

ENCOURAGEMENT

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THE HOST APOSTOLATE

WWW.THEHOSTAPOSTOLATE.ORG

info@thehostapostolate.org

14 Goatbeck Terrace
Langley Moor
County Durham
DH7 8JJ

United Kingdom

Renewing the Heart

As you read this you will have already been putting into practise some special Lenten duty, praying, perhaps a little more, fasting or abstaining from something you enjoy – food or activity, or perhaps have been giving generously of your time and resources in the service of others. Maybe you have been doing some spiritual reading or pondering scripture. By the end of the month you will have entered into the Passion of Jesus, and basking in the light of His Resurrection in joy. But with all these activities have you made use of the Sacrament of Forgiveness, Confession in order to be reconciled with our Loving God who desires us to be at on with Him?

This is an important question for not only do we discover our faults, failings, sins and omissions, but we receive the greatest gift of forgiveness but we also are reminded that we are the most beloved Children of the Father – what an incredible gift this is... How blessed is the moment when someone forgives or forgets a wrongdoing and embraces you. We do this so often in families. Parents overlook a child's misdemeanour. Husbands and wives go on loving in spite of some disagreements. Friends smile at each other. How incredible, therefore is the gift that the Father gives us when we make a sincere regretful confession of who we are before Him and He not only forgives us but embraces us with blessings and love and 'forgets'!

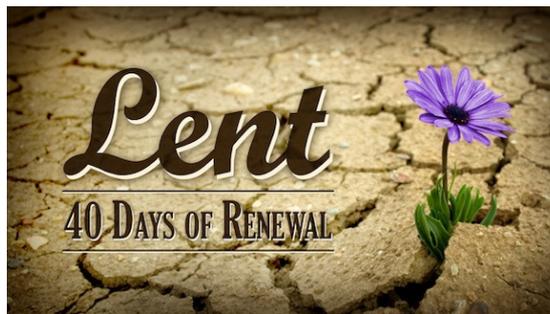
We all know the expression that Jesus gave 'That there is more joy in Heaven over one repentant sinner than over the many good'.

Why is this? Well one reason is that to be repentant, to be sorry, is to recognise that we are 'faulty' and frail people in much need of forgiveness – but also that we become humble before God, which reverses the attitude of Pride which satan carries, and the sin of Adam and Eve. To humble ourselves is to be truthful and honest and to realise that all goodness comes from God, who longs for us to be free and pure, to serve Him and be happy.

Today, sadly, this great Sacrament is much neglected as we steadfastly refuse to accept responsibility for our error, sins and mis-judgment. We live in a blame culture which encourages us to deflect and reject our part in any mistakes.

How sad this is for we cannot be mature Christians if we do not first recognise that we make mistakes and that we do not know all the answers– but that God leads us to the truth, as He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We all recognise great acts of forgiveness- but do we practice them ourselves, and do we seek pardon from the greatest source of that forgiveness – Many people feel that they can ask God and the sacrament is unnecessary (often a shield to deny existence of their own fallibility), and of course this a vital first step.

We are also forgiven during Mass after the Confiteor, this too is often forgotten –and are minor sins are forgiven here if we are contrite. – So too are we deeply forgiven as we receive the Body of Jesus- but there are many things that require us to humble ourselves before God in a deeper way.



**"In failing to confess, Lord, I would only hide You from myself, not myself from You."
--Saint Augustine**

There is **NO one** who has not sinned and a deeply respectful confession brings us not only to a sense of worth and forgiveness but also enables us to go on in spite of those errors.



In *Lent* it is good to reevaluate our lives and seek for areas of improvement. There are the sins so rarely talked about, the so-called deadly ones of Pride, Anger, Gluttony, Sloth, Avarice, Envy and Lust which are forgotten about – let alone sins against Faith, or even the Ten Commandments. Maybe this *Lent* we could reflect on one particular area of our lives that needs sorting out and putting right?

When we approach this Sacrament- it is God who is listening through the instrumentality of the Priest. Again, it was Jesus who gave the commandment to forgive sins, and empowered our Priests to exercise this very special privilege. They act *In Persona Christi*, in the place of Jesus, with great love. We, by receiving this gift, allow them to fulfil their rôle, and we too become part of the priesthood of Jesus as we learn to forgive others and serve in our families, parishes and communities. It takes courage to admit error and sin – The more we are forgiven, the more we feel God's tenderness and compassion. Jesus came for sinners, not the righteous. We are all frail human beings – Saint Peter not less than any, yet he was both loved and learned to love. It is in this sacrament that we learn to receive and give, to be sorry and to rejoice.

Psalm 51 states.....

Be merciful to me, O God, because of Your constant love.

Because of Your great mercy, wipe away my sins.

Wash away all my evil and make me clean from my sin...

Create a pure heart for me O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me.

Give me the joy that comes from Your Salvation.....

Pope Benedict also encourages us this *Lent* with the following words:

Today we contemplate Christ in the desert, fasting, praying, and being tempted. As we begin our Lenten journey, we join him and we ask him to give us strength to fight our weaknesses. Let me also thank you for the prayers and support you have shown me in these days. May God bless all of you! I wish everyone a good Sunday and a good Lenten journey. This evening I will begin a week of retreat: let us be united in prayer. Have a good week everyone. Thank you!

It is useful to reflect on two areas of our life. How faithful am I to God's service and how faithful am I in the service of man? Or as Pope Benedict put it – 'two equal arms; Faith and Charity'.

At Easter we are reborn into new life. We rise with Jesus from our death to new life: the completeness of this awaits us at our own death, but slowly we can rise with Him, with courage and determination and be a light to others in a darkened world. Sin leaves us weak, grace strengthens us. Let this *Lent* be a period of spiritual growth for us, letting us exchange our old clothes for new ones.

May this *Lent* fill us with new heart and Easter fill us with new Hope.



At this critical time for the church, and with great thanksgiving for the Papacy of Pope Benedict XVI let us all pray for a successor who can guide the faithful and lead all to holiness.

May we also pray that his mission as a 'Prayer' for the church is richly blessed and he is given peace and courage.

H.H.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this season of Lent, as we prepare to celebrate the event of the Cross and Resurrection – in which the love of God redeemed the world and shone its light upon history – I express my wish that all of you may spend this precious time rekindling your faith in Jesus Christ, so as to enter with him into the dynamic of love for the Father and for every brother and sister that we encounter in our lives.

-Pope Benedict XVI, Feb. 2013

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