

Bishop Provost's Pastoral for Lent 2009



Dearly beloved of the Diocese of Lake Charles,

Last year on the First Sunday of Lent, I wrote to you on the importance of the Sacrament of Penance. I stressed that the Sacrament of Penance gives us the opportunity to hear the words spoken to us, "I forgive you." I also emphasized that Our Lord Jesus knew of this need when in the Gospel of St. John He communicated to His Apostles and to His Church the power to forgive sins in His name. "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:23). As we begin another Lent, I would wish to share with you a few more reflections on the importance of this Sacrament by which we are reconciled to God and to neighbor within the Church.

First, humility is needed for the Sacrament of Penance. When we have sinned, the grace of God through our conscience helps us realize the error of our ways. At that moment or soon after we acknowledge the fault and experience a sense of sorrow. If we allow the grace of God to continue its action in us, then we make a decision to change our lives. We seek to be reconciled. The important virtue that helps us through this journey is humility. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, in reflecting on this last Christmas, had this to say: "It takes man's humility to respond to God's humility." What does Pope Benedict mean by "God's humility"? I think the answer to that question is linked to the Sacrament of Penance.

God's humility is first and foremost manifested in becoming Man. "And the Word became flesh" (John 1:14) the Gospel of Christmas day proclaims to us. God humbles himself by taking on frail and flawed human flesh. This humility of God is a profound mystery. St. Paul, probably quoting an ancient Christian hymn, speaks of this humility when he writes: "He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). To meet God we too must humble ourselves. We encounter God in the humility of accepting a dying to self through repentance. For this response of "man's humility... to God's humility", Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Penance. Here we encounter Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Let us take a brief look at how sin entered the world. Sin first appears in the Bible in the decision of Adam and Eve described in the Book of Genesis. God gives to our first parents all that is good but asks only one thing of them. "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden," Eve explains to the tempter. "It is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:3-4). Of course, the temptation is that "you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad" (Genesis 3:5). Man rejects that God defines what is good and evil. The temptation is for Man, both male and female, to determine what is good and evil. In eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve, and consequently their descendants, define for themselves what can and cannot be done. When they do this, they die. In other words, they are separated from God. Physical death is a tribute to that separation. Physical death is to be feared, because there is no hope. How can hope exist if Man is his own god? In effect, Man says, "God is not going to tell me what to do." It is obvious today that Man still tries to define what is good or evil, using his own secular definitions. What the modern world has not already accomplished by denying that sin exists, it seeks to achieve by redefining good and evil according to its own standards. The result of this thinking is the cause of much of the chaos we see in the world around us. Mercifully, God does not leave us alone in our self-centeredness.

God reconciles His creation to Himself. God creates a new Adam to reverse the action of the old Adam. For this to happen, God must become Man. He must enter the world of Man, humbly teaching us what it means to be selfless, taking death and turning it into victory. To do so, the Son of God embraces death humbly and freely. Then, and only then, can there be a resurrection. Jesus repeats that this is exactly what He will do. "This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ... I lay it down on my own. I have the power to lay it down, and power to take it up again" (John 10:17-18). This is real

power, a power to defeat pride, the sin of Man, and even death itself. This is the power of Jesus, and it flows over into us who participate in Him. St. Paul expresses it beautifully: "For if by that one person's transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many" (Romans 5:15). That gift is here and now, now for anyone who turns to God with a contrite heart, with sorrow for sin, and participates in the rich, overflowing gift of God's mercy. For us as Catholics, the Sacraments exist for this encounter.

This work of reconciling Man to God is given over to the Church. St. Paul also speaks of this, when he writes to the Corinthians: "And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us that ministry of reconciliation" (II Corinthians 5:18). The ministers of the Church are "ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through" them, "... be reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:20). What joy the early Christians must have experienced in the confession of sin, realizing that in so doing they were participating in the abundant mercy of God made possible through Jesus Christ. We read in the Letter of St. James the exhortation: "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). Perhaps we should remember the words of St. John, when he writes: "If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (I John 1:9-10).

The new creation of God's grace and mercy is found in the Sacraments of the Church. Through the Sacraments, which include the Sacrament of Penance, we encounter Jesus and His forgiveness. It is particularly in the Sacrament of Penance that the "ministry of reconciliation", of which St. Paul spoke earlier, continues for us.

As a pastor of many years, I have heard people say, "I went to confession, and I felt as though a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I could have sprouted wings." What prompted such joy? It was nothing less than an encounter with God's mercy that was real. These people had humbly confessed their sins. They had encountered the Lord Jesus Christ. "From his fullness" they had "all received, grace in place of grace" (John 1:16). They died to their sins. They were renewed and alive. What a special happiness it is for a priest to say "in the person of Christ", "God loves you and has forgiven your sins." Here the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ are alive for the repentant sinner, who humbly embracing death, freely and completely, allows the Church to speak "in the person of Christ" the words of forgiveness. Grace opens the door to eternal life. It is through this Sacrament of Penance that the Catholic experiences the "justification by faith" spoken of in St. Paul's writing.

Lent invites us to participate more fully in the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I would strongly suggest that one way to do this is the regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance, not just in Lent but throughout the year. Through this Sacrament I embrace the "dying to self" that Jesus announces in the Gospel. "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). These words take on new meaning every time I encounter God's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance.

Extending to you my prayers for a holy season of Lent, filled with the rich experience of God's mercy, I remain

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

+Glen John Provost
Bishop of Lake Charles



The Vocations Committee of Christ the King Catholic Church continued its annual event of honoring members of the women's religious communities working in the Diocese as well as the senior and retired priests of the Diocese for their years of



gracious service to the faithful of Southwest Louisiana. Bishop Glen John Provost leads the blessing at the sisters' luncheon at left with Rev. Wayne LeBleu, while Father LeBleu offers the blessing prior to the meal for the priests.

Gustav, Ike victims aided

LAKE CHARLES - More than 400 families affected by hurricanes Gustav and Ike have been aided through the Office of Disaster Response and Preparedness, according to Director Sandy Gay.

"We have assisted 405 families up to now," Gay said. "We have received funding totaling more than \$123,000 to provide for those in need following the storms."

The office received grants of \$10,000 each from Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) as well as individual contributions totaling \$30,588.89. It also received two grants of \$12,500 from the Family and Youth Foundation, \$40,000 from the Community Foundation of Southwest

Louisiana, \$5,000 from the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, and \$2,600 in donated Wal-Mart gift cards.

To aid victims the office purchased and distributed additional \$2,000 in Wal-Mart gift cards, provided \$300 in medical assistance, \$153.00 for transportation costs, \$304.20 to pay insurance premiums, \$20,382.97 for housing needs, and \$32,392.49 for utility bills.

"We are now participating in a pilot program of case management for Rita victims in the area through Catholic Charities," Gay continued. "The goal is to help as many families as possible move forward in their recovery."

The office has recently re-

ceived from two grants, one from CCUSA, which will help fund the operation of the office two more years. After Hurricane Rita CCUSA provided a grant of \$2,067,000, more than 90 percent of which went to direct assistance for victims. The second major grant, which helped establish the Office, was \$1,512,250. Of that amount, \$900,000 was spent

on direct assistance to those in need, according to Gay.

A second grant will be provided through Family and Youth Counseling Agency, which will help Rita victims continue on their road to recovery through low-interest loans for a variety of uses.

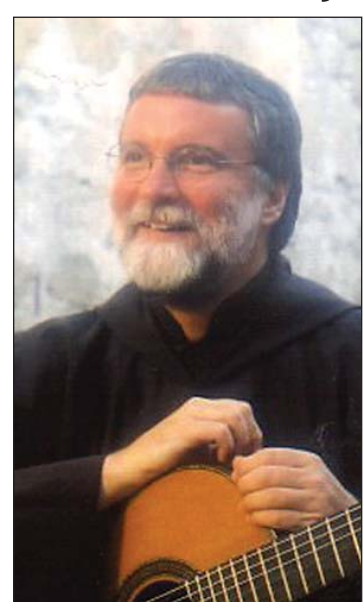
(EDITOR'S NOTE: For more information, go to lcdioocese.org.)

John Michael Talbot at St. Henry

LAKE CHARLES -International Catholic singer and composer John Michael Talbot will be featured in concert Saturday, March 28, at 7 p.m. in the St. Henry Catholic Church, 1021 Eighth Avenue. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. for the general admission concert, which is one of the efforts of St. Henry Church to raise funds for its Building Bridges Capital Campaign, according to the Very Reverend Daniel Torres, pastor of St. Henry.

Tickets are \$20 each and seating is limited. They are available to the general public at St. Henry Church, Crossroads Bookstore, 601 West Prien Lake Road, and the Diocese of Lake Charles Chancery Building, 414 Iris Street.

Talbot is the founder and General Minister of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity at Little Portion Hermitage near Eureka Springs, Arkansas. This unique religious community encompasses celibates, singles, and families, and is the only community of its type in the



John Michael Talbot

United States to be granted canonical status in the Catholic Church. In addition to its monastic community in Arkansas, the Brothers and Sisters of Charity has around 500 domestic members worldwide.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Read more about John Michael Talbot at lcdioocese.org.)

Diocesan Briefs

Reunion 2009: Rise Up and Witness

LAKE CHARLES -- Reunion 2009: Rise Up and Witness, a day for adults and young adults, will be held Saturday, May 23, beginning at 10 a.m. and featuring Christopher West and Steve Angrisano. Doors will open at 9 a.m.

The day, sponsored by the Secretariat of the Ministry of Christian Formation of the Diocese, will be held at St. Louis Catholic High School, 1620 Bank Street. Tickets are \$20 each and seating is limited. The ticket price includes lunch and West's *Theology of the Body* workbook.

Forty Hours Devotion

LAKE CHARLES - Forty Hours Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament to promote vocations to the priesthood and the religious life here in the Diocese of Lake Charles will be held at churches in the Easter Deanery during the month of March.

Devotion at St. Joan of Arc Church in Oberlin will be held on March 2-6 while Adoration will start at 11 a.m. on March 8 at St. Philip Neri Church in Kinder, continuing for 40 straight hours.

The three Catholic churches in Jennings will serve as hosts through the end of the month. Our Lady Help of Christians will host the Devotion on March 16-20 while Immaculate Conception begins the Devotion at noon on March 22 continuing for 40 hours. The final stop in the month will be at Our Lady of Perpetual Help on March 24.

March breakfast, luncheon with Bishop set

LAKE CHARLES - The Women's Prayer Luncheon and the First Friday Men's Prayer Breakfast with Bishop Glen John Provost will continue in March.

The Women's Prayer Luncheon will be at noon Tuesday, March 3, in the Lake Charles Civic Center while the Men's First Friday Prayer Breakfast will be March 6 in Ave Maria Hall of the Cathedral Office Building at 7 a.m., following the 6:30 a.m. Mass in the Cathedral.

St. Paul series at OLQH

LAKE CHARLES - A lecture series on St. Paul is continuing at Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church on successive Wednesdays in the Activity Room of the Family Life Center. The event begins with a 6 p.m. supper followed by an hour-long lecture from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. with an opportunity for questions at the end of each program.

Bishop Glen John Provost will be the next presenter on March 4, with "The Nature of the Pauline Year."

Did you know...

According to the 2008 Official Catholic Directory, the Diocese of Lake Charles had 39 active Diocesan priests, 10 religious order priests, 30 permanent deacons, two transitional deacons, one religious brother, and 16 religious sisters. This compares to the numbers for the same categories at the founding of the Diocese of 29 active Diocesan priests, 23 religious order priests, seven permanent deacons and 52 religious sisters.

At the founding of the Diocese in 1980, there were two Catholic High Schools. Do you know their names and their locations? Find out in our next Catholic Calendar.

(This page paid for by the Diocese of Lake Charles.)