

THE HEALING POWER OF FAITH

A WAY OUT OF DARKNESS

As we journey through the latest message series called **BAGGAGE:**

The Importance of Forgiveness,

we have been reflecting on the power, grace and light of actually forgiving those who have hurt us—of letting go of that baggage that weighs on our hearts, minds and souls. Those burdens drain us of our energy, enthusiasm and keeps us in the dark. Sometimes we don't think there is ever a way out, a way to be freed from those sufferings. The great gift of our faith reminds us that there certainly is a way out—it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

A SACRAMENT OF HEALING

One of the great opportunities I have in the parish is to teach sacramental preparation with our families. I have the honour of teaching the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Communion and Confirmation. Sharing the gift of God's love in these sacraments is totally amazing!! I love talking to the children and parents about how much God loves us and that he seeks to make us whole, happy and filled with life. God does not seek to punish or burden us. The sacraments are there to help us experience his love. The Sacrament of Confession (or Peace, Reconciliation, Forgiveness) offers us the unconditional love and mercy of Jesus who died on the cross for all of our sins. This is a sacrament of healing, light and peace. Not a sacrament of guilt, shame and punishment.

WE ARE MISSING OUT!

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has changed over the centuries. It has gone from being able only to go to confession once in your life, public confessions in front of the bishop to a shopping list of sins in which it seemed to be more of a transaction than a conversion of heart. You offered your list, the priest totalled up the cost and charged a penance. The days of going to confession every week with your school class and thinking up of sins so that Father doesn't get upset with you are gone—thankfully, but on the other hand, not enough of us take advantage of this sacrament that really seeks to heal, embrace and

strengthen our hearts. We are missing out on a chance to be loved by Jesus for who we are, in the midst of our messy lives, sins, confusion and pain. We miss out on a great opportunity for unconditional love that has the power to transform our lives.

HOW DOES THE SACRAMENT HEAL US?

(1) JESUS COMES TO US

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has Jesus enter into our lives, into our mess and into our sufferings. He does not judge, but seeks to heal us of our pains, regrets and

sins. He meets us where we are at and lifts us up through the priest who acts as His representative. No matter what we have done, no matter who we are, if we seek His love and forgiveness, He offers it in abundance!! No strings attached.

(2) JESUS LOVES US

As much as the sacrament is about the forgiveness of sins, it is more about how Jesus loves us and that love transforming our hearts. In that transformation, we then learn to forgive and love others. If we are seeking to be loved and can't find it anywhere else, I would send people to the Sacrament of Peace—to the confessional where we are embraced by Jesus who seeks to make us whole again.

(3) JESUS GIVES US LIGHT

The sacrament is all about light, peace, love and joy. When we hear from the priest — your sins are forgiven, they are let go, they are gone, you are set free! — this is pure joy and light!! I have had the great honour of telling people they need to drop the baggage of sin and pain because they don't need to carry them anymore. Jesus paid the price for all of them and the last piece for us is to forgive ourselves and move forward in new light and love.

(4) JESUS SENDS US OUT

After being loved, healed and brought out of the darkness and into the light, Jesus doesn't stop there. After being forgiven and set free, we are sent out to be

missionaries of mercy loving, healing and shedding light on those around us who are hurting.

This is what we as disciples are called to do through the gift of our baptism. I would also suggest that this is the fullest way to experience the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The penance we receive at the sacrament is a support to help us with the healing needed, but to fully embrace the forgiveness and healing received, we become Christ for others. We need to be the animators of light, love, peace and healing for those in our parish, family, community and the world. This is also what we as a parish have been seeking to do. We are looking to form disciples who understand that Jesus calls them to action being of service to those around them. We as a pastoral team along with amazing volunteer ministers are engaging in this important pastoral shift which challenges each of us to be active participants not only in the life of the parish, but in the mission of Christ to offer healing, love and light in the world.

A CHALLENGE & INVITATION

Come to reconciliation!!! Come into the light of Christ's love for us and experience that unconditional love that is freely given to those who seek it. If you haven't been to confession in a long time, we are here and will walk you through each step offering the Lord's grace and peace. God's love transforms us and the Sacrament of

Reconciliation does so in such an immediate way. Don't miss out — come and experience the power of our faith!!

