

***The Third Sunday of Advent***  
***December 12, 2021***  
***Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #48)***

*“When he saw their faith, he said, ‘As for you, your sins are forgiven.’ Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?’” (Luke 5:20-21)*

The passage from the gospel of Saint Luke, quoted above, is extremely important as the foundation of our next reflection concerning the sacrament of reconciliation. It poses a familiar question: “Who but God alone can forgive sins?” I say it is familiar for many of us have heard this same question posed by our non-Catholic brothers and sisters. They will ask: “Why do Catholics confess their sins to a priest? He is a man. Who but God alone can forgive sins?” Their question is nothing new, and its answer has been provided to us by Jesus, Himself during His public ministry. I will now attempt to connect various passages together from Sacred Scripture to offer the answer, I profess, God gives to us.

The incident of the healing of the paralytic can be taken from either the fifth chapter of Saint Luke’s gospel or the ninth chapter Saint Matthew’s gospel. In both accounts we can fix our attention upon the miraculous healing which occurred. Yet, if we do this then we, unintentionally, limit the work of Jesus. Yes, we profess Jesus to be the Divine Physician, but not solely a physician who heals physical ills. Harken back to last weekend, what did we hear foretold in the dream of Saint Joseph? *“He will save His people from their sins.”* (Matthew 1:21). If Jesus had only been content with healing the physical maladies of the people He encountered, then Yes, He is a Divine Physician, but He would never merit the more endearing titles of Savior and Redeemer. Again, remember from last week, the principal object of the mission of Jesus was to release our souls from the bonds of sin and restore our relationship with God which had been wounded due to sin.

As Catholics, we profess that Jesus, God Himself, established the Catholic Church to continue the ministry He had begun during His earthly ministry. An example of this continuation can be read in the gospel of Saint Matthew (28:18-20), when Jesus commissions His apostles to out and make disciples of all nations through the sacrament of Baptism. Let us now propose that Jesus also wanted His disciples to continue His ministry of reconciling humanity to His Father through another means, the forgiveness of sins after Baptism. We can read two passages which show Him sharing in His own power to forgive sins before commissioning them to go and baptize. Jesus will share His power of forgiving sins through investing the keys of the church to Saint Peter (Matthew 16:18-19). Not content to bestow this authority solely

upon Peter, He will breathe His Holy Spirit upon the apostles with these words: *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.”* (John 20:21-22). Saint Paul, not one of the original apostles, will attest to this authority in his second letter to the church at Corinth with these words: *“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”* (2 Corinthians 5:18).

I conclude with a thought for you to consider. If Jesus ordained His apostles to continue with His work of reconciling humanity back to His Father, as our Catholic Church teaches, then could we not find in our history either examples or statements which show the first Christians both teaching and exercising this God given power? Next week, I will conclude our reflections upon the Sacrament of Reconciliation showing various early Catholic Church teachings which show that our earliest ancestors in the faith believed what we still do to this day. And that is the necessity of confessing your sins to a priest who has the authority to forgive those sins as divinely willed by Jesus Christ.