

Today's readings talk about reconciliation, not the sacrament so much as the whole concept of healing our relationships with God and our fellow brothers and sisters. "Reconcile," means to cause something to coexist in harmony; to be in agreement, balanced, and in tune with one another. Do we have any accountants in the congregation? For you, reconciling involves making one account consistent with another, especially by finding transactions that have begun but have not yet been completed.

Early in my career as a software engineer, I worked on an Air Force Program that involved the collection and analysis of jet engine performance data. We helped mechanics keep airplanes in the sky. Some bases were large and had multiple computers, they would run our program in several locations and the data they collected would be sent to a main server computer and shared throughout the flightline. The process was called "reconciliation." Data changed in one computer had to be sent to the others and if the same engine has updates on from two locations, the newer data would take precedence over the old.

Having data reconciled is critical to the whole operation. If a failing engine part is identified as needing replacement within say, 10 flight hours at one end of the flight line, but that information doesn't make it to the computer on the other end, a mechanic might approve an airplane to fly when it shouldn't, a mistake that could be catastrophic. In a similar way, our reconciliation with God and others is critical to staying on our flight path to heaven.

Lent is a time to renew our habit of reconciliation, as we detach ourselves from the distractions of earthly life, and focus on Jesus and his Resurrection that forgives our sins and makes reconciliation, or getting our lives in order with the Father, possible.

St Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians says, "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away;" This is like the old data in the system being replaced by new data through reconciliation. Bishop Barron says, "Jesus takes upon himself the sin of the world." Sin injures our relationship with God and with each other. But as Bishop Barron says, "Jesus becomes the healer, even to the point of shedding his blood, which explodes (or erases) [the sin] from within us." We are blessed as Christians to have the sacrament of reconciliation to fully erase our sins and give us a fresh start. When we damage a relationship through sin and humbly seek reconciliation from God, OUR sin is erased. The grace of forgiveness then gives us courage to approach the often more difficult task of asking forgiveness from the person we hurt.

In today's gospel parable, Jesus shows how the younger son reconciles with his Father after a bout with extreme selfishness. This son humbly admits his grievous behavior saying, "I no longer deserve to be called your son, treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers." This is "Metanoia," a change of mind, a turning around of the younger brother's life.

The merciful father rejects this offer of estrangement and restores his son with a robe, a ring, and pair of sandals, all outward signs of his renewed sonship. However, his older brother is not so merciful. He sees the wasteful behavior of his brother and harbors bitterness for the father over the inequality between how he and his brother are treated. He even insults his father by not attending his younger brother's welcome home party. The older brother cannot reconcile or find agreement with his father's act of mercy.

St. Paul says God is, "Entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So, we are ambassadors for Christ." Unlike the older brother, we are called at times to share God's mercy, overcome our bitterness for others, and take reconciliation out into the world, trusting the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us.

Twice a year, the deacons of the diocese meet with the Bishops for an all-day convocation. Not to be confused with a conVacation, a convocation is a large formal assembly of the deacons. Using the software reconciliation analogy, convocation is a time for the deacons at the parishes to reconcile with the main server, the bishop and his auxiliary bishops at the diocese. Last Saturday with Bishop Michael the newly appointed "administrator" of the diocese and he asked us to share our joys, challenges, and hopes for the Church.

One of the deacons' wives answered in an emotional voice saying, "My joy is Jesus. My hope is Jesus." But, the challenge I see, is the political divide that is ripping our Church apart." Like the bitterness of the older brother, this is a place where reconciliation is sorely needed. It requires that we listen with our hearts and take time to prayerfully consider what our fellow Christians have to say. Reconciling requires patience to receive the data, contemplate the message, and share with each other in a loving and open way. It's not easy, but together, with the Holy Spirit as our guide, we can find our way forward as a Church.

As we pass the half-way point of Lent, let's consider our progress on this journey, are we keeping up with our Lenten commitments? Are we feeling like the younger brother as he walks the humble path back to his father? Or are we still struggling like the older brother to abandon bitterness and open our hearts to reconciliation? We pray for the strength to take the love expressed by Christ on the cross, let it bind us as Christians, and become ambassadors of reconciliation in our own parish, our families, and our communities at large.