
A MISSION OF RECONCILIATION



On January 27 and 28, 1997, the annual continuing education session was held [In French] at the Diocesan Centre for pastors, pastoral agents, members of parish pastoral councils, and others interested in the topic. Father Raymond Vaillancourt, C.J.M., a professor at the Université de Sherbrooke, had been retained as the resource person on the subject of the sacrament of reconciliation; he himself is the author of a book on the sacrament entitled *La pénitence dans l'existence contemporaine*. [*Penance in Contemporary Life*]

DIFFICULT RECONCILIATIONS

Whenever we talk of reconciliation we know that this is not always easily achieved. How reconcile spouses among themselves when there is a long-festering hurt and misunderstanding? How reconcile parents to children when the dialogue has been cut off for many years? How reconcile neighbours to one another when there is still hurt about harsh words spoken? How reconcile members of a group or organisation when the burden of serious offenses against others is still being carried? How reconcile municipalities or parishes when major events have brought about discord among members? How reconcile with one's past when memories of youthful misdemeanour come to haunt us? How reconcile oneself to creation when recollections of drowning or major environmental accidents are still fresh? How be reconciled to God Himself when we strongly believe that He is the cause of this accident or death?

AN ESSENTIAL TASK

Father Vaillancourt first pointed out that the Church's mission can be summed up in the essential task of reconciling humankind with God, with itself, with one's brothers and sisters, and even with creation itself. He quoted the following from Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance: « *The Church - and when we say 'Church' we are referring to all the baptised - has the mission of announcing reconciliation and of being its sign and instrument, in the world. This it is first and foremost by its existence as a reconciled community that witnesses to and represents the work of Christ. This it is by its service as guardian and interpreter of Holy Scripture which is the happy news of reconciliation, because it makes known God's plan of love from generation to generation. This it also is through the seven sacraments which each in its own way, build up the Church. All the sacraments are sources of life for the Church and through the Church they are instruments of conversion to God and of reconciliation.* »

ALREADY AT WORK

If people are worried about the seeming neglect regarding the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, we would have to look closer at how this indispensable task of reconciliation is experienced. When parents help their children regain confidence, they perform a splendid task: they remind their children of all the love and esteem which God continues to have for them. When a nurse, a doctor, or a volunteer remind the sick that they are important people in their community, they are performing a marvellous task and in the name of the Lord are expressing to their patients the profound meaning of the hope that inhabits them. When municipal, provincial, and federal officials elaborate legislation meant to bring about more fellowship and justice, in the name of the Lord they raise the level of trust of the entire community. In a world that creates its own images of God - sometimes even, idols - the Church's mission and that of the baptised is to reveal the image of the God of Jesus. The Church's task is to convert

humankind to the God of Jesus, and reconcile the world to the Christian God. It is therefore both a reconciliation and a conversion: to turn away from one's own images of God and to the real God, and to bring the faithful to take seriously the communitarian dimension of the Gospel.

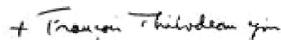
UNDERSTANDING ONE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

At the heart of this mission of reconciliation there is the indispensable dimension of knowing how to recognise one's own responsibility, in one's options and actions. *« As today's mentality rightfully grants a great value to the human being, it is most tempting to make of oneself the absolute standard. The drama of Adam and Eve is duplicated in every human being, whence the importance of the Church's mission faced with the universality of this two-fold tension of the human being, so well described in the wise Genesis account. Every human being yearns for its own absolute. Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the serpent. A very simple account, but so very rich in meaning and realism, especially in a context which pushes human beings to throw their own responsibilities onto others, on society and on existing systems. »* The mission of reconciliation obliges us to cast a cool eye on the situation as a whole, and to recognise both our mutual rights and obligations.

A SOURCE OF RECONCILIATION

For the Church as a whole, there is an undisputed certainty: *« love is greater than sin; where sin abounds, grace abounds exceedingly. »* Professing its faith in the mystery of Christ, the Church believes that Jesus has revealed himself in our own flesh and that he was justified by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the basis of all reconciliation. Through baptism and confirmation he associates us intimately in his work of reconciling the world. Welcoming the Word of God, celebrating the sacraments and especially the Eucharist, the exercise of charity, commitment to one's brother and sister, working for justice, prayer, and almsgiving are all ways of entering this world of reconciliation and of becoming aware once again of how God still has confidence in us today, and that He loves us without measure. The sacrament of penance and reconciliation - I shall return to this - does not exhaust the ways given us to reconcile ourselves to God, to one another, to ourselves, and to creation. In a way of speaking, the sacrament is a stamp of recognition of the conversion that has taken place in our being, and a reaffirmation of the pledge of God's trust in us.

Have a good week!



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« From A Bishop's Journal » (162) (26 February 1997)