

Take-Home 5 | Until the End of the Age

Whose Sins You Forgive

The apostolic ministry of reconciliation

Keep this sheet for prayer, review, and practice this week.

What We Found

Only God forgives sins, and Jesus proved he has that authority by healing the paralytic. Then the risen Jesus sent his disciples as the Father sent him and breathed the Holy Spirit on them. Only then did he say, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Paul calls this a ministry of reconciliation carried by ambassadors for Christ. The Church receives it through bishops and priests, who act in Christ's person and never as the source of mercy. The form of the sacrament has changed over time; its foundation in Christ's gift has not. (Mark 2:1-12; John 20:19-23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; CCC 1441-1442; 1447; 1461.)

Voices of the Church

St. John Chrysostom

Summary: Chrysostom marvels that men who live on earth have been entrusted with what belongs to heaven. He applies "whatever you bind on earth" and the forgiving of sins in John 20 directly to the priest's ministry. A king can bind the body; the priest, by Christ's gift, binds and looses the soul. The power is Christ's, exercised through the minister.

On the Priesthood, III.5

Second Vatican Council

Summary: Priests, exercising Christ's office as shepherd within their authority, gather the family of God and lead it to the Father. In the sacrament of Penance they reconcile sinners with God and with the Church, acting in dependence on the bishop.

Presbyterorum Ordinis, 5

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Summary: Since Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to his Apostles, the bishops who are their successors, and priests as the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise it. Bishops and priests, by the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Church regulates its exercise through faculties.

CCC 1461-1462

Ready Response

If someone says: "I confess straight to God. I do not need a priest in the middle."

You can say: Keep doing that; the Church asks it of you every night. The question is whether Jesus also gave a way to hear forgiveness spoken to you by someone he sent. Read John 20:21-23 with me and notice that he breathes the Spirit on them before he says a word about sins.

Live It This Week

Pray. Pray Psalm 51:1-12 slowly on three days, asking for both mercy and a new heart.

Prepare. Make a private examination of conscience. If you can receive the sacrament, make a concrete plan and a time. If you are exploring the faith, ask a priest for a conversation.

Repair. Take one appropriate step toward repairing a harm you caused. Get advice first if contact would be unwise or unsafe.

Scripture Memory

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

2 Corinthians 5:20 (RSV2CE)

A Personal Response

When did I last hear forgiveness spoken to me, and what is keeping me from hearing it again?

Before Next Session

Read: Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. Notice every word of receiving and handing on.

Catechism: CCC 1341, 1366-1367, 1374-1376.

In the Catechism this week: 1441-1442; 1447-1448; 1452; 1461-1462; 1495.