

## **Penitential Service**

### **Opening Prayer**

**Almighty and Mercy-full God, you have brought us together in the name of your son to receive your mercy and grace in a time of need. Open our eyes to see our sinfulness. Touch our hearts and convert us again to yourself. Where sin has scattered, may your love make us one again. Where sin has brought weakness, may your power heal and strengthen. Where sin has brought death, may you Spirit raises us again to life.**

**Give us a new heart to love you, so that our lives may more truly reflect the image of your Son. And may our world come to see the glory of Christ revealed more clearly in us, your Church, and come to know that he truly is the One whom you have sent, Jesus Christ, the One whom we proclaim as Lord, forever and ever. Amen!**

## **Closing Prayer**

**Lord, our God, You created us in love and redeemed us in mercy. Send now your Holy Spirit to breathe new life again into your children...for you do not wish us to die, but to live, and to live for you alone. You never abandon those who abandon you. Be with us in this conviction.**

**Lord, your sons and daughters stand before you in humility and trust. Look with compassion on us. Heal our wounds; stretch your hand and raise us up. Continue to protect us in body, mind, and spirit. And may we always keep safe in all its fullness the gift your love once gave us and which your mercy now restores.**

**We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever and ever. Amen!**

## **A reading from the Holy Gospel According to Mark**

**A leper approached Jesus with a request, kneeling down as he addressed him: “If you will to do so, you can cure me.” Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said: “I do will it. Be cured.” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus then gave him a stern warning and sent him on his way: “Not a word to anyone, now,” he said: “Go and present yourself to the priest and offer for your cure what Moses prescribed. That should be proof for them.” The man went off and began to proclaim the whole matter freely, making the story public. As a result of this, it was no longer possible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He stayed in desert places; yet people kept coming to him from all sides.” The gospel of the Lord.**

## Homily Notes

When I was growing up, we were taught to set aside time to examine our consciences. The object was to remember your sins—carefully and completely. It sometimes took a long time, I recall. As I've gotten older and reflected on the new *Ordo Penitentiae*, or rite of reconciliation, it's dawned on me that remembering *is* an important part of this sacrament. But perhaps we've been remembering some of the wrong things. Or at least not remembering some of the more important things.

Perhaps we should be spending more time remembering God's word to us about forgiveness. The sacrament is about God, after all, not so much really about me. It is God's action through the ministry of the church.

Remember God's Word: remember Ezechial's song: "Even if a mother could forget (and we know some do), I will never forget you. Remember that! Or remember Jesus saying again tonight to the leper: "Of course I will that you be clean, whole again." Or remember the other startling stories Jesus tells, or other amazing lines from our scriptures. Remember the Prodigal Father in Luke's gospel. "Kill the fatted calf; my son was lost and is now found." Or remember St. Paul in Galatians saying: "For freedom Christ has set you free." Or John's gospel: "I have come that you might have life in abundance." Remember that! That's what the sacrament is really all about.

**But we forget what is worth most remembering. We forget!**

**There is a wonderful myth that ancient Greeks used to tell each other about forgetting who we are. Plato records it in his book the *Phaedo*. Each human being is fashioned with great care and love by the gods and is fully aware of the gods' affection and concern for each one. But as each soul takes final shape in a body, each must pass through the Plain of *Lethe*, a word which means literally the Plain of Forgetfulness. And we *forget* how loved we are and have been created. The rest of our human life is forged in the challenge to remember. To remember who we really are before God.**

**Some ancient Hebrews had a similar myth/story. In theirs, as each soul takes its carefully crafted, unique, and much loved body to earth, it is literally "touched by an angel" right on the top lip in the center. And when the angel touches each of us, we forget. We forget how loved we really are. We forget that God *exists* to forgive. We forget, quite literally, who we really are.**

**That angel's touch may explain why to this day every time we try to remember something, so many of us put our finger up to our top lip, to that little indentation, and often hum a bit. Hummm!**

**Our greatest invitation in life may be to remember. Remember God's constant love; remember God's healing power; remember God's desire to forgive is the essence of who God is.**

**All sacramental power comes, in the end, from Eucharist. And Eucharist's heart remembers Jesus' words to all his friends. "Whenever you do this, remember me." Remember: even if all these should forget. I will never forget you. You are mine and I am God's. Remember that! Peace!**