

Mother of God Community  
Sunday Night Prayer Meeting  
March 14, 2010  
“Unlocking the Mercy of God”  
by Terri Celmer

I Encounter Christ when you read the Scriptures.

Some years ago I received literature from a Christian organization with a list of Scriptures to read during Lent. I noticed, however, that many of the Scripture passages read like a To Do list. At one point I sensed the Holy Spirit say to me to stop using the list I had received in the mail and just take up the Gospels and read from the accounts of the life of Jesus instead. There I came in contact with Jesus. By staying with the Gospels I gave myself the opportunity to encounter him in a life-changing way.

Sometimes we spend time with the Word, but we aren't actually attracted to the Word, to the Person of Jesus. Jesus explains in **John 5:39-40**, “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

II Christianity is about a relationship with the Son of God.

We so easily slip back into a form of arrogance and think we are living a good Christian life. This arrogance stunts our growth as Christians. His life is not flowing through us. We cut off our potential to become great wine.

But this arrogance is not just a matter of personal sin. When the Body of Christ invests in our structures and gives the Lord what is leftover of our hearts and minds we become blinded by our own good fortune.

Jesus tells a parable in **Luke 12:15-21** about a man who amassed great wealth. The man said, “What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?” The man decides to tear down his barn and build larger ones. Jesus calls him “Fool” for that very night his soul was called to account before the throne of God. Jesus says, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

Jesus says, “... a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). The same could be said about the Body of Christ. The Church's life does not consist in the abundance of her possessions, her spiritual treasures. Rather, her glory is in the depth of her relationship with the Pearl of great price, her Lord. For the nature of the Church as Bride of Christ is to be the one who delights in her Bridegroom, not his wealth.

What happens if a bride does not delight in her bridegroom? **Ezekiel 16** informs us what happens. It tells the story of a young woman who was nothing before meeting the man who later became her husband. Because of his love for her, she became beautiful. When they married she grew arrogant and started to trust in her beauty and played the harlot (Ez 16:15). She became an adulteress. Written as an allegory this chapter depicts Jerusalem's unfaithfulness to the Lord. Because of his infinite love and mercy the Lord takes pity on her and promises to restore her glory and give her even more than she had before. See Ez 16:60-63.

III There are many blessings associated with the confession of sin and sinfulness

For many years now I have been struck by how the history of the Jewish people is presented in the Old Testament; it reveals their high points and their low points, their personal transgressions and their corporate transgressions. Their sins have been exposed for all to read for time and memorial. It is like the Jewish people have been called to live out a prophetic vulnerability – let the whole world see their sin and misery so that the Lord can show forth his love and mercy.

Confession of sin precedes many of the great acts of commissioning in the Bible. When he beholds the glory of God in **Isaiah 6:5-8** Isaiah says, “Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). But then, only a few lines later it says Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord

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asking, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I [Isaiah] said, ‘Here I am! Send me!’ (Isaiah 6:8) His confession of sinfulness released him into service for God.

In the New Testament we hear in **Luke 5:8-10** that after Peter observed the Lord multiply the catch of fish, Peter “fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (Luke 5:8). Jesus replies, “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men” (Luke 5:10). You see here again that confession opens up a greater revelation of God’s will.

It is not just our personal sins but our collective sins as well for which we need to confess before God. The Jews understood that. Upon hearing of the transgressions the exiles had committed, Ezra rent his garments and his mantle, and pulled hair from his head and beard and sat appalled. See **Ezra 9:3-7**. Those who acknowledged their guilt gathered around Ezra as he spread out his hands to the Lord. Ezra prayed, “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt” (Ezra 9:6-7).

During these last weeks of Lent we are invited to add a confession of sins to our fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Pope John Paul II led the Catholic Church in this kind of corporate confession of sins during Lent of the Great Jubilee Year – March 12<sup>th</sup> ten years ago. He gave us the pattern to follow. The Pope called for a penitential service in which representatives of the Roman Curia confessed sins and asked the Lord’s pardon for sins committed by the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church. One of the areas the Pope mentioned was sins against Christian unity. This kind of confession moves the heart of God and unlocks abundant blessings for God’s people. When the Church does this, she receives graces that she could not imagine happening, such as the Elijah graces “to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (**Malachi 4:6**).

We recently saw this grace worked out in the life of the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit. We saw the Catholic Church offer to welcome certain members of the Anglican tradition into full communion with Rome without asking them to forsake their identification with the Spirit’s genuine work in their spiritual heritage. Who could have foreseen this? Because of this there has been a new impetus for overcoming stumbling blocks to full communion. There is a group in Sweden with the same aspirations. The Holy Spirit is responsible for this.

One of the first things I experienced after being baptized in the Spirit was a thirst for Christian unity. It was so obvious to me that the Lord wanted His body whole. I’ve never forgotten that the Lord put that thirst in my heart. What we are seeing in these days is a sign that the Holy Spirit can move us beyond the stumbling blocks that have prevented us in the past.

What holds us back and what we can take responsibility for and repent as a local expression of the body of Christ is our particular expressions of arrogance. Our corporate pride – whether Catholic pride, Protestant pride, Evangelical pride, Pentecostal pride, Charismatic pride, etc. – makes it nearly impossible for us to recognize and esteem the gifts of the Spirit in other denominations as being important for the whole Body’s growth in holiness.

And so as we progress through the remainder of this Lent the Holy Spirit challenges the Churches – as many as would receive it – to revisit our commitment to seeing the Body of Christ healed and restored whole according to the will of the Father, and the role of humble repentance leading the way. If we hope to someday celebrate Holy Week and Easter in full communion with one another we must begin to honor and esteem the work of the Holy Spirit in the life and prayer of brethren from other Christian communities of faith. Then, with contrite

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hearts and in a spirit of humility and dependence on God’s mercy can we pray with faith and power Jesus’ prayer “that they may all be one” (John 17:21) so that the world will believe that the Father sent the Son.

I recommend you read **Ephesians 4:1-6** in light of MOG Community’s call to serve unity.

The confessions of sin offered at the end of prayer meeting were remarkable. Be expectant. God pours out immeasurable blessings on the contrite of heart.