

Homily for the 7<sup>th</sup> sun. in Ord. “B”  
Feb. 21-22

One of the questions people have about the Catholic Church is why do we have to go to a Priest to confess our sins, can't we just go directly to God?

Part of the answer to that question is given to us in today's Gospel.

Before Jesus healed the paralytic, He said to him, “Your sins are forgiven.” The Scribes and the Pharisees murmured and grumbled to themselves about this saying, “Who can forgive sins but God Himself?”

This is exactly the same response that critics of the church use when they question the Sacrament of Confession.

Locked in Jesus response is a small but powerful and important phrase. Jesus, knowing the objections of the Scribes, says to the Paralytic and to the crowd pressing around Him, “So that you will know that the Son of man has the power to forgive sins on earth, I say to you stand up, pick up your mat and go home.”

Why didn't Jesus just say “So that you will know that the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins ...”? Why did He add the phrase “on earth”?

Jesus did this to proclaim that His presence and the power of His ministry were intended to continue to have effect on earth through the life and the work of the Church. Why was this important? So we won't have to guess whether or not we are forgiven?

Human beings always struggle with issues of worthiness. Only those with unbridled pride mask this struggle. But most of us always wonder and worry about whether we are worthy to be

loved by God. Are we worthy of Salvation? Are we worthy of forgiveness?

An honest look into our souls can never admit in any way that we can ever be worthy.

But God's love is a gift. We don't have to be worthy of it. God chooses to love us despite our sin. It pleases Him to reach beyond our pride and selfishness to draw us into His salvation. And though we can never be truly sorry, He chooses to give us total forgiveness if we just ask for it. Jesus said that the work that God asks of us is to believe and to trust. That is all we need to do.

The concrete pledge of God's love and forgiveness is made real in the world by what Jesus did. He bore our sins. He established a tangible means by which we are reconciled to God and given His forgiveness. He established the Church so that every generation down to this one will have access to that clear assurance of His forgiveness.

We know that this is Jesus intention from what we find at the end of John's Gospel. Before He ascended into heaven Jesus appeared to the disciples gathered in the upper room. He said, "Peace be with you". And after He said this He breathed on them and said "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive they are forgiven. Whose sins you retain are retained."

Why did Jesus breathe on them? To show that the power He gave them is something real; not just an idea or a warm feeling. What He gave to the disciples He gave to the Church, so that you and I would benefit from it. It is a real means of receiving God's forgiveness.

We can have this forgiveness. We can have this freedom from our sins. We can truly have a chance to put our mistakes

behind us and start a-new, through the Sacrament of Confession and Reconciliation.

The season of Lent, which starts this Wednesday is an invitation to start fresh and say goodbye to destructive behavior and be free of the burden of our sins. It is a chance to re-commit ourselves to live in communion with God's grace.

I hope that you will make use of the Sacrament of Confession and Reconciliation. I hope that you will choose to strengthen your commitment to Jesus this Lent. I invite you to choose a-new to live your faith with intention.

Instead of just giving something up for lent, do something that will build the Kingdom of God. One opportunity is to participate in the 40 days for Life that is being organized by the Parishes in Everett. It is a chance to witness in a gentle but powerful way to the value of Human life. In a peaceful and caring way, it is an opportunity to state your opposition to abortion and your care for the women who face the burden and confusion which an unwanted pregnancy can cause.

Christ has given you a great and life changing gift; the gift of forgiveness. He has given you the chance to recreate yourselves in His image and likeness. Use this Lent to restore your relationship with Christ. Use this gift of Reconciliation which He has given us as a real and concrete forgiveness so that we can build ourselves a-new and live in God's peace and joy.