

## **Did You Say "Celebrate"?**

Did you ever wonder why the church talks about "celebrating" the Sacrament of Reconciliation? I don't know about you, but it always seems a bit contradictory to celebrate something so intrinsically depressing as your sins.

But the Rite of Reconciliation is serious about the "celebrating" part. It's not celebrating sin though; instead it is celebrating God's forgiveness and love offered to us in this sacrament.

The revised rite, in a sense, is trying to recapture an ancient insight about the human heart. For the early Church, "a change of heart" was the essential ingredient in restoring a personal relationship with God. Even if severe penance helped bring that change about, it was that change that reestablished friendship with God. The new rite respects that insight from the early Church by underlining the importance of conversion. We experience that change of heart, it says, when "we begin to consider, judge, and arrange our life according to the spirit and love of God."

### **So what has changed?**

The Church has moved away from darkened confessionals to the use of Reconciliation Rooms. Instead of kneeling behind a screen, the person is encouraged to sit face-to-face and talk. This set-up reflects how people normally talk with friends in which they confide and seek council.

The sacrament is not intended only for the confession of serious sins. While it is very important to confess serious sins, most people are likely to use the sacrament for spiritual growth, and they are encouraged to confess the sinful, selfish patterns in their lives. The sacrament is a time of conversion and welcoming back to God. Like the father of the prodigal son, God is waiting for us to welcome us back with joy.

The sacrament is not intended simply to include the person listing sins, and then the priest imposing penance and absolution. Instead, conversation is encouraged. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not simply a place to get your sins erased, but a place of changing and receiving God's grace to act in a more loving way.

There is an emphasis on community. Often, a Reconciliation service is planned, with prayers, songs, and Scripture readings as well as the opportunity for individual confession. This emphasizes the communal ramifications of sin.

While many people are hesitant to come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament truly is a celebration. It is a celebration of God's infinite love for you, and God's desire to forgive your sins. The sacrament celebrates conversion, turning away from wrong actions and coming back to God's love. God wants his children to be happy, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is God's gift of grace and mercy. Reconciliation is about coming back to live in God's love.