

Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 30, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“If I mention to a third party that I am discussing various aspects of my life with another, he will generally agree. It is a good idea: ‘You’re doing the right thing, and I’m glad you’ve found someone who can help you along.’ In a way, this will elevate me in his eyes. But if I tell him that I am going to confession and that it redeems me, this lessens my status in his eyes, for those who do not go to confession always have a great deal to say against it.” (Adrienne von Speyr, Confession, p. 19)

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul wrote: *“Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure or greedy person, that is, an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient.”* We may ask ourselves: *“To whom were these words addressed?”* The correct answer would be to the Christians reading his words.

These words written to the Ephesians seem to present a different theological understanding of sin from Saint Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians, which we heard proclaimed today. Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians that God reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus Christ and, very important point, *“not counting their trespasses against them.”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). Modern ministers assert the debt of sin incurred by all is wiped clean by Jesus and this mercy is extended to all who avail themselves of this gift. As an ambassador of Jesus, Paul represents Him to those who hear his words of reconciliation. We now find ourselves asking an important question: *“If the death of Jesus forgave all sin and to receive this mercy all we need do is turn to Jesus, THEN why do Catholics confess to a man, a priest, when Jesus has already done everything?”*

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul explained (1 Corinthians 12:4-31) that there were many gifts by the Holy Spirit to the Body of Christ (the Church). The various members of the Body are given specific gifts from the Holy Spirit which allow the member to know, love and serve God in the way best suited for their growth in holiness. Of these gifts, certain members are called to be ambassadors of Jesus as His witnesses to others. Saint Paul acknowledges himself as an ambassador who speaks for God and his message is to announce God’s mercy. Once a person is baptized and receives the Holy Spirit, then their sins, all of their sins, are forgiven. Again, so why need we go to a priest?

Earlier, I quoted a passage from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. Why would Saint Paul write these words IF all sins have been forgiven through Jesus? Again, the answer lies in whom those words were addressed to. Saint Paul is speaking to Christians. These are people who have already received the Trinitarian Baptism (Father, Son and Spirit) for the forgiveness of their sins and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Confirmation). Yet, as we all know from experience, even with all of these graces, man, in his weakness, returns to sin. We must acknowledge this fact. We all commit sin. This is where we need to consult other books of the New Testament. The First Letter of Saint John (1 John 2:4) addressed its hearers with these words: *“Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth*

is not in him.” Jesus, John and Paul all knew that Christians would continue to sin in spite of Jesus’ saving death. We are weak and the lure of sin is very strong. We need help to remain on the path toward Heaven. Therefore, Jesus would provide this needed assistance through His ambassadors who received His power to offer forgiveness to Christians who committed sin after their Baptism. This was recorded by Saint John in his Gospel (John 20:21-23). My family, be reconciled to God with His Son in the power of His Spirit through the words of His ambassador who is called to preach this reconciliation to you. Now is the acceptable time to embrace this mercy before the celebration of His Passion, Death and Resurrection.