

UNIT III

PENANCE AND HOLY OIL

Sacraments of Healing in the Church

NOTE: Lessons 24 and 25 can be taught before or after Lesson 19, or after Lesson 22, if the teacher wishes to introduce the Sacrament of Penance at the beginning of Great Lent.

24. OUR LIFE AWAY FROM GOD

Do you remember the white robe you were given at your baptism? We called this white garment the **robe of holiness** because it reminds us of the holy life God wants us to live. The priest gave you your white garment and told you to keep your soul and body clean and free from sin, just like the whiteness of your robe.

Most of us, however, have not kept ourselves so clean. Even after our new birth in baptism we find it difficult to turn away from evil and sin. We disobey God's wishes in order to satisfy our own. We forget to treat other people with love. We forget God's Kingdom and the good life He gives us.

Once when Jesus was speaking to His disciples about the Kingdom of God, He compared it to a story of a marriage feast:

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying 'Tell those who are invited, Behold I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are

killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.'

But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The King was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep

and gnash their teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

(Matthew 22:2-14)

In order to understand this story, we must know that in the wedding feast the host provided the wedding garments. He gave one to each guest as he entered the feast. So when God invites us to feast in His Kingdom, He provides us with a clean, new robe, the robe we receive from Him in baptism.

During Holy Week we remember the story of the man who wasn't prepared for the feast of the king. We sing this hymn:

*"I see Thy bridal chamber adorned, O Saviour,
And I have no wedding garment with which to enter;
Make light (or clean) the robe of my soul,
O Giver of Light, and save me."*

In another hymn of Holy Week, we sing:

*"How can I who am unworthy
Enter into the splendor of Thy saints?
If I should dare to come into the bridal hall,
my robe betrays me,
For it is not a wedding garment;
I shall be thrown out by the angels as a prisoner.
Cleanse the impurity of my soul, O Lord,
And of Thy mercy, save me."*

God prepares a feast for us in His Kingdom each time we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. He invites us to come and eat with Him. He invites us to share His food and His life. But our minds and bodies must be clean and free from sin if we are to share God's life. We cannot have a dirty garment soiled by our bad thoughts and actions.

God helps us to come to Him again with clean minds and hearts after we have sinned. God gives us a chance to say we are sorry for not living as He wants us to live. God gives us the possibility to confess our sins and

to receive a "robe of holiness" from Him once more.

As we prepare for confession, the first thing we must do is to see that we have sinned against God and feel sorry for our sins. Some people never realize and admit that they have sinned, but others who see God's love and goodness know that they themselves have not been loving, and good. The Bible gives us an example of two such men, one who was too proud to think he could sin, and one who recognized his sins and confessed that he was not worthy to enter God's Kingdom. Read the story of the Publican and the Pharisee.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all I get.'

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

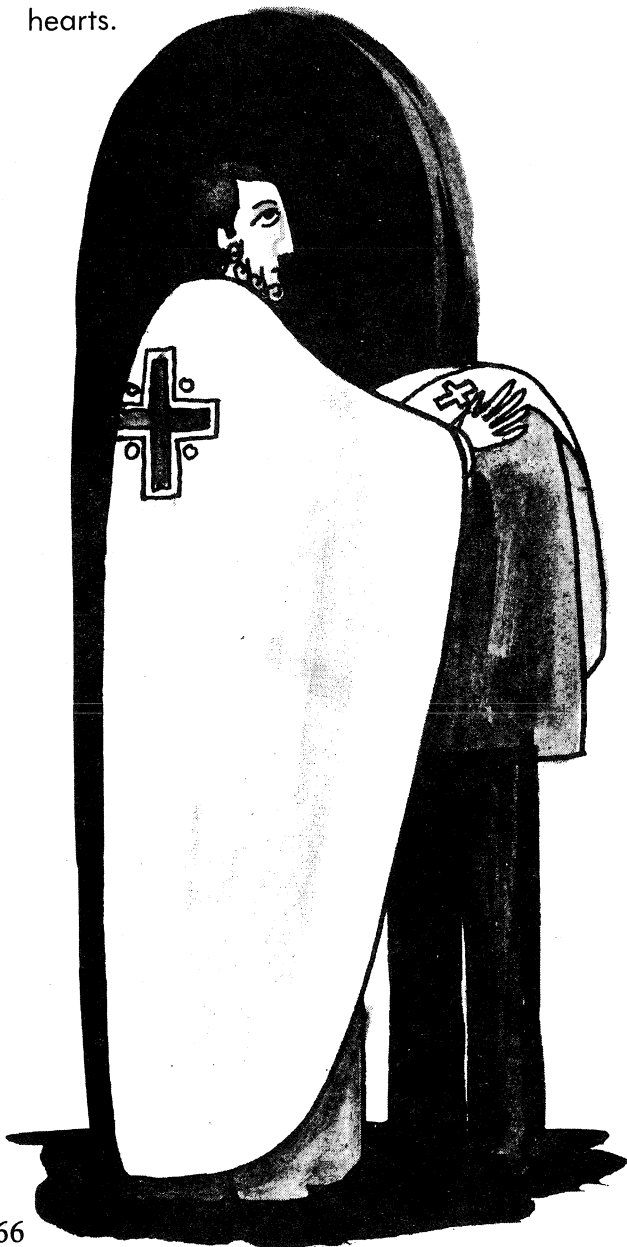
I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

(Luke 18:10-14)

God loves everyone of His children so much that He is willing to forgive us if we realize our sins, repent, and want to live a new life again. In the Sacrament of Penance, we realize and confess our sins. We turn again to God and promise to do His Will. God forgives us and helps us again to live a new life in the world. God robes us in purity as He did on the day we were baptized.

Before we come to the priest to confess our sins, we should first prepare ourselves. We may do this in many ways:

1. Thinking about how we have disobeyed God and sinned against other men;
2. Reading the Bible and other religious books which help us to see both the beauty of God's Kingdom and the sadness of our own sinfulness, and show us how we can better direct our lives towards God; and
3. Spending some time in prayer and fasting to prepare ourselves spiritually and physically to receive God again in our hearts.



When we are ready to confess our sins, we usually read some special prayers before Confession. Here are some of the prayers we say (only the beginning of the prayers is written here):

1. *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal . . .*
2. *Glory to the Father . . .*
3. *Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us . . .*
4. *Lord have mercy (3 times) . . .*
5. *Glory to the Father . . .*
6. *Our Father, who art in heaven . . .*
7. *Lord have mercy (12 times) . . .*
8. *Glory to the Father . . .*
9. *O come let us worship God our King . . .*
10. *Psalm 51*
11. *Have mercy on us, O Lord . . .*

Finally, we finish with a few short prayers. Here is one that you can learn:

*Have mercy upon us, O Lord
for in Thee have we trusted
be not very angry with us
nor remember our sins;
but look down even now upon us in Thy
mercy,
deliver us from our enemies,
for Thou art our God,
and we are Thy people,
and we call upon Thy Name. Amen.*

Then, after repeating the short prayer, "Lord have mercy" (as many times as we wish), we approach to confess our sins.

Activities

1. Prepare a booklet of the prayers before Confession.
2. Learn one or more of the Troparia — "Have mercy upon us, O Lord."
3. Read the story of St. Mary of Egypt, who repented of her sins when she realized that she was not worthy to enter the Kingdom of God.