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SACRAMENT OF CONVERSION

Abstract

„Penance requires the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction.” (CCC 1450) The sacrament of conversion and reconciliation turns us towards Christ, to the source of salvation that flows from His Heart. Christians are called to celebrate the mercy of God in a sacramental way. We have the great gift of being able to experience the fruit of peace and reconciliation. Our mission is to give that gift to the world through personal and sacramental testimony. If a man confesses his sin, the justice of God may purify the sinner. God does not just heal the sinner but recreates him and gives him a new heart.

Keywords: *sacrament, conversion, contrition, penance, reconciliation, mercy, way of the Cross.*

Introduction

The sacrament of penance and reconciliation is also known as the sacrament of conversion because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion (cf. Mark 1,15), a step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed through sin (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* = CCC 1423). The mission which Christ entrusted to his apostles involved the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the preaching of the Gospel for conversion (cf. Mark 16,15; Matthew 28,18–20). The call to conversion is at the very core of apostolic kerygma and one must constantly be reminded of it as an integral part of the witness inaugurated by Christ's Apostles. Owing to the crisis arising from the way sin is viewed today, it is important to renew the declaration of God's mercy in Christ which has a special manifestation in the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

1. Lord, I am not worthy

There are numerous Gospel scenes showing how Jesus encounters sinners and proclaims to them the joyful message of mercy: the adulterous woman, Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, Matthew, the paralyzed man, and the man lowered through the roof... „Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof; but say only the word“. (Mathew 8,8). Each of these witnesses to Jesus' mercy was transformed by a single word, which liberated and recreated the very core of their being. There are many others who were simply touched by Jesus' word and approached him with contrite hearts. The Gospels also reveal that Jesus' ministry stirs scandal. The Pharisees are astonished by how Jesus treats sinners, and object to His forgiveness of sins, which they believe is something only God is capable of. They consider Jesus to be misusing divine power, yet they do not condemn Him for performing miracles. One by one, His adversaries close ranks and he is condemned to a shameful death – crucifixion outside the city – as the sacrificial lamb on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).

Saint Paul explains the redemptive meaning of the atoning sacrifice as follows: „We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God“ (2 Corinthians 5,20-21). The evangelist John writes about John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner, who says: „Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world“ (John 1,29). Therefore, Jesus' first word after rising from the dead is 'Shalom', the messianic greeting of peace, encompassing all the blessings promised by prophets, starting with the forgiveness of sins. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus thus immediately entrusted the apostles with the ministry of reconciliation: „Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven“ (John 20,20-23).

„Confession is the Lord's command. It is an unconditional requirement stemming from love. God desires us to confess because he wishes to forgive. Perfect contrition is a prelude to a new life in the sacramental experience. From the very beginning, contrition has been part of the sacrament of confession and remains inherently oriented towards the act of confessing – an expression of one's orientation towards confessing before God and the Church. Between contrition and confession, absolution is manifested in advance by granting purity. Yet, one must always await God's response. This corresponds to the celebrations of

Holy Saturday. No one can grant absolution themselves. Everyone is oriented towards the forgiving grace.”¹

The merciful Jesus introduces a new dimension of mercy – one that will not lack scandal through the centuries, the power entrusted to the Church to forgive sins and, directly, entrusted to ministers who themselves are not exempt from sin. Yet shameful deviations must not obscure the good news of God’s mercy. The forgiveness of sins does exist; this piece of good news has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification. All people are capable of showing mercy, for he died for all, and the Holy Spirit touches every human heart in ways beyond our understanding. The joyful good news of mercy goes beyond the boundaries of the Church and sacramental order because of the universality of the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Against this background, Christians are called to celebrate God’s mercy sacramentally. They have a great advantage of experiencing the fruit of peace and reconciliation, as well as the mission to make these known to the world through their personal and sacramental witness. The excellence of their witness depends on how open they are to the Father’s mercy which is revealed through the face of the merciful Christ.

Most men and women who have rarely or never heard of the Gospel can embrace the liberating mercy of Jesus Christ, providing they open their inner space of goodwill by sincerely repenting their sins. God desires that all people are saved. He grants mercy to all for the sake of Jesus Christ. Even if they cannot go back to the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist in full, God’s mercy continues to accompany them. They are not condemned. The Church must, in accordance with the requirements under the covenant, consider the boundaries. At the same time, it is aware that it is God who is entitled to judge people by their conscience as well as to bestow the kingdom of his mercy upon them. Many people live bitter lives without practising religion because they no longer have full access to the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. Nevertheless, they must be assured of the mercy of God in order to help them understand the boundaries of their access to the sacraments.

As for believers who have simply drifted away from sacramental bonds, they should also be reminded of the positive psychological and therapeutic effects of absolution following their sincere confession of sins. Psychiatrists are astonished that the act of confession is disappearing from the Catholic Church, while their offices are packed with people who wish

1 Anton ŠTRUKELJ, *Odpušcanje*. Ljubljana: Družina, 2000., 79

to be listened to, speak of their mistakes, resolve their feeling of guilt, and rediscover their freedom and inner unity. Have we lost awareness of the inestimable value of this healing service that connects us so closely to the merciful Christ?

2. Sacramentality of penance

Embracing the merciful Christ necessitates a new evangelization allowing for the sacraments to have an even deeper role within the Church's mission. The Second Vatican Council calls for this at the very outset of the *Lumen Gentium* Constitution:

„Christ is the light of nations [...] the Sacred Synod desires to bring the light of Christ, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church, to all men, and to proclaim the Gospel to every creature... (cf. Mark 16,15). For the Church is in Christ a sacrament or a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1).

Before the seven sacraments comes the Church – a community founded upon the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – the universal sacrament of salvation. The sacraments serve as tangible signs of salvation *propter homines*. They bestow specific grace upon people and also serve as signs of the Church's sacramentality vis-à-vis the world. They visibly reflect the Church, the fruitfulness of the covenant between Christ, the Bridegroom and Church, the Bride, in unity with the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, Christ grants his Bride, the Church, new children.

„Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, to sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – so that she might be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5,26–27).

A view of the Church that implies a new evangelisation of the sacraments in general – and of penance in particular – is founded on the nuptial covenant between Christ and the Church. The sacraments are the main reflection of this covenant, serving as a vessel for the Church to accomplish its mission in the world in full. Baptismal water thoroughly cleanses the Bride, who then only needs the word of reconciliation – penance – in order to stand before the Bridegroom as is appropriate for a nuptial Eucharistic encounter. The Church is never more truly herself than at the very moment when she allows her Lord to cleanse her, strengthen

her in grace, and make her receptive to the mercy of God, which she is called to bear witness to in the world. Thus, for a person to fully embrace God's forgiveness not only must they truly desire to achieve their inner peace – they must also be ready to bear witness to the world, of the merciful Christ, with the Holy Spirit pouring this readiness into the hearts of those who wish to show ever more love. This makes it easier to grasp the meaning of the fulfilment of the penitent's actions as a whole: repentance, confession, and satisfaction, reflecting the Bride's disposition – along with her sinful members – before the merciful Bridegroom. Something essential would be missing if general absolution were enough, without a personal acknowledgement of sins. This would imply that Christ's confession of love on the Cross conveyed a different disposition. The Church has always emphasized that, for the absolution of sins to be valid and fruitful, a person needs to confess to a priest as soon as possible. This reciprocity in the confession of sins, which is essentially a confession of love, is inherent to the very nature of the covenant that God desires. To confess sin is to confess a lack of love; it is to fill in what was lacking in love. On the Cross, Jesus confessed to the Father the sin of the world, and each of our personal sins, as He drank to the dregs the cup of God's wrath.

„The cross is the most profound condescension of God to man and to what man – especially in difficult and painful moments – looks on as His unhappy destiny. The cross is like a touch of eternal love upon the most painful wounds of man's earthly existence [...] the cross of Christ, in fact, makes us understand the deepest roots of evil, which are fixed in sin and death; thus, the cross becomes an eschatological sign.“²

Can a sinful man and a sinful woman who acknowledge the mercy of Christ's confession on the cross be in a true loving communion with the suffering Bridegroom without themselves experiencing the pain of confessing their own sins? The logic of the covenant requires the Bride to satisfy the merciful love of the Bridegroom by sincerely confessing her sins and performing the acts of satisfaction. Therefore, the disclosure of sins and penance make part of the sacrament. They conform to the very nature of the nuptial covenant which Christ, the Bridegroom wishes to preserve with his Bride and every one of her members. Encouraging are Jesus' words to the sinful woman: „Her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown“ (Luke 7,47). The Church's approach, founded on the inner demand for love which is expressed in the sacramental en-

2 JANEZ PAVEL II., *V znamenju Svete Trojice. Dives et misericordia*. Ljubljana: Družina, 1999., 129.

counter, complements and deepens the anthropological, therapeutic, and marital reasons that call for a detailed disclosure of sins for the sacrament to be genuine and valid.

If a man confesses his sins, the redemptive righteousness of God may cleanse the sinner. „I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11,19).“ God not only heals the sinner but transforms them through his Holy Spirit, giving them a new heart, i.e., a new conscience, and opens before them the horizons of worship and revitalized faith. As the *Imitation of Christ* reads:

„To You, O Lord, humble sorrow for sins is an acceptable sacrifice, a sacrifice far sweeter than the perfume of incense. This is also the pleasing ointment which You would have poured upon Your sacred feet, for a contrite and humble heart You have never despised“ (III, 52, 4).

The Bible in its entirety is imbued with a sense of sin which is never reduced to insufficient religious observance alone. Instead, it is always oriented towards moral and theological significance and opens up to hope. We will never cease to hope, for God's mercy always exceeds our affliction.

3. Against You, You alone, have I sinned

Psalms 51 reads as follows: „Against You, You alone, have I sinned; what is evil in Your sight I have done, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment“ (Psalm 51,6).

The focus is on the first verse, unveiling the very gist of the biblical theology of sin and penance. An act of a sinner encompasses a dimension of interpersonal „relationship“, an external element, without being constrained to a personal private matter alone. This is obvious: sin affects the other, our neighbour – which is a common moral experience across cultures. What the psalmist introduces, however, is a vertical perspective: not only does the sin violate the rights of our neighbours horizontally, the will of the supreme moral guardian is also under attack, with the sinner's action being directed towards the Person of God. The sinner's action is ultimately directed against the person of God. God is not some vague force whose reactions are unpredictable, as seen in many ancient Near Eastern theologies. Instead, God is a personal 'I' („I am who I am“ (2 Moses 3,14), the one who reveals what is good and what is evil. Evil being 'you', undermined by the abuse of righteousness and truth... The abuse of the rights of our neighbour reveals itself as an act of offense against God who is the guarantor of moral law. Several commandments of the Decalogue clearly show the connection

between the love of God and love of our neighbour. That is why David, after his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, utters a simple yet essential confession: „I have sinned against the Lord“ (2 Samuel 12,13). This sentence which belongs to the established formula used during penance is part of lasting biblical tradition which seeks to distance the understanding of sin from magical, merely legal, or sociological frameworks, and lead it back to its theological and spiritual roots.

This view is represented by the words of a prophet according to whom a sin is an act against God, the latter being the highest guardian of righteousness and ethics, the defender of the poor, powerless and victims.

„The Lord has risen to bring judgment. He stands to judge the peoples. The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people. It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor – declares the Lord, the God of hosts“ (Isaiah 3,13–15).

„Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying ‘When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat...buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat.’ The Lord has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: I will never forget anything they have done“ (Amos 8,4–7).

The same confession can be found in the famous Lukan parable of the Prodigal Son, veiled in the symbolic language of the son’s offense against his father, expressing the same understanding – marked by the reference to ‘heaven’ which is a euphemism for the name of God: „Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you“ (Luke 15,18). Dealing with the issue of idolatry, St. Paul wrote: „Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ“ (1 Corinthians 8,12). Sin always has the scent of sacrilege. Before injustice is committed against a man, sin is first and foremost a betrayal of God. The Lord is the God who is an originator of moral law, which is expressed in the command given to Noah: „From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image“ (1 Moses 9,5–6). Sin corrupts the sinner’s conscience, wounds one’s neighbour, and offends God. When we pray the *Miserere* (Blessed Charles de Foucauld often emphasized that ‘*Miserere mei, Deus*’ (Have mercy on me, oh God) should be our most usual prayer. We must not regard the sin from the personal or psychological perspective only, for it is defined by its theological nature. Sin is not a mere psychological or social issue; it is an event that defiles

our relationship with God by violating his law, rejecting his plan in history, and dismantling the moral order. As the prophet Isaiah put it: „Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5,20). Before it becomes an injustice against a man, the sin is first and foremost a betrayal of God.

Saint Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans: „What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God’s faithfulness? Absolutely not! Let God be true, and every human being a liar, as it is written: ‘So that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged’” (Romans 3,3–4). Yet human unfaithfulness does not destroy God’s faithfulness. God’s final word is not the condemnation of the sinner, but forgiveness and redemption. In the Apostles’ Creed, we declare: „I believe in the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting”. The resurrection of the body is the fruit of the transformation of a man freed from sin through baptism and strengthened by the Eucharist. Cardinal Henri de Lubac notes that „with these words, the Creed concludes and summarises all perfection”.³ „Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked?, declares the Lord God. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? [...] For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God. Turn back and live” (Ezekiel 18,23.32). God is just when pronouncing punishment against evil. However, when it comes to penitence, he goes beyond the simple equation of sin and punishment and introduces a three-fold premise: „sin-righteousness-reward”.

4. The turning of life

At the core of the purest Christian spirituality, Blaise Pascal introduced a dialogue between God and the soul:

„If you knew your sins, you would lose heart. –I shall lose heart then, Lord, for I believe in their malignancy on your assurance. –No, for I, through whom you learn this, can heal you, and what I say you is a sign that I wish to heal you. Just so far as you shall expiate your sins, you shall know them, and it shall be said to you: ‘Behold the sins that are forgiven you.’ Do penance then for your concealed sins, and for the hidden malignity of those that you know”.⁴

3 Henri DE LUBAC, *La foi chrétienne*. Cerf: Pariz, 2008., 254.

4 Blaise PASCAL, *Le Mystère de Jésus par Blaise Pascal*. Pariz: Art Catholique, 1917., 13.

Confession, as a sacrament, holds its place along the journey of following Christ. It encompasses a period of suffering – where the act of confession represents repentance – however, the fact of us being able to confess is an Easter grace. Confession does not signify the end of a love relationship. To be pure for one another means a mutual sacrifice along with everything one possesses. A pure soul is a beautiful soul. A beautiful soul knows how to, and wishes to pray beautifully. „It is easier to speak with God amidst beauty. Why? Because God is beauty”.⁵ Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the root cause of the crisis that shakes the modern age and pointed to the importance of the beauty of liturgical tasks: „The deepest cause of the crisis that has shaken the Church lies in the obscuring of the primacy of God in the liturgy”.⁶ Therefore, the confessional disposition must be in the Trinitarian life of God: God stands before God with a disposition befitting God. By analogy, we may refer to it as a confessional disposition, for it is in this disposition that God reveals himself as he is – because God himself desires such a revelation, and because it is this disposition that gives rise to ever new perspectives and new forms of love. God is not static; he is eternal, continually originating life. For God, beatitude lies in self-revelation before God – the joy of close interconnection, encompassing both the act of revealing and the act of accepting what is revealed.

„Three divine persons are completely open to one another. They hide nothing from each other but reveal themselves as they are. They give themselves to one another and accept each other, trusting each other limitlessly. This is how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit show each other their perfect love: this is their beatitude. And a man should, by grace, be part of this divine confessional immediacy. When confessing, a man presents himself as he is before the God who sees it all. Therefore, an essential element of this confessional disposition is that man discloses their sins”.⁷

A part of the sin of the world must always make it into one's personal confession; in this way, the absolution received by each believer will extend beyond him/her alone, touching the world in its entirety in an unconceivable way. Thus, no one can receive Holy Communion for themselves alone – this would be in total contradiction with the very notion of communion itself, which always signifies a union with God and with

5 Nicolas DIAT, *Trois jours et trois nuits*. Pariz: Fayard, 2021., 189.

6 BENEDIKT XVI., *Kaj je krščanstvo?* Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 2024., 49.

7 A. ŠTRUKELJ, *Odpuščanje*, 68.

the mystical Body of Christ that no one can confine. Just as participation in the Body and Blood of Christ is a participation in what was given for the life of the world, so is the participation in the Cross – the primordial confession – the sacramental actualisation of the absolution that was proclaimed over the world on Easter, a world fully reconciled with God.

5. Confession, a lifeboat following a shipwreck

Divine wisdom has given us a remedy to assist us in putting sin to death: the sacrament of confession, also known as penance. When a person makes use of this gift, the power of the sin keeps getting weaker and a man triumphs over any disturbance. It is a recommendation of the Church that even Christians who generally live in friendship with God go often to confession. All great saints often went to confession. St. Francis de Sales, for example, would confess daily before celebrating Holy Mass. Their hearts felt a constant need to be washed in the Blood of the Lamb: „Thoroughly wash away my guilt; from my sin cleanse me” (Psalm 51,4). The sacrament of penance always brings reconciliation to the soul *ex opere operato* – out of the Saviour’s merit: „The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1,7). Forgiveness involves pouring out grace that makes human nature suitable for interaction with God. With the aim of renewing and sanctifying the soul, grace takes hold of the sinner’s actions, i.e., a confession of sins committed in the hope of being forgiven, the contempt for sin followed by a firm resolution to be better, to have will, to perform the act of satisfaction imposed by the Church.

On Calvary Jesus presented himself to the Father clothed in all our sins: „The Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all” (Isaiah 53,7). Jesus knew each one of our sins. He measured the full weight of the injustice our sins had inflicted upon divine holiness. And in order to save us, he took upon himself all the shame, all the rightful suffering that was caused by our iniquity. In the sacrament of reconciliation, he grants a share of his merit to us: this is necessary for us to be able to accept his merits. In the judgement of mercy, we must feel the true weight of our sins, ingratitude, and poverty; the corruptness of our sins and infidelity must weigh heavily on our soul and our confession must be painful. It is equally important to embrace the sacramental penance with all our heart, and to offer all actions of our life to this aim. In this way, one may gradually attain spiritual death owing to the powerful offering of satisfaction of Jesus Christ. For confession to truly help one’s progression in perfection, one must firmly guard against falling back into sin. Anton Strle, the servant of God teach-

es: „Punishment of satisfaction serves as a strong deterrent against sin; it keeps penitents, so to speak, on a rein, making them more cautious and vigilant in the future”.⁸ One must nurture a firm resolve for conversion to be able to respond whenever temptation arises.

„The sacrament of conversion, for it is through the latter that we return to the Father by converting our lives and hearts, something to which Jesus constantly calls us. Only the heart of Christ, which knows the depths of his Father’s love, could reveal the depth of his mercy in a way so simple and so profoundly beautiful. Conversion is the work of God’s grace within us. It is God himself who gives us the strength to begin anew”.⁹

On our way to achieving spiritual freedom, a spirit of contrition, remorse, and solemnity can be of great help. This is known as *compunctio cordis* (from the Latin verb *compungere*, meaning „to prick” or „to sting” the heart – to cause regret, remorse). It is the feeling of regret for having offended God, stirring in the soul a revulsion against sin.

„Contrition must be painful. As soon as it is Christian, it can no longer be a mere intellectual exercise. We are lost sheep. We must feel pain in our heart, i.e., where the heart should have loved, but failed to do so. For a man cannot pray or deliberate if only moments before they seriously wronged the other; deliberation would lead them nowhere. The Spirit will not make any revelations to them. If anything, it would send them away to reconcile with their brother. It is not possible to pray or deliberate with the mind alone; a man with their entire being must be present, with entire being feeling remorse [...]. They have lost the eye and the sense of the Lord’s purity. And yet, the very moment they wish to confess, they start returning to God – seeing him again”.¹⁰

A man should not dwell on the details of their sins, as doing so can sometimes be dangerous. Instead, one should repent for having opposed God’s will with their own will – for having neglected, thrown away, or wounded His love, the great treasure of grace. Saint Teresa of Ávila inscribed in her desk with her own hand the following words: „Lord, do not call your servant to judgment” (Psalm 143,2). Some might consider such turning toward God’s mercy for past sins excessive. Yet what did Saint John write: „If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Offending the Lord,

8 Anton STRLE, *Vera Cerkev*. Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 1997., 353.

9 Marija ZUPANČIČ, *Zakramenti. Božje mojstrovine*. Bled: Vernar, 2004., 255.

10 Adrienne VON SPEYR, *Spoved*. Ljubljana: MKSBD, 1999., 176.

contributing to Jesus' suffering, even if only once, already weighs heavily on the consciousness of a caring man. Contrition preserves within our soul the sense of God's forgiveness, bringing peace and trust; the heart opens up in joy: „Restore to me the joy of your salvation” (Psalm 51,14).

A clear disposition for deliberating sinfulness and contrition before God reflects the devotion of the way of the cross. The way of the cross is the source of contrition, the most fruitful devotion for nurturing the spirit of remorse. In the way of the cross Jesus shows himself as an example of holiness. He reveals himself to us as perfect in all virtues. He reveals his love for the Father, his love for souls, his patience, mildness, and the glory of forgiveness. His submission which is the source of his strength, sustains him and allows him to continue walking the painful path to his final words: *consumatum est* (It is finished). By reflecting on Jesus' suffering, we learn to resist sin within ourselves and join him in his sacrifice to help fill the abyss of the world's injustice. We cannot imitate Christ unless we share in his life. At every stage of his Passion, he gained strength which allowed him to renew, by his grace, within us the image of virtues that we contemplate of him: „Power came out from Him” (Luke 6,19). The Church encourages us to relive the Savior's Passion. We must learn to better understand the price of Jesus' blood and place our hopes in his merit. The Curé of Ars, Saint John Vianney, once said: „After confession, you must drive a thorn into your heart and never lose sight of your sins”.¹¹

Conclusion

According to Revelation, God is known for his desire for the salvation and well-being of people; for being a God of salvation. Thus, in Preface I of Advent in the Roman Missal we pray: „For he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation” (RM). God chooses men for salvation; he wishes for them to experience the fullness of life, to bestow on them the gifts of salvation. However, by committing a sin, a man ruptures this friendly relationship with God, ruptures a covenant with him. And this rupture lies at the very core of the sin. The word of God calls for conversion, for turning one's life around. God will only forgive a sinner if the latter will convert.

Sin blinds the human eye, obscuring the vision of God when tirelessly seeking his face – „something like scales fell from his eyes” (cf. Acts 9,18).

11 Janez Marija VIANNEY, *Življenje je več kot jed*. Ljubljana: Družina, 2000., 51.

„If a man encounters God within the sense of turning from disbelief to faith, he is imbued with the truth, which sets them free and shows them the way. It makes them capable of walking the path. The truth is Christ, and the path to him is now open”.¹² In his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* Saint John Paul II addressed the people of our time: „It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism”.¹³

„Christianity is a mystery of death and of life, but the object of this death is to safeguard the divine life in us”.¹⁴ By dying, Christ destroyed death and offered us life by rising from the dead. The core task of a Christian life is, by its very nature, the task of life itself: Christianity is about multiplying Christ's life within us. Christians die to everything that is sin in order to receive more of God's life. Penance serves the purpose of conversion and is merely a medium through which we attain life in God. „Think of a different view into which you have to immerse your own”.¹⁵

SAKRAMENT OBRAĆENJA

Sažetak

„Pokora obvezuje grešnika da dragovoljno prihvati sve njezine dijelove: u svom srcu ka-
janje, u svojim ustima ispovijed te u svom vladanju potpunu poniznost i plodnu zadovoljštinu“
(KKC 1450). Sakrament obraćenja i pomirenja usmjerava nas prema Kristu, k izvoru spasenja koji
teče iz njegova Srca. Kršćani su pozvani sakramentalno slaviti Božje milosrđe. Imamo veliki dar
mogućnosti iskusiti plod mira i pomirenja. Naša je misija taj dar dati svijetu kroz osobno i sakramen-
talno svjedočanstvo. Ako čovjek ispovijedi svoj grijeh, Božja pravednost može pročistiti grešnika. Bog
ne samo da liječi grešnika, nego ga ponovno stvara i daje mu novo srce.

Ključne riječi: sakrament, obraćenje, skrušenost, pokora, pomirenje, milosrđe, križni put.

12 Adrienne VON SPEYR, *Človek pred Bogom*. Ljubljana: Družina, 1997., 117.

13 JANEZ PAVEL II., *Apostolsko pismo Novo millennio ineunte*. CD 91. Ljubljana: Družina, 2001., 36.

14 Dom Columba MARMION, *Le Christ, vie de l'âme*. Cadillac: Éditions Saint-Rémi, 2020., 259.

15 Georges BERNANOS, *Trpljenje in upanje*. Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 2007., 159.