

## Homily 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2026

'I am gentle and humble of heart'

During last year's Mission at Holy Redeemer, we celebrated a Liturgy of Reconciliation. \* Most people went to individual 'Confession'. I observed, as some emerged with tears of joy, others with a broad smile, others couldn't hold back their need to speak enthusiastically about their experience and deep inner healing. One woman ran to me and joyfully proclaimed, 'John, I hadn't been to 'Confession' for years and years, that was truly amazing! Why did I wait so long? Fr Antony is so Christ-like and through him Jesus just lifted a great weight off my shoulders. Thanks be to God!'

Fr Antony certainly emulated his Master and with great humility communicated Jesus' deep compassion and infinite mercy for the penitent sinner. Zachariah in today's First Reading prophesied the coming of a Messiah king who would usher an era of humility, justice and salvation. The humble Messiah king would come with meekness, poverty of spirit and complete trust in God. This humility would be in stark contrast with ancient kings who entered cities on magnificent war horses after military victories. The Messiah king riding on a donkey symbolised a humble and peaceful Messiah. Jesus fulfils this prophecy throughout his entire public ministry, but explicitly in his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This humility and bringer of peace must be the hallmark of every 'confessor'

St Paul in his Letter to The Romans explains how it is possible to have men and women who, like Fr Antony and many of the Faithful, follow in Christ's footsteps. Paul says we simply must be born of The Spirit. Living in the Spirit means: to be life giving through our compassion for others; to be energy-givers through our readiness to listen and understand when we are called to forgive our neighbour and to constantly raise people up, helping them to live 'in the image and likeness of God'. St Paul writes, 'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.'

Jesus in today's Gospel from St Matthew utters one of the most beautiful and moving invitations in the history of the humankind, 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' The humble Jesus, filled with The Holy Spirit, proclaims the will of The Father: no-one needs to carry the burdens of pain, guilt, regret; the gentle and humble Jesus will relieve us of those weights and carry them for us and finally we only need to 'come to him' and through his Passion and Death he will raise us up.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has perhaps, for some, gone out of 'vogue'? Perhaps the humility to face up to our faults is no longer 'fashionable'. Perhaps we don't like to admit our weaknesses or talk about our sins in our 'anything goes' post-modern 'I'm alright Jack' 'survival of the fittest' world. Yet, if we are honest, all of us are in some way 'broken' and in need of 'rest' for our souls. We all need someone to help us carry our often-heavy loads.

In 'Confession', if we are humble enough to accept our sinfulness and if we 'choose our priest carefully' we will indeed encounter the humble Risen Lord. Jesus, through the Sacrament will all too willingly relieve us of our pain and carry our burden with us. In so doing he will enable us, through The Holy Spirit, 'to find rest for our souls'. How stunningly beautiful is that!

\* The therapeutic (healing) aspects of the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** (also called **Confession** or **Penance**) in the Catholic tradition are central to how the Church understands the Sacrament. Rather than viewing it only as a legal act of forgiveness, Catholic theology sees it as a remedy that heals the wounds caused by sin and restores a person's relationship with God, others, and themselves.

The key therapeutic aspects include:

1. **Healing the Relationship with God: Sin** damages communion with God. Through absolution, the Sacrament restores sanctifying grace and reconciles the person with God. Catholics believe God's forgiveness brings spiritual peace and renewed intimacy with Him.
2. **Relief from Guilt and Shame:** Confessing sins aloud to a priest allows individuals to acknowledge wrongdoing honestly rather than suppressing it. Hearing the words of Absolution provides objective assurance of forgiveness, often reducing feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety.
3. **Emotional and Psychological Healing:** Many people experience Confession as emotionally liberating because it encourages: honest self-examination; acceptance of responsibility; expression of remorse and hope for a new beginning. While it is not psychotherapy, these elements can have positive psychological effects.
4. **Growth in Self-Knowledge:** The examination of conscience encourages reflection on one's patterns of behaviour, motivations, strengths, and weaknesses. This self-awareness supports personal and spiritual growth.
5. **Formation of Virtue;** The Sacrament encourages repentance (*metanoia*), meaning a change of heart and life. Through repeated practice, Catholics strive to replace sinful habits with virtues such as humility, patience, charity, and self-control.
6. **Healing Relationships with Others:** Sin affects not only the individual but also the community. Reconciliation restores the person's relationship with the Church and motivates them to seek forgiveness from those they have harmed. The assigned penance often includes acts that foster repair and reconciliation.
7. **Hope and Renewal:** The Sacrament emphasises God's mercy rather than condemnation. Catholics are encouraged to trust that no sin is beyond God's forgiveness when there is sincere repentance, fostering hope and resilience.
8. **Spiritual Strength:** Catholics believe the grace received in the Sacrament strengthens them against future temptation. Regular 'Confession' is seen as spiritual medicine that promotes ongoing conversion rather than merely addressing isolated sins.

**9. Therapeutic Process within the Sacrament:** The Sacrament itself follows a process that mirrors many aspects of healing:

**9.1 Examination of conscience** – honest self-reflection.

**9.2 Contrition** – sincere sorrow for sin.

**9.3 Confession** – verbal acknowledgment of sins.

**9.4 Absolution** – God's forgiveness

**9.5 Penance** – actions that express repentance and promote spiritual restoration.

## **10. Catholic Understanding of Healing**

The Catholic tradition distinguishes between **spiritual healing** and **psychological therapy**. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is primarily intended to heal the soul by restoring one's relationship with God. However, because spiritual, emotional, and relational well-being are interconnected, many people also experience psychological benefits such as reduced guilt, greater peace, and renewed purpose. The Church does not present confession as a substitute for professional mental health care when such care is needed; rather, the sacrament and psychological therapy can complement one another.

In summary, the therapeutic dimensions of the Sacrament of Reconciliation include spiritual healing, emotional relief, restoration of relationships, moral transformation, increased self-awareness, and renewed hope. It functions as both a Sacrament of forgiveness and a means of ongoing personal and spiritual healing.