

FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO THE RITE OF PENANCE

3. Christ “loved the Church and gave himself up for it to make it holy” (Ephesians 5:25-26) and he united the Church to himself as a bride (Rev. 19:7). He filled it with his divine gifts, because it is his Body and his fullness; through the Church he spreads truth and grace upon all. The members of the church, however, are exposed to temptation and often fall into the wretchedness of sin. As a result, “whereas Christ, ‘holy harmless, undefiled’ (Hebrews 7:26), knew no sins (see 2 Corinthians 5:21), but came solely to seek pardon for the sins of his people (see Hebrews 2:17), the Church, having sinners in its midst, is at the same time holy and in need of cleansing, and so is unceasingly intent on repentance and reform” (*Lumen gentium*, 8).

4. The people of God accomplish and perfect this continued repentance in many different ways. They share in the sufferings of Christ by enduring their own difficulties, carry out works of mercy and charity, and adopt ever more fully the outlook of the Gospel message. Thus the people of God become in the world a sign of conversion to God. All this the Church expresses in its life and celebrates in its liturgy when the faithful confess that they are sinners and ask pardon of God and of their brothers and sisters. This happens in penitential services, in the proclamation of the word of God, in prayer, and in the penitential parts of the Eucharistic celebration. In the sacrament of penance the faithful “obtain from God’s mercy pardon for having offended him and at the same time reconciliation with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, example, and prayer seeks their conversion” (*Lumen gentium*, 11).

5. Since every sin is an offense against God that disrupts our friendship with him: “the ultimate purpose of penance is that we should love God deeply and commit ourselves completely to him” (Paul VI, *Paenitemini* 179 and *Lumen gentium* 11). “Therefore, the sinner who by the grace of a merciful God embraces the way of penance comes back to the Father who “first loved us” (1 John 4:19), to Christ who gave himself up for us (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:25), and to the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on us abundantly (Titus 3:6).

“The hidden and gracious mystery of God unites us all through a supernatural bond” on this basis one person’s sin harms the rest even as one person’s goodness enriches them” (see Paul VI, *Paenitemini* 4 and Pius XII, *Mystici corporis*, 213). Penance always therefore entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who remain harmed by our sins.

In fact, people frequently join together to commit injustice, but it is also true that they help each other in doing penance; freed from sin by the grace of Christ, they become, with all persons of goodwill, agents of justice and peace in the world.

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