

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2026
Year of the Church in History

“Again he saith to me; ‘Love truth, and let nothing but truth proceed out of thy mouth, that the Spirit which God made to dwell in this flesh, may be found true in the sight of all men; and thus shall the Lord, Who dwelleth in thee, be glorified; for the Lord is true in every word, and with Him there is no falsehood.’” (The Shepherd of Hermas)

As we continue our reflection upon *The Shepherd of Hermas*, I would call your attention to the above quote. I specifically want to highlight the statement: “With Him there is no falsehood.” This statement will be fundamental as we approach another lesson which is taken from the Fourth Mandate, displayed below.

*“I have heard, Sir, say I, ‘from certain teachers, that **there is no other repentance, save that which took place when we went down into the water and obtained remission of our former sins.**’ He saith to me; ‘**Thou hast well heard; for so it is.** For he that hath received remission of sins ought no longer to sin, but to dwell in purity.’” (Fourth Mandate, The Shepherd of Hermas)*

*“‘But I say unto you,’ saith he, ‘if after this great and holy calling any one, being tempted of the devil, **shall commit sin, he hath only one (opportunity of) repentance.** But if he sin off-hand and repent, repentance is unprofitable for such a man; for he shall live with difficulty.’ I say unto him, ‘I was quickened into life again, when I heard these things from thee so precisely. For I know that, if I shall add no more to my sins, I shall be saved.’ ‘Thou shalt be saved,’ he saith, ‘**thou and all, as many as shall do these things.**’” (Fourth Mandate, The Shepherd of Hermas)*

In the written handout you will receive in the bulletin, I have used the “Bold” feature to emphasize two main points. Hermas recalls certain teachers speaking of no other way for sins to be forgiven except through a going “down into the water.” His guide responds affirming this teaching as true. I think all present will recognize what this going down into the water is referring to: Baptism. It has always been the belief that Baptism was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Those early Christians held this belief, taught this belief and gave up their lives in union with this belief. Although we have defined the Sacrament of Baptism in greater detail than these first and second generation Christians, the common belief we have all held was: Baptism forgives all sins, leaves an indelible mark upon us claiming us for Christ and restores to us that grace (Sanctifying Grace) which allows us to be known as children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit.

However, I included another section of this conversation which needs further reflection. Hermas is concerned. He had been previously baptized. What would then happen to him when he fell to the temptations offered and sinned again? In essence, could sins committed after Baptism be forgiven?

For you and I, this point seems moot. As Catholics, we have been taught there is another sacrament, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is available to forgive those sins committed after Baptism. This teaching is not new to us. Yet, this same teaching was being debated during the time of the writing of *The Shepherd of Hermas*. The notion of forgiveness AFTER Baptism was highly debated for years. In fact, if we are honest, our Catholic understanding of the forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is still questioned by some in our day.

A key point which helped our Catholic Church to finally define Reconciliation as a Sacrament, established by God, for the forgiveness of sins after Baptism developed through our understanding of Sacred Scripture. Turning to the Book of Exodus (Exodus 14), Moses led the children of God through the waters toward their freedom from oppression. This great scene has often been described as pre-figuring Baptism. It is key to remember what occurs after this event. The children of God fell into sin through the construction and worship of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). God, through Moses, had to extend His forgiveness upon His disobedient children. A man, Moses, acting with the authority given him by God, is able to offer God's forgiveness. Jesus, as both God and man, will offer God's continually disobedient children that same forgiveness through the same tool — A man given His authority. *“And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained’”* (John 20:21-22 KJV).

What *The Shepherd of Hermas* illustrated to early Christians was this point: Sins committed after Baptism can be forgiven once. Our Church built upon this foundation and expanded it by stressing the Mercy of God which allows for that same forgiveness to be extended more than once. As the Children of God would repeatedly fall into sin in the desert, so we too fall repeatedly into sin even now. We still need forgiveness and God still offers us that forgiveness.