

A wide range of texts for this form of the Penitential Rite is provided in the Missal. (*Roman Missal*: Order of Mass 3B,c) There is also freedom to provide other verses or tropes, so long as they name the saving works of Christ and are invocations of praise. This flexibility can be of great assistance as a way of engaging the faithful with different aspects of the saving work of Christ in the Mass, or in various other liturgical celebrations which may be celebrated within or outside of the Mass.

There is sometimes confusion concerning the Absolution which concludes the Penitential Rite. A prayer for God's forgiveness rather than a formal act of absolution, it lacks the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance. (cf. GIRM 51)

Questions

1. What expressions of penance and reconciliation are most familiar to you? Which of the dimensions of penance described above are least familiar?
2. What images of reconciliation are there in your parish church?
3. The prayer for blessing water at the Easter Vigil identifies saving events in salvation history. What other significant saving events (associated with water or not) might stand alongside these as significant for
 - a. The people of your parish
 - b. For you yourself
4. What saving works of Christ might be remembered in the 3rd form of the Penitential Rite at Mass, when there was to be a celebration of
 - a. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick
 - b. The sacrament of Marriage
 - c. The sacrament of Orders (Bishop/priest/deacon)
 - d. A funeral Mass

Look to see which texts in the Missal would be most suitable. Try your hand at drafting alternatives (*Lord Jesus, you...*).

Acknowledgements

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Thinking about Reconciliation

a reader for priests and people

Part Two:

The Mystery of Reconciliation in the Sacraments of the Church

As has already been noted the liturgical expression of the mystery of reconciliation is far from being confined to the *Rite of Penance*. Considering how this mystery is expressed in a variety of the Church's other Rites can help deepen an appreciation of the different dimensions of our reconciliation in Christ, and clarify what is particular to the *Rite of Penance*.

Baptism

This section might be better headed 'sacraments of Christian Initiation'. In the ancient tradition of the Church, the work of reconciliation is accomplished not only by Baptism but by the celebration together of the three sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. This practice is restored now for adults and older children in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The majority of people baptised in the Church in England and Wales are still baptised as infants. They celebrate in later years the remaining sacraments of initiation, Confirmation and Eucharist, each of which effects and signifies the mystery of reconciliation in its own way.

Yet of the three sacraments it is Baptism that has been seen as *the* sacrament that reconciles humankind with God.

Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children, a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and are indeed the children of God...

Baptism, the cleansing with water by the power of the living word, washes away every stain of sin, original and personal, makes us sharers in God's own life and his adopted children. As proclaimed in the prayers for the blessing of the water, baptism is a cleansing water of rebirth...

Christian Initiation: General Introduction 2, 5

Any celebration of the sacrament of baptism is very much about this person or these people being baptised, and about the particular change being effected in their being and in their lives. At the same time it is not just about them and their relationship with God, nor even their relationship with the Church, local or universal. The work of salvation now celebrated with them takes place within, is the latest expression of the great history of salvation. Through their redemption through water and the Spirit they become a part of that whole history.

For this reason the Church is cautious about any practices which might suggest that baptism is a private affair (cf. *Christian Initiation: General Introduction* 7-10; *Rite of Baptism for Children* 4-6; *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 9-16)

One of the already mentioned prayers for the blessing of water evokes a number of saving events from salvation history which involved water. It invites those present to recognise the significance of what it is about to take place in this baptism, and its broader context.

Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs,
which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power.

In baptism we use your gift of water,
which you have made a rich symbol
of the grace you give us in this sacrament.

At the very dawn of creation
your Spirit breathed on the waters,
making them the wellspring of all holiness.

The waters of the great flood
you made a sign of the waters of baptism,
that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness.

Through the waters of the Red Sea
you led Israel out of slavery,
to be an image of God's holy people,
set free from sin by baptism.

In the waters of the Jordan
your Son was baptized by John
and anointed with the Spirit.

Your Son willed that water and blood
should flow from his side

In the Concluding Rite the faithful are sent forth in peace to love and to serve the Lord, in deeper communion, with each other and the whole Church. (cf. *One Bread, One Body* 66, 67)

The Penitential Rite at Mass can take a number of alternative forms. (As noted above it can also be replaced on Sundays by the Rite for Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water)

The first form of the Penitential Rite, the *Confiteor*, the 'I Confess', focuses especially on our sinfulness and on our call to pray for each other.

I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done
and in what I have failed to do;
and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,
all the angels and saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

The second form concisely contains a confession of sin and an implicit confession of the Lord's mercy and love.

Lord we have sinned against you:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord, show us your mercy and love.
And grant us your salvation.

The 3rd form, sometimes called a Litany of Praise, always focuses on the saving acts of Jesus to which the assembly responds with the Kyrie Eleison, the Lord have mercy, by which we acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy.

Lord Jesus, you came to gather the nations
into the peace of God's kingdom:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

You come in word and sacrament to strengthen us in holiness:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

You will come again in glory with salvation for your people:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

united with Christ. Indeed in our gathering Christ is once more personally present to and with his people. (cf. SC 7)

In the Liturgy of the Word, Christ speaks with his people. As we listen to his word and respond to it our continuing conversion from sin and to God is promoted. (cf. SC 7, Lectionary for Mass: Introduction 4, 5, 6) After the proclamation of the Gospel reading the deacon or priest kisses the Gospel Book and says quietly: 'May the words of the gospel wipe away our sins.' (*Roman Missal*, Order of Mass 13)

In the Eucharistic Prayer the faithful of the Church give thanks for the reconciliation won in Christ and pray that it may come to still fuller expression in their lives and for the peoples of the world.

Look with favour on your Church's offering,
and see the Victim whose death has reconciled us to yourself.
Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood,
may be filled with his Holy Spirit,
and become one body, one spirit in Christ...

Lord, may this sacrifice,
which has made our peace with you,
advance the peace and salvation of all the world.

From Eucharistic Prayer III (*Roman Missal*, Order Of Mass, 114)

The Church provides two particular Eucharistic Prayers for Masses of Reconciliation which focus on aspects of reconciliation which may be the object of thanksgiving.

During the Communion Rite the assembly prays for Christ's mercy as it prepares for Holy Communion:

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world:
have mercy on us...

(*Roman Missal*, Order Of Mass, 131)

Together with the priest the people once more acknowledge their unworthiness and that reconciliation is Christ's gift:

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.

(*Roman Missal*, Order Of Mass, 133)

As they receive Holy Communion, Christ's faithful say 'Amen' to the gift of union with him.

as he hung upon the cross.

After his resurrection he told his disciples:

'Go out and teach all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

Father, look now with love upon your Church,
and unseal for her the fountain of baptism.

By the power of the Spirit
give to the water of this font
the grace of your Son.

You created man in your own likeness:
cleanse him from sin in a new birth of innocence
by water and the Spirit.

The priest may lower the Easter candle into the water either once or three times, as he continues:

We ask you, Father, with your Son
to send the Holy Spirit upon the waters of this font.

He holds the candle in the water:

May all who are buried with Christ
in the death of baptism
rise also with him to newness of life.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Roman Missal: The Proper of Seasons – The Easter Vigil, 42

By baptism we become 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Pt 2:9) And again and again through our lives we advert to our baptismal identity, the promises it contains for us, and the responsibilities it gives us.

Each time we enter a church, we dip our hands into holy water and make the sign of the cross. Whether the water comes from the font or not, the gesture connects us with our baptism.

At Sunday Mass there is the optional rite of sprinkling with holy water. It is especially commended during the season of Easter (because of the baptismal resonances of that season). It reminds us of our baptism that we might be kept faithful to the Spirit God has given us. (cf. *Roman Missal*, Order of Mass 3 A)

Baptism is signified in the alb which worn by the clergy and other liturgical. The whiteness of the alb echoes the white baptismal garment that all are dressed in after they have received the washing of baptism.

And the reconciliation already won in baptism is recalled in the funeral liturgy as the body of the deceased is brought into the church. Holy water is sprinkled on the coffin:

In the waters of baptism
N. died with Christ and rose with him to new life.
May he/she now share with him eternal glory.

(Order of Christian Funerals, 118)

The coffin may then be covered with a white pall, again a reminder of the baptismal garment and a sign of the dignity of this person whom Christ has reconciled with himself.

In some parishes when a coffin is brought into the church the night before the funeral it stands in the baptistery so that this baptismal imagery may be all the more strongly engaged with.

The Anointing of the Sick

The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick signifies and brings about reconciliation in a number of ways.

Often the sick and elderly can be marginalised within the community. The celebration of this sacrament with them, (together with the other liturgies which are offered in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*) can help overcome that, and witness to the irreducible value of human persons at every stage of their lives.

In her Tradition the Church has recognised that as well as being a response to physical sickness this sacrament also is a response to spiritual and even moral disorder.

This sacrament gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick: by this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the Evil One and against anxiety over death. ...If necessary, the sacrament also provides the sick person with the forgiveness of sins and the completion of Christian penance.

Pastoral Care of the Sick: Introduction 6

Marriage

The sacrament of Marriage expresses in the union of man and woman the mystery of Christ's union with the Church. In this mystery God teaches that what he has united may never be divided. (cf. *Rite of Marriage* 33)

Orders

In the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ—the head and shepherd—authoritatively proclaiming his word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation—particularly in baptism, penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the head and shepherd.

John Paul II, *Pastores dabo vobis* 15.

The responsibilities of a Bishop and priest for the work of reconciliation in the Church are several times singled out for attention in the liturgies of ordination (e.g. *Rite of Ordination* 40, 152, 171.)

Not only their particular responsibilities for the ministry of the sacrament of Penance are considered, but also their broader responsibilities for maintaining and strengthening the unity and holiness of the Church enabling the Church herself to be minister of reconciliation, a sign in the world of conversion to God. (cf. *Ceremonial of Bishops* 621)

Eucharist

The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is 'given up for us', and the blood we drink 'shed for many for the forgiveness of sins'. For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1393

It will be clear that the Penitential Rite of the Mass engages us with the Mystery of Reconciliation. However so does the whole of Mass as well as its various parts.

In our gathering we who are many, and sometimes belie the unity of the Church in the way we live our individual lives are once more together and