

God's patience is your salvation. St. Peter is clear about one thing in today's second reading; the Lord does not delay! Rather, for the Lord, one day is as a thousand years. And why is this so? So you and I can be ready for that great day when the Lord does come. God does not delay, God is infinitely patient with us finite beings. Indeed, you and I must learn a hard lesson first. We have yet to fully understand that all our rushing about trying to make life "just right" or "fun" does neither. Just the opposite, all our "busyness" takes us away from others--family members, friends, and those who need us and our energy, the poor, homeless and the outcast.

But maybe we don't slow down because we're afraid of what we might see once the dust settles. Yet, facing who we really are is essential if Christmas is to be more than just a time of parties and presents. Though Advent is a time of joyful anticipation it is still a time of preparation. You and I need to prepare our hearts and minds for the great feast, indeed for the great feast in eternity.

For Catholics, the Sacrament of Penance reminds us of the reconciliation the Christ Child brought to this world. One might think I can do this by myself; I don't need to go to confession. Certainly God's mercy is available to us all through Christ. However, full reconciliation with those whom our actions, or lack of action, hurt comes to us through the Church, the sacrament of Christ's reconciliation in the present. Confession is necessary for reconciliation with my fellow Christians, without this dimension we fool ourselves into justifying our actions or inaction that affects others and ourselves.

There are many reasons people stay away from celebrating God's reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance. Some reasons are embarrassment, fear, pride, or even laziness. Give yourself a gift this year and hand the fear and embarrassment over to God. Set aside the pride that keeps you from his presence in this sacrament and wake up from your sleep for the time draws near. The priest is not a judge, but like in all sacramental encounters, he is an outward sign of the unseen reality of God's forgiveness. Take note of the absolution prayer the priest says at the end of your confession:

God the Father of mercies through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church, may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This prayer summarizes the teaching of our Church on this matter. It is the ministry (the work) of the Church (that is everyone represented in the person of the priest) to make God's reconciliation visible in this world. God gives the pardon and the peace and the priest, in the name of the Church (Christ's body on earth) absolves (that is pronounces this freedom from guilt) to the penitent.

The Sacrament of Penance is being celebrated throughout the year on Saturday's from 3:30 to 4:30 PM but during this season it is also celebrated in a communal fashion. Together we celebrate God's mercy in listening to the Word of God, reviewing our consciences and making our contrition. Then each person is invited to individual confession. As we go to the priest individually everyone prays for the other. When all are finished, everyone sings God's praise and offers each other the peace of Christ. A peace renewed through our confession and absolution.

Much good happens at this time of the year. Yet, it is clouded by the fact that our rush to *get into* Christmas actually might extend our real waiting for God's loving presence in our life and in this world. Slow down! Let go of some of the things that busy you and burden you. In doing so, you may be very surprised to see that you have what you need and then the Lord could come to you like a dear unexpected friend on Christmas day.