequisites
 - (2) There needs to be a willingness to "change direction," a willingness to follow Jesus
 - (a) Not to follow others, peer pressure
 - (b) Nor to lead self
 - (3) Any form of expression of willingness may be used
 - (4) The traditional form can pose problems
 - (a) A person can be locked in an "occasion of sin"
 - [1] He/she may have years of the same pattern
 - [2] And he/she cannot promise "to amend my life"
 - (b) "I am heartily sorry" and "I detest all my sins"
 - [1] Within our hearts, this is often not possible
 - [2] We enjoyed this action -- that's why we did it

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- [3] We feel a certain dishonesty in making the required statement
- [4] Actually, we need just see that we were wrong, that our actions were wrong
 - [a] They hurt ourselves and/or others
 - [b] And this hurt was unnecessary
- g The priest puts his hands on the person's head
 - (1) This is the visible sign of reconciliation
 - (2) It is part of the Sacrament
 - (3) Americans are often not ready for it
 - (a) Many of us don't want to be touched by others
 - (b) Problems can exist for some women
- h And he recites a prayer of Reconciliation
- i The Sacrament concludes with a formal dismissal
- V CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF RECONCILIATION
 - A It's no secret that this Sacrament is not used today
 - 1 Its demise is a strange side effect of Vatican II
 - 2 And it is nearly world-wide in its decline
 - B This decrease in its use is sad and everyone suffers because of it
 - 1 It is one of only seven Sacraments Jesus offered the Church
 - 2 **Each and all were given because each and all reflect an aspect of the Church and of Jesus which we need to experience at every moment of our lives**
 - a To experience the invisible reality, we need not experience the Sacrament by ourselves
 - b It is sufficient to witness the Sacrament performed
 - (1) Each Baptism reminds me I die and Jesus lives in me
 - (2) Each Reconciliation reminds me I am reunited with the whole community
 - (a) That this is the mission of Jesus
 - (b) That this is the mission of the Church -- to seek me out and reunite with me regardless of anything I have done
 - C Some of the decline in the private reception of the Sacrament is healthy
 - 1 It reflects a drift away from legalism
 - 2 It reflects a drift away from fearing God
 - 3 It reflects an experience of a loving God
 - D But much of the decline is also unhealthy
 - 1 It has been occasioned by loss of a sense of sin
 - a I have done nothing "serious"
 - b So I don't need Reconciliation
 - c Which means I really don't need Jesus or the Church
 - d It also reflects the loss of a sense of the communal nature of all sin
 - 2 The decline is possible because we have no sense of the effects of our sins on others
 - a Modern Christians, including Catholics, have no concept of the social nature of religion, of salvation
 - (1) They only want to "save" themselves
 - (2) The God of Love, of harmony, of "wholeness," who made them

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- (a) Wants to “save” each of them
- (b) Also wants them to be instruments of “saving” everyone else
- (3) **The “Animal Puzzle” shows how even our “private” sin affects others, cheats others**
 - (a) God did not create us to be isolated pieces
 - (b) He made us to live in harmony with all others and with each other
 - [1] We have beauty
 - [2] But the whole has a beauty greater than the sum of its parts!
 - (c) He gave us our talents to use them to bless others
 - [1] Not for us to keep them undeveloped
 - [2] Nor for us to allow them to atrophy
 - [3] But for us to develop and share, to use
- (4) One of the consequences of all our sin is that we fail to bless others with the love God intended
 - (a) We become a source of “Original Sin” in their lives!
 - (b) We rob them of their heritage — as Jacob did to Esau
 - (c) We make it difficult — or impossible — for them to be the masterpieces intended by God
 - [1] Think of the “balloons”
 - [2] We fail to give them the air, the love, they need for healthy development
 - [3] We make it impossible for them to be all they were created to be
- b **Yet current Christian preaching ignores this social aspect of reality and creation**
 - (1) People are encouraged to save themselves — and to Hell with everyone else”
 - (a) Christians are told to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior — for their own sakes only
 - (b) Catholics are told to believe in Jesus and be baptized — for their own sakes only
 - (2) **And then they are warned not to louse up their salvation by serious sin**
 - (3) **If other Christians louse up their salvation by serious sin**
 - (a) They are told to ask God to forgive them — for their own sakes only
 - (b) Catholics are told to go to Confession — for their own sakes only
 - (c) And the impression is offered that everything is all right again
 - (4) Everything is not right again
 - (a) **Others are hurting — they suffer a lack of love in their lives**
 - (b) **And a loving God**
 - [1] Loves us
 - [2] And loves them
 - (c) Because of both loves, He wants us to amend the damage we have done
 - [1] Not by saying “I’m sorry”
 - [2] But by taking positive actions to replace the love we have not offered, to heal the scars we have inflicted
 - [3] By spending loving time with those we have ignored
- 3 There is a practical loss: Catholics had enjoyed the cheapest and safest therapy in the world
 - a **The “Seal of the Confessional” is sacred -- even to fallen away priests**
 - b **Most Catholics had trusted in the confidentiality of the Sacrament**

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- (1) They dumped their "garbage"
- (2) They walked out freer than they entered
- c Now these Catholics are carrying their little and big guilts within themselves
 - (1) They have less emotional peace
 - (2) So they have less religious peace
- 4 **People quit using the Sacrament because they mentioned the "same old sins week after week"**
 - a **Two problems are involved with this view**
 - (1) Do they want God to give them new sins?
 - (2) What would they have been doing if they had not received the Sacrament?
 - b **There is a simple test: Are our lives more serene without the Sacrament? Nearly never**
 - c We feel more and more isolated from each other from ourselves and from God
- 5 **People also quit because they and the priest wrongly put the spotlight on their "confessing"**
 - a This is an emotionally distasteful action for healthy people
 - b Often the humiliation was increased by their receiving a tongue lashing from priests
- E Remember: a Sacrament is a visible sign of the Invisible Reality
 - 1 Reconciliation is a reminder of what the Church is to be -- a reconciling community welcoming you back to unity even when you have shattered all bonds with it
 - 2 It should be a sign of who Jesus always is -- a loving Shepherd looking for the lost sheep no matter how far they have strayed
 - a Never resting until you are found
 - b Then carrying you back to the fold
 - c And throwing a party in celebration because you are found
 - (1) Luke 15:4
 - (a) "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?"
 - (b) 5 "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
 - (c) 6 "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"
 - (d) 7 "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.
 - d Each Eucharist can be seen as God's party because you are back
 - 3 Jesus is a sign of who the Invisible Father is
 - a **Not the God of vengeance preached in thunder from so many pulpits**
 - b **But the Father of the "Prodigal Son"**
 - (1) Anxiously looking for His lost child
 - (2) Running across the fields to greet the child
 - (3) **Hugging the kid -- before he says anything!**
 - (4) Acting to heal him so that he can be treated with dignity
 - (a) Giving a ring
 - (b) Presenting the finest robe
 - (c) And offering sandals
 - (5) **Not responding at all to his confession -- that's unimportant**

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- (6) **Caring only that His child is back**
- (7) **Throwing a party -- the Eucharist -- to celebrate this**
- (8) **Wanting all -- including the "good" "elder" brothers in the Church -- to join in this party**
- 4 **How much we lose when we ignore this experience of Jesus, of the Church,**