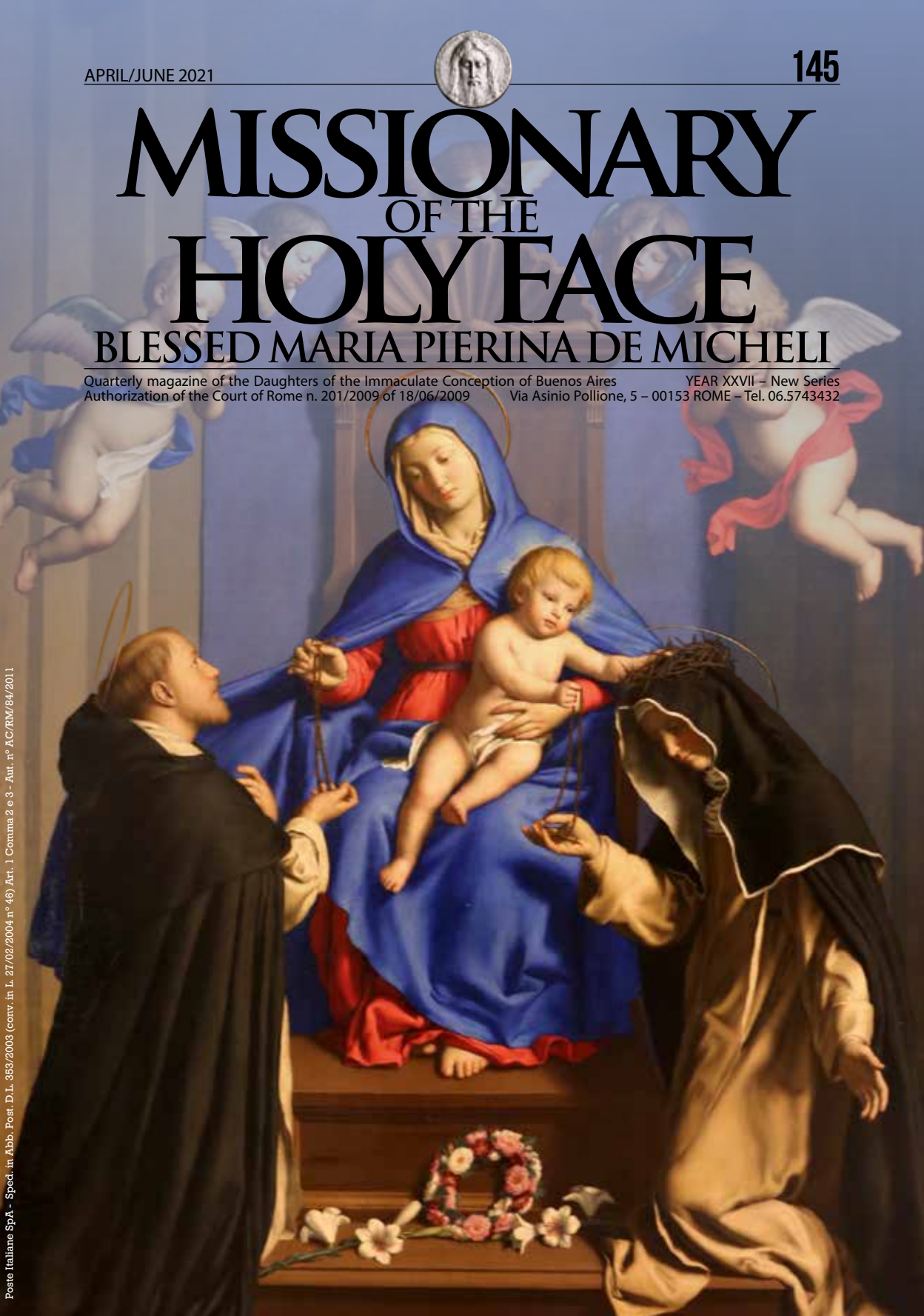




# MISSIONARY OF THE HOLY FACE

## BLESSED MARIA PIERINA DE MICHELI

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SUMMARY

The health emergency caused by Covid-19 is continuing to persist throughout the world. Pope Francis has asked for the Rosary to be recited and for prayers to be addressed to the Virgin Mary for a swift end to the pandemic. We too are called to respond to this appeal and to pray to the Holy Face and to Blessed Maria Pierina de Micheli so that the Lord may have mercy on humanity and intervene to end the tragic sequela of suffering and death. We therefore invite all those devoted to the Blessed to join together in a chain of prayer with the intention of supporting those who suffer, those who are called to care for the sick, those who have been devastated by the economic crisis and those who cry for the loss of their loved ones. Let us invoke Mary so that she may free the souls of the departed and speed their entry into Heaven.

In this issue, we would like to offer a contribution by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, Major Penitentiary, on the theme "The Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Way of Sanctification".



Approaching the Sacraments has never been as important as it is now, in particular Confession, in order to live in closer contact with Jesus. The conditions of our time and the challenges that we are called to face demand it. If a situation becomes increasingly difficult and filled with obstacles, we have the opportunity to access Divine Mercy

through the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. These Sacraments are the demonstration that man is not alone or abandoned to his fate, but rather is firmly protected in the hand of God. Indeed, the destiny of humanity is not marked only by the choices of individuals but is inserted into a history of salvation that transcends the present moment and is cast into eternity. There is no doubt that faith is necessary in order to surrender oneself to God when things go wrong, but sometimes, even more faith is required when things go well. Often man finds his best energies when he is put under pressure and has to respond to the requests that life impetuously imposes. This is why Christians have all the more reason to be serene because they know that nothing escapes Divine Providence and everything contributes to the ultimate good of souls.

The Editorial Staff

# THE SACRAMENT OF MERCY

*The following is a Lectio Magistralis by Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, Major Penitentiary of the Holy Roman Church, on the theme, “The Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Way of Sanctification”, held on Monday, 8 March 2021, during the XXXI Course on the Internal Forum.*

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not the mere remission of mortal sins committed since the last confession. It is – as we well know – much more! It is the sacrament which, by freeing us from sin, puts us back in full communion with God, with the divine Three-Person Agape, with the great Mystery that makes all things and on which the universe depends and from which it continuously springs forth.

## 1. 1. God Alone is Holy

Sacramental Reconciliation places us in communion with the Most Holy One, in communion with the Only Holy One from which all holiness arises.

In the Bible narrative of the Old Testament, holiness is an attribute that is only of God, pertaining to His very Being, capable of showing, precisely in its absolute

distance from sinners, the transcendence of the Creator with respect to the creature, the transcendence of the infinite with respect to the finite.

Before the Most Holy One, one covers one’s face, one removes one’s sandals and, only out of mercy, is it possible to hear His voice which traces the ancient journey of the Covenant, in fidelity to the Law of Sinai, that is, to the Ten Commandments, which for Israel, means fidelity to God, to the Holy One.

The recognition of the Oneness of Divine Holiness is thus directly proportional to the awareness of one’s own limitations, of one’s sin, of one’s betrayal; and of one’s prostitution! It is precisely the prostitution of idolatry, clearly denounced by biblical Prophetism, the first and most dramatic of the sins of Israel. Idolatry, in fact, is the non-recogni-



tion of God, of his Oneness and of his Holiness. If God is God, the only Holy One, He deserves to be recognized, known, followed and served by all people, by all of man and by all men.

In our times too, dear brothers, - let us always remember -, the first sin is never to be sought in the second part of the Decalogue, but in the first. The first sin of our age is identical to Israel's sin. It is the sin of idolatry which makes man incapable of recognizing the Holiness of God, thus reaching the point of excluding himself from it. Indeed, no one can desire to participate in what one does not recognize!

In this sense, both the liturgical norms of Deuteronomy and the powerful calls to conversion of prophetism forcefully and constantly urged the people to lift up to God [a form of] worship that was capable of recognizing His absolute otherness, worship in which one could finally pray to God according to the Law of God, pray to God with God's words so that the Holy One could be recognized as Holy and the people could render him due adoration.

This otherness that we can recognize in the Old Testament however, kept the Holy One distant from the sinner; it kept the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob distant from the concrete homo viator, who, conscious of his own inadequacy, could only hope in Divine

Mercy although without ever being certain of it. He could only hope in the unfathomable love of God and in His capacity to render "sins white as snow; Though they are red like crimson" (cf. *Ps.* 50). However, the Old Testament tradition lacked a presence that could justify the certainty of future hope.

Indeed, this is how Saint Thomas Aquinas described hope: as the certainty of the future by virtue of a present reality. The presence of the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple of Jerusalem was not enough to be certain of Divine Mercy. It was extremely timely and convenient that the Holy One should manifest Himself in the flesh so that man, in the flesh, could experience Holiness and closeness to God. In the mystery of Incarnation which is the fulfilment of all of God's promises to the people of Israel, we recognize the full manifestation of the Holiness of God who, not forgoing His Divinity but only the Glory that was His (cf. *Phil* 2:6), did not disdain to become man, to take on the space and time limitations of our created bodies and, in an even more bewildering manner – if that is possi-



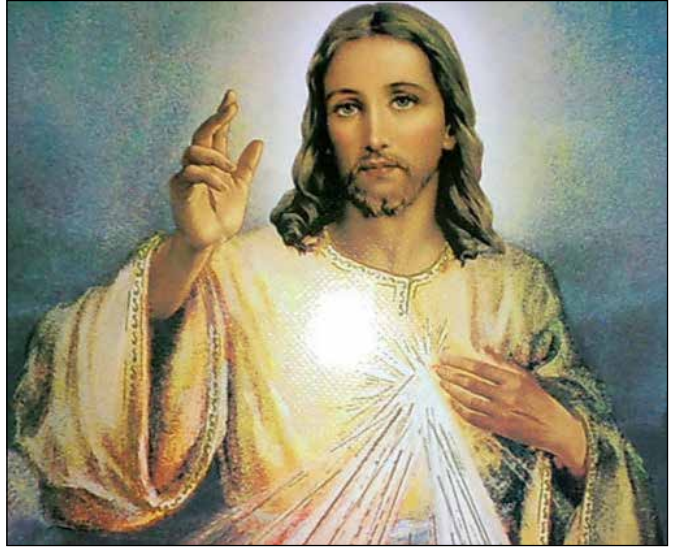
ble – , to take on our sin to free us from it.

Saint Paul states this in his second Letter to the Corinthians when he says: “he made him to be sin who knew no sin...” (2 Cor 5:21).

The Holy One became flesh! Holiness became flesh! From Christ onwards, the Holy One and Holiness, live in our midst. They will also live on earth until the end of time.

Dearest brothers, this is the reason why, in the Creed, we say that the Church is Holy! This is the reason why until the end of time, we will live in the second trinitarian mission, that of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ who proceeds from the Father, continuously overflowing the earth with the salvific offer of holiness.

In this sense, from the complete manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Holiness of God became essentially a gift for us men. Divine Incarnate Holiness radiates in Christ, Dead and Risen, in the Messiah Anointed by the Father. In his glorious wounds, we can contemplate the human face of Holiness as a gift, the supreme gift of



life, pro-existence and sacrifice; in the light of the Risen One, we can thus contemplate the non-deductible destiny, though real and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, of our own glorified, resurrected and thus made holy, flesh.

The recognized Holiness, yearned for but inaccessible of the Old Testament, becomes Holiness incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament; incarnate and on the Cross, gushing from the pierced side of Our Lord, given, shed on humanity through the indispensable mission of the Church.

The Church is the garment of Aaron on which the oil of Divine Holiness descends and through which, by the proclamation of the Word and above all by the celebration of the sacraments, the Holiness of God is given to men.

The Holiness of the Lord's Anointed One, of Jesus Christ, is the perfumed oil that descends on the head which is Christ, and that descends until the rim of his garment that covers the Body which is the Church (cf. Ps 132:2). The Church is holy, the Church is anointed by the Lord, the Church is the recipient of the integrity of Divine Revelation and of the integrity of the means of salvation. The Bridegroom has made his Bride rich, making her a participant in all his patrimony! Dearest friends, there is no separation of property in the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church! All the property of the Bridegroom is also of the Bride who is always *Ecclesia de Trinitate!*



## 2. Reconciliation and holiness

In this One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, in this Church, who is herself a universal sacrament of salvation, live, because they are celebrated, the seven sacramental signs, wanted directly or indirectly by Christ and entrusted to the Church that regulates their celebration. There is an unsurpassable reciprocity, a vital reciprocity, between the sacraments and the Church: the sacraments live in the Church and are celebrated by the Church and, at the same time, the Church lives thanks to the Sacraments and is edified by them.

If we have to recognize that this aspect of reciprocity is particularly evident and effective in the celebration of the Eucharist, the true heart of life in the Church and the driving force of her edification, and we thus recognize the primacy of the Eucharist in relation to the Church, we cannot then fail to recognize the role of the other six sacraments in relation to the edification of the Body of Christ: Baptism which incorporates us into the Church; Confirmation which enables us to become her witnesses; Matrimony which fulfils her domestic dimension; the Anointing of the Sick which expresses her suffering face, making holy even that condition in life; Holy Orders which express “Christic paternity” in the form of holy hierarchy; Reconciliation, the real washing of purification that reassociates to the ecclesial Body the sinner who has

become separate from it, since, in mortally sinning, one does not separate only from God but also from His Body which is the Church.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, therefore, has two inseparable dimensions that are always coexistent: the negative one of liberation from sin and the positive one, of the renewed bestowal of baptismal innocence.

All too often, only the negative aspect of liberation from sin is highlighted in this legitimate and necessary duality of the sacrament. As much as such liberation is an indispensable prerequisite for any possible journey of holiness, we cannot fail to notice the incompleteness of such a view. Allow me to take this opportunity to draw a parallel with the Theology of Redemption and Christology. Only underscoring the negative aspect of the Sacrament of Reconciliation’s remission of sins, would be like affirming in Christology that God became man and died on the cross only to remit our sins, to save us from original sin and reconcile us with God. This is true. It is absolutely true but is only part of what we call redemption.

It is not only the re-



mission of man's sins that arises from the Cross and from Christ's Resurrection, but much more. The door of his divinization is opened, of his participation in life, in glory and even in divine nature, as Saint Peter states (cf. 2 Pet 1:4). The eastern lung of the Church recalls with greater force this element of divinization, which for us westerners is particularly denoted by the Theology of Grace, of which Saint Augustine was an unsurpassed teacher.

It is necessary that the Church always breathe with both lungs. It is necessary to always keep the Sacrament of Reconciliation's two dimensions joined: the negative one and the positive one; as liberation from sin and the way of sanctification, indeed, as liberation from sin and true and freely given sanctification.

In order to do this, I think that a reading of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the perspective of the primordial sacrament of salvation which is Baptism, is indispensable. It is not a chance that for centuries, the Sacrament of Reconciliation was also called "second reconciliation", since the first remission of sins was the one obtained in Holy Baptism.



Just as Baptism forgives the original sin and all sins committed until that moment, just as Baptism inserts us into the ecclesial Body and makes us participants of all the goods of the Church, just as Baptism inserts us into the trinitarian dynamic of Divine Love, making us adopted children of God and brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ, so too the Sacrament of Reconciliation frees us from sin and gives us back that filial dignity which mortal sin disfigures, and that ecclesial and trinitarian communion from which it separates.

In this sense, we can state that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the way to holiness, in the sense that it is the way through which God makes us holy, giving us the holiness that we lost due to personal sin.

As confessors or future confessors, the Church asks you to always be mindful of this dual dimension. If it is





true that the faithful almost instinctively underscore the first one more, then the confessor is called to make the second one also emerge so that the sacrament will not be seen as the mere and mechanical “resetting of the meter” of sins, but as a true experience of divine embrace, a reinstatement into the circularity of trinitarian love which was freely given to us, and into which we were freely inserted at Holy Baptism.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the holiness that is given meets mysteriously, but truly, with the yearning for holiness that is present in every man.

If such yearning were not present, why would our brothers and sisters approach Reconciliation? Certainly, they ask for Divine Mercy in order to be freed from their sins, but also out of a mysterious desire, a yearning for holiness which is present in the heart of every man.

This yearning for holiness is not very different from the desire for God, from the reality of Augustinian tradition’s *capax Dei* (cf. *De Trinit.*, XIV,8). The man who

desires God, who desires to be reconciled with Him is the man who yearns for holiness, and such yearning finds its fulfilment in the Holiness of Christ, God made Man, which is none other than the Holiness of God offered to us men.

The individual faithful, who kneel at the confessional asking for Divine Mercy, express in a simple but efficient gesture, the yearning for holiness present in the heart of man. No external force, no civil power forces nor could ever force this simple gesture of mendicant humility. It is thus the triumph, the manifestation of freedom that, following one’s yearning for holiness and desire to be freed from sin, asks for salvation, asks for redemption, asks for holiness.

Sacramental absolution, obviously in situations which allow it, is the answer of holiness that God offers to the yearning for holiness of man! It is the answer of Divine Grace to the mendicant freedom of man. Like all of God’s answers, Divine Mercy is absolutely over-abundant, in surplus, completely disproportionate to the request of man. This disproportionate aspect has its theological roots precisely in the tran-



scendence of God; God is God, and this is why He loves without measure, this is why He forgives without measure, this is why He is free to join us to His Holiness without measure and without any other merit on our part, if not the freedom that opens out to Him in intention and in deed.

In this sense, then, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the sacrament of Holiness. It not only sanctifies those who celebrate it both as a ministry and as lay faithful, like all the sacraments, but it is a true and proper way, a journey, the means through which the Most Holy One, who made His Holiness acces-

sible in Jesus Christ and in His Body that is the Church, wishes to touch each man, calling him to Communion with Him and insert him in the loving dynamic of the Trinity.

With regards to this, dear friends, allow me to highlight an indispensable category to be able to correctly interpret and, in my opinion, also explain to our faithful something of this positive dynamic of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

There is a theological category which is quite forgotten today, or worse only interpreted in a sociological light, that should instead be urgently recovered: the category of participation. We were made participants of Divine Life: we were made participants of Divine Holiness. The theological category of participation points to the true insertion into the dynamic of Divine Holiness, permanently safeguarding the otherness between Creator and creature and thus, not reducing grace and its transcendence to something that can be humanly deduced. We participate in something greater, of which we become a part, but of which we are not the makers. I think that the intelligent and catechetical recovery of this theological category would be a great benefit, not only to theology, but also to pastoral care. Let us always remember that



participation is the theological prerequisite as well as the psychological one, of belonging. One can only participate in what one belongs to, and one can only belong to what one participates in.

The virtuous circularity between participation and belonging will progressively shape, also through the faithful celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the individual faithful's consciousness of not belonging to himself but to God and therefore, of being made a participant in his Life and at the same time, the consciousness of participating in Divine Life will progressively lead to that necessary expropriation of self that determines belonging to another.

### 3. Holiness as a journey

We all know that the holiness given to us by God in the sacraments calls each of us to a gradual journey of constant appropriation [of holiness]. Man, who is called to holiness and receives it from God as a gift, is constantly called to seize this gift in a journey of progressive conformation to the gift received. In this context, how can we forget the cry of the Pontificate of Saint John Paul II: "Man, become what you are".

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is fulfilled every time that both the negative element of freedom from sin and the positive one of sanctification is celebrated, also

has in its more pastoral and relational dimension, a function of progressive journey towards the sanctification of the penitent soul. We all know that the first step towards holiness, the first step to receive the holiness that God wants to give us, is to renounce sin, to separate from sin, to detest one's own sin, to flee from sin.

There is nothing more distant from God than sin! God, who never hates the sinner, who does not wish the death of the sinner but rather that he convert himself and live (cf. Ezek. 33:11), profoundly detests sin, in the sense that Divine Holiness is what is most distant from sin. It is thus necessary to make grow in the consciousness



of the individual faithful, a clear awareness of the extraneousness between sin and Christian life, through a wise pastoral action that is delicate and patient but determined to look at the goal.

Upon closer look, dear friends, this extraneous nature is clearly documented in the early Church. Both in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Letter to the Romans, as well as in other New Testament writings, it clearly emerges that the early Church considered sin as something absolutely distant from being Christian. You well know that for centuries, the Sacrament of Reconciliation was considered not repeatable precisely because of this very high level of Christian identity in relation to the Holiness of God. The wisdom of the Church understood that the salvific Will of God and His mercy were infinitely broad – and this Tribunal of the Apostolic Penitentiary is its many-centuried witness. It did not, however, fail to fulfill the total extraneousness of sin with respect to the Holiness of God and man's capacity to receive the gift of holiness.

Detesting sin, becoming interiorly detached from it, recognizing it

humbly, feeling sincere suffering and being determined not to commit it again, through actual will, is the required condition to be able to be absolved, that is, reinstated into the supernatural dynamic of grace that the Trinity brings to the Church and which, from the Church, is raised as an answer and as praise to the Trinity.

In this sense the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in addition to objectively being the way of given holiness, is also pastorally and pedagogically a progressive journey of holiness.

In your ministry, you will encounter sinners who need a profound washing of regeneration, sinners who have been immersed in mortal sin for years or decades and who need a path of redemption that is capable of making grow within them a profound separation from sin. But you will also encounter people who are distant, very distant from intentionally committing mortal sin, and who fight daily for an ever greater perfection, for an ever greater yearning for holiness. You will have to welcome and accompany the former, bless and encourage the latter and always vigilantly recognize the difference between the delicate nature of the soul, which is worthy of praise and desirable, and doubt, which is dangerous and detestable.

Lastly, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the way of sanctification for us ministers who celebrate it. The priest who celebrates Sacramental Reconciliation is the first one to be called to be holy. He is the first to be called to let himself be continuously reconciled with God, to detest sin and never the sinner, to allow himself to be purified by exercising his ministry, in which constantly and efficiently, echoes the will of the Holy One to become flesh, God's will to manifest himself as sanctifying mercy; the mercy of which the priest, without his own merit, became a minister, thus one who serves. A confessor who will live his mission this way will not be able not to walk towards holiness, he will not be able to be anything but himself an instrument of sanctified holiness, an instrument of forgiven forgiveness, sanctified and holy, forgiven son and therefore, merciful father.

I entrust your ministry as confessors to the Most Holy Blessed Virgin, in the certainty rooted in faith that also through you today, the Holy One wants to show himself to humanity, to embrace it and make it holy, welcoming the gift that each individual freedom makes of itself, by separating from sin and immersing into the infinite ocean of love.



# THE VERONICAS

Sister Marie de Saint Pierre (1816-1848) was a Discalced Carmelite, originally from Rennes, who lived in the Carmel at Tours for nine years. The Lord entrusted her with the mission to spread devotion to His Holy Face.

On 25 August 1843, Jesus revealed to her:

“My Name is everywhere blasphemed: even the children blaspheme and this frightful sin, more than any other, grievously wounds my Divine Heart. By blasphemy, the sinner curses God, attacks Him openly, annuls redemption, and pronounces his own condemnation and judgment. Blasphemy is a poisoned arrow which wounds my Heart continually. I will give you a golden arrow wherewith to wound it delightfully and to heal

the wounds inflicted on it by the malice of sinners”.

In 1845, the Lord revealed to Sister Marie that He desired souls that were similar to that of Saint Veronica, that thus had the same courage to wipe the bloody Face of Jesus. He wanted them to make reparation for the insults and indignities: “I seek Veronicas to wipe and honour My Divine Face which has few adorers.”

Sister Marie asked her confessor to speak about this to the Archbishop of Tours, who went to the Carmel to speak to her in person. Sister Marie recommended reparation and veneration of the Holy Face: “This Adorable Face is the mirror of the perfections contained in the Most Holy Name of God. I comprehended that as the Sacred Heart of Jesus is the sensible object offered to our adoration, to represent his boundless love in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, so in the Work of the Reparation our Lord’s Holy Face is the sensible object offered to the adoration of the Associates, to atone for the outrages of blasphemers who attack the Divinity,





of which it is the mirror and expression. By virtue of this Adorable Face presented to the Eternal Father we can appease his just wrath and obtain the conversion of the impious and blasphemers”.

On various occasions, Jesus revealed to Sister Marie the gifts of grace linked to this devotion:

“Oh! could you but behold the beauty of My Face! But your eyes are yet too weak. His adorable Face is like the seal of divinity, which has the power of imprinting once more the Image of God in the souls which apply themselves to it”. And again: “By My Holy Face, they will work wonders”.

“By this Holy Face you





will obtain the salvation of many sinners. Nothing will be refused you by means of this offering. Oh, if you only knew how pleasing to my Father is the sight of my Face.”

“As in a kingdom they can procure all that is desired with a coin stamped with the King’s effigy, so in the Kingdom of Heaven they will obtain all they desire with the precious coin of My Holy Face”.

“According to the diligence you will manifest in repairing my image disfigured by blasphemers, so will I have the same care in repairing your soul which has been disfigured by sin. I will imprint thereon my image, and I will render it as beautiful as when it came forth from the baptismal font”.

“All those who defend my cause in this work of reparation, by words, by prayers, or in writings, I will defend before my Father; at their death I will purify their souls by effacing all the blots of sin and will restore to them their primitive beauty”.

After the death of Sister Marie, Pope Leo XIII instituted a Confraternity of the Holy Face in Tours in 1885. On 26 April 1885, Saint Louis Martin, the father of Saint Therese of Lisieux, along with four of his daughters, joined the Confraternity.

# Canticle To The Holy Face

by Saint Therese of Lisieux

Jesus, Your ineffable image  
Is the star which guides my steps.  
Ah, You know, Your sweet Face  
Is for me Heaven on earth.  
Oh! To console You I want  
To live unknown on earth!  
Your beauty, which You know how to veil,  
Discloses for me all its mystery.

Your Face is my only homeland.  
It's my Kingdom of love.  
It's my cheerful meadow.  
Each day, my sweet sun.  
It's the Lily of the Valley  
Whose mysterious perfume  
Consoles my exiled soul,  
Making it taste the peace of Heaven.

Your Face is my only wealth.  
I ask for nothing more.  
Hiding myself in it unceasingly,  
I will resemble You, Jesus



Leave in me, the Divine Impress  
Of Your features filled with sweetness,  
And soon I'll become holy.  
I shall draw hearts to You.

Your Face is my only homeland.  
It's my Kingdom of love.  
It's my cheerful meadow.  
Each day, my sweet sun.  
It's the Lily of the Valley  
Whose mysterious perfume  
Consoles my exiled soul,  
Making it taste the peace of Heaven.

From the Diary of Mother Maria Pierina De Micheli

*"I did not take Communion for three days! Today, at last, Jesus came into my heart. I could no longer bear it. [I was] exhausted in every sense. My God, give me the strength to do Your Will. Last night I recited five Glory be to the Sacred Heart and one to Saint Sylvester, asking out of obedience, that my lung be healed and that I*

*may be granted a bout of reprieve from the attacks of the enemy. A distinct voice made itself heard to me: "Go to Fabriano, go up to the foot of the hermitage and the grace you seek will be granted at the tomb of Saint Sylvester". I said in my mind: how is it possible to do this in my state of weakness? And the voice [said] "Do not argue; have faith". My God, may Your Will always be done in everything. (12 June 1941)*



