

The Holy Mystery of Reconciliation

Holy Reconciliation is a wonderful Mystery (Sacrament) and goes by different names in English: Confession, Penance, Reconciliation. I like the last one since it best describes this Mystery, but whatever the case, it is important to understand what it does. It is, in essence, a restoration of our baptismal grace and thus a reconciliation of our relationship with God.

Have you ever wished you could be re-baptized and start all over again? Well, this is what this Mystery provides, a renewal of God's life within us. Some of you are in the habit of receiving this Mystery weekly. This is a good practice, but if you are unable, due to time or other circumstances, you should try your best to receive this Mystery at least once a month!

This is why I always try to provide an opportunity to receive this Mystery during the beginning of Orthros before the Divine Liturgy each Sunday. Sometimes the lines can be quite long so don't wait until the last minute. If you miss that chance then let me know when you receive the antidoron (bread after Divine Liturgy) and I'll make sure to stay in the church afterward for you. But again, if you feel that you are in need of this Mystery, try as best as you are able to receive this Mystery before the Divine Liturgy by arriving before Orthros begins.

When you do come up for the Mystery, I will be standing just to the left of the icon of Christ. I leave the space in front of the icon open for you. Come right up and stand next to me while facing the icon. When you come I will immediately begin praying with you the penitent's prayer: **"O God be propitious to me a sinner and have mercy on me."** Together, we will say this three times with bows while making the sign of the cross. I am saying this with you as a fellow sinner. So this is a prayer **you** should be saying as well.

Next I will bless you making the sign of the cross over your head and say, **"Have you asked Jesus for forgiveness of any sins you may have committed."** The hoped for response is, **"Yes,"** since before you come to this Mystery you should have already asked God for forgiveness of whatever sins you have on your conscience and have made a real heartfelt act of contrition and decision, with God's grace, to make a life change.

I will then ask, **"Are there any sins you feel you need to confess at this time?"** I am saying this because, while we all have many sins that we deal with on a regular basis, there are usually some that are more serious than others and it is for this reason that you are probably coming for reconciliation. So, the answer would be, **"Yes, I.....etc."** This is when you explain to me the more significant things with which you are struggling. There is no need to get into colorful details but just enough for me to understand some of the issues so that I can offer some help. But the basic principle regarding details here is: less is better. I'll ask if I need to know more.

I will then attempt to give you some recommendations, maybe it is some advice about the issues, maybe it is a Scripture passage to read, or maybe it is about improving your fasting as a way to increase your willpower to resist temptation. After I have given you the recommendations, then I will say, **"Now bow down your head and pray for God's blessing."**

You then bow toward the icon of Christ and I will put my epitachelion (stole) over your head and say, **"God it was who pardoned David through Nathan the Prophet when he confessed his sins, Peter who wept bitterly for his denial, the Harlot weeping at his feet, the Publican, and the Prodigal Son;**

may the same God forgive thee all things, through the hand of me a sinner, both in this world and in the world to come, and set thee uncondemned before his awesome Judgment Seat."

I will then make the sign of the cross over you saying, **"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** and then I will remove the epitrachelion saying, **"Now having no further care for the sins which thou hast confessed, depart in peace."** At this point it is traditional to kiss the cross on the epitrachelion and then the hand of the priest from which you have received this Mystery and embrace as a sign of your Reconciliation to God. As you depart I will ask you to pray for me. Please remember to do so since I also am a sinner and need your prayers!

Come to the Holy Mystery of Reconciliation as soon as need arises. You never know when it will be your last opportunity.