

Reconciliation: the gift of perfect remission and forgiveness

II Cor 5:20b "Let God reconcile you; this we ask you in the name of Christ."

Some of us get very disgusted with the general disregard for law and order in the society. We get impatient with those who walk slowly when they cross the road while talking on the cell phone or texting, totally ignoring the oncoming traffic. Not to mention those who throw garbage through the bus, car or taxi window; ignoring the fact that they are destroying the environment and in the end will destroy all of us. Older people are impatient with the younger generation who have no manners as they speak to older people as if they are their peers. At the same time younger people are very often disgusted with the older generation as they abuse them verbally, sexually and emotionally. Even in the midst of abuse older people usually expect the younger ones to conform to standards they themselves are not observing. There seems to be a general disrespect and disregard for each other in the society and it seems there is no end to the general decay of moral and values in the society. The question is, why is this so and what can we do?

In the second reading for today St Paul suggests the overall problem lies in the reality of people's separation from God and from each other. Sin is the term St Paul uses to describe the reality I just described. Sin separates us from God and each other. Bad behaviour is the result of sin in the world and people are prepared to live in sin rather than live with God. Of course this reality of sin is not just the lot of people outside the Church; people inside the Church are just as guilty. Some Church people behave worse than those who are on the outside; for this reason those on the outside looking on say I will never become a member of the Church because of the way so and so behaves. Of course we should not allow the behaviour of others to stop us from being reconciled with God and with others, nevertheless, sin works in the people of faith as much as it works in the people on the outside.

St Paul's answer to the problem of sin or bad behaviour is reconciliation with God. In II Cor 5:20 he says, "Let God reconcile you; this we ask you in the name of Christ." For St Paul, good behaviour lies in dependence on God to shape us into the people God wants us to be; good behaviour is a gift from God. St Paul says good behaviour, or a life reconciled to God, is "the work of God who in Christ reconciled us to himself, and who entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation"

(II Cor 5:18). This reconciliation is the reason we prayed earlier in the Collect for Ash Wednesday for “perfect remission and forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Of ourselves and by ourselves we are condemned to our bad behaviour, however, if we are reconciled by God to God and with each other our behaviour can be transformed and we can be like God and live a godly life. Lent is a time for us to examine ourselves and our relationship with God and each other. It is reconciliation with God and each other than stands at the basis of transforming bad behaviour into good behaviour.

“Let God reconcile you.” This is the message of St Paul to us at the beginning of Lent. This is an invitation to humility. Reconciliation means the restoration of friendly relations or making one view or belief compatible with another.¹ This suggests that to be reconciled is to be open to being friends with others, even our enemies; it means to be open to loving our neighbour as ourselves. This is indeed a call to humility. It is a reminder that we are dust; we are of the earth and to the earth we shall return. The one thing that can be preserved from the dust which makes us is our souls. On this Ash Wednesday we are called to repent and allow God to reconcile us to him so we can be at peace with each other and with God. It

1 <https://www.google.com.jm/search?q=reconciliation+meaning&oq=reconciliation&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.6625j0j1&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

is only on the basis of repentance and a commitment to live humble – humus – that we will be reconciled with God and with each other. It is as God reconciles us that we will be at peace with God and with each other. The result of reconciliation means we can sing with the song writer: “When peace like a river attendeth my way; when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say it is well it is well with my soul.” A soul reconciled to God is at peace with God and with each other. This is the basis of good behaviour in our society.

Not only does St Paul say that we are to let God reconcile us he also says, “this we ask you in the name of Christ.” Here the Apostle Paul begs the saints of the Church to allow Christ to be the standard of the faith they live by on a daily basis. To ask that God reconcile us in the name of Christ is to say we are willing to conform our lives to that of Christ. It means a willingness to live by the standards of Christ. It is that standard that is at the base of good behaviour in the world. It is a willingness to surrender ourselves to God, with a commitment to live for God and not for ourselves. You see fiends as human beings we are naturally selfish. We are prone to look out for ourselves and our families rather than for our neighbours and our enemies. Living a life reconciled to God in Jesus Christ enables

us to change that direction of selfishness and instead live a life of selflessness, that is, to live for others.

One of the reasons I feel I am a priest today is the early lessons in living for others which I was taught by my parents. My mother would go to the market on a Saturday and purchase items not only for us but for a number of elderly persons in the community. On Sunday mornings they would wake the eight of us as children, put us in pairs, and send us with a small package of food to these elderly persons. We would have to deliver these packages and return home to have breakfast and get ready for Church. From very early in life therefore I was taught the importance of living for others and not living for myself. Today I watch people who live for themselves rush past me to get ahead, totally ignoring the fact that I exist. I go to the tax office to pay a bill, for example, and watch people who skip the line as they feel they are busier than I am. Very often I have to remind them that I am a person too and my business is just as important as theirs. It is in living by the standards of Christ that we learn to surrender ourselves to God in order to be reconciled to God for Christ sake.

The story is told of an elderly woman who was on her death bed. Her last request was for her children to take a box of jewels to her. This is a box in which she kept all her jewels over the years. Upon receiving the box she invited all her children to gather around her. She gave each one a piece of jewel from the box. Finally a silver ring was left in the box. One of the daughters said to her, "Mommy, you forgot a silver ring left in the box." To which the mother replied, "that ring was given to me by my grandmother; I am going to keep it." The mother died the same night. The daughter who tells this story said she cried when she saw the ring as she knew her mother was no longer able to use the ring.

Friends, some of us are like that woman with the ring. We do not want to let God of life and let God reconcile us in Jesus Christ. We want to hold on to self; we want to hold on to things; we want to hold on to power; we want to hold on to status, power and prestige. None of these things are able to reconcile us to God in Jesus Christ. Lent is a time for us to let God reconcile us in Jesus Christ. It is a call for us to be humble and to live our lives in obedience to God. Bad behaviour is the result of people who refuse to be humble and to live in obedience to God. Let God reconcile you for Jesus Christ sake.

As you come forward for ashes to be placed on your forehead, use the opportunity to once again ask God to enable you to live a holy Lent. Let God reconcile you to himself and to others. Use this service this morning as a commitment to be an agent of change in your family, at your workplace, on the street, in the shops, the bars and supermarkets. Let God reconcile you in Jesus Christ and use you to be an agent of change for good behaviour. Be an example of good behaviour. Let older people be an example of good behaviour to younger people. Let younger people grow to respect older people who respect them in return. By doing these things we can make the world a better place for all of us to live in. "Let God reconcile you; this we ask in the name of Christ. In the name...