

Humbling ministry



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Every Saturday at 3 p.m., I make my way to the Reconciliation Chapel at Holy Redeemer Parish. It is part of the weekend routine which I find is rarely routine. One of the most humbling aspects of my ministry as a priest is my role as confessor. Each week, I am humbled by the act of listening to the sins of the penitents who come to me seeking to be reconciled with God and the church through the sacrament of penance.

Together we celebrate the love God extends to us through this sacrament by which sinners receive the healing and reconciling gift of God's grace. Whenever I celebrate this sacrament I am humbled to be part of an individual's faith journey which has brought them to the point of acknowledging the wounds created by their sin which are in need of healing. I am humbled that they willingly bare the darkest parts of their souls to me. In forgiving their sins, I am humbled to be an "... instrument of our Lord Jesus Christ, the author and liberal giver of salvation who wills to use [this sacrament and myself] in order to efface our sins and give us the grace of justification." (CCC, #987)

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?" demanded the scribes and Pharisees when Jesus absolved the paralytic (Luke 5:21), and this same objection is unwittingly repeated against the ministers of Jesus by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The power of absolution does not mean that God has contracted out part of his work to the hired help. It is still true and absolutely without exception that absolution from sin can come from God alone, but the power of absolution means that the priest's words of forgiveness are the instrument and channel of God's forgiving grace to all who receive the sacrament worthily.

The priest is only the human face given to the invisible grace of God. The Son of God became flesh so that, in him, we could more easily recognize God's merciful love for us. For the very same reason, God's words of pardon are spoken to us in the human accents of his authorized representatives. It is often difficult to believe in God's pardon, especially for sins of which we are profoundly ashamed. Our timid hearts receive a powerful reassurance when one authorized to speak for Christ declares, "I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." As we all know the lines for the sacrament of reconciliation are rarely very long each Saturday. And, it is only on rare occasions that the hour I set aside for the sacrament is filled completely. However, I find that I leave the Reconciliation chapel at 4 p.m. each week knowing that I have been privy to powerful moments in the lives of the penitents who came that week.



Catholic Diocese of
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Priestly vocations

dioceseofgrandrapids.org/vocation/welcome.htm

Religious orders

dioceseofgrandrapids.org/clergy/religiousorders.htm