

Dear Friends,

Advent is a penitential season, but that doesn't mean it must be devoid of joy. It has always been my experience, as I go around from parish to parish to celebrate communal penance this time of year, that it is this very sacrament that makes Advent joyful. It is a joy to know that my presence brings people closer to the healing love of God. Reconciliation is a gift that can't be measured. It can only be experienced when we are open to receiving it.

This weekend (December 6 at 4:00 p.m.) we will celebrate communal penance here at St. Catherine Parish. Several priests will be here. I can understand the fact that people don't want to be seen going to confession. No one likes to be seen as a sinner (even though all of us are). Shame has a way of making us feel a lot more self-conscious, and perhaps a little bit shy. I understand that tension. I remember once when I was still in the seminary we were celebrating communal penance in the Abbey Church one night, and for some reason, I really didn't want to be there. We knew, of course, that we didn't have to go if we didn't want to, and even though I knew I needed the sacrament of reconciliation, I didn't want to go. The lights were down in the Abbey Church, the music was beautiful, the priest had given an excellent homily, and I was going to settle into my chair while everyone else went to confession. What the heck. I could go to confession anytime I wanted to. I knew several priests, some of them were good friends of mine. I was perfectly content to just sit in my chair and do nothing. But then I saw something that shook me to the core of my being. The rector of the School, the president of St. Meinrad School of Theology, Father Daniel got up to go to confession. He was one of the holiest men I had ever known in my life.

Seeing this I started thinking about my own sins. I don't want to compare myself to Father Daniel; he's far too good a man to be compared with the likes of me. In fact, it was his holiness that inspired me to desire the grace of reconciliation that night. I even hoped I could go to him. But I didn't see him when I decided to go to confession, which is fine because I did receive the sacrament and my soul was filled with joy.

You know, we don't have to prepare ourselves to celebrate the birth of Jesus as much as we need to be prepared for his presence in our lives right now. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation we are blessed to have Christ touch our souls to bring us forgiveness and peace. If you really think about it, what greater joy could there be in our lives than to receive divine mercy?

In joyful hope,  
Fr. Tim Seigel