

Every Penitent Who Approaches the Confessional is Sacred Ground to be Cultivated with Care and Attention

“The Sacraments, as we know, are God's demonstration of closeness and tenderness towards humanity; they are the concrete way God created to move be closer to us, to embrace us, without shame for our limits”, said Pope Francis this morning as he received in audience in the Paul VI Hall the participants in the annual Course on the Inner Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary. “Without doubt”, he continued, “among the Sacraments, it is that of Reconciliation that best shows the merciful face of God. We must never forget, either as penitents or as confessors: there is no sin that God cannot forgive! None! Only what is hidden from divine mercy cannot be forgiven, like those that hide themselves from the sun cannot be illuminated or warmed.

Following the theme of reconciliation, Francis emphasized three demands. The first is to live the Sacrament as a way of educating in mercy. The Pope described Confession “not as a form of torture but rather as a liberating encounter, full of humanity, through which we can educate in a mercy that does not exclude, but rather includes the just commitment to make amends, as far as possible, for the sin committed”. The second is that of “allowing oneself to be educated in what we are celebrating, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation”, as “it is possible to learn much from conversion and the repentance of our brothers. They lead us to examine our own consciences”. He then outlined the third requirement, that of keeping one's gaze towards heaven and the supernatural. He urged those present to remember that they are all ministers of reconciliation “purely by the grace of God, gratuitously and out of love, or rather, out of mercy. We are ministers of mercy thanks to God's mercy, and we must never lose this view to the supernatural that makes us truly humble, welcoming and merciful towards every brother and sister who wishes to confess. ... Every faithful penitent who approaches the confessional is 'sacred ground' to be cultivated with dedication, care and pastoral attention”.

The Pope concluded by encouraging those present to “make the most of this Lenten period for personal conversion and to dedicate yourselves generously to confessions, so that the People of God can be purified as they reach Easter, which represents the final victory of Divine Mercy over all the evil in the world”.