

## LORD, HAVE MERCY

### The Healing Power of Confession

Do you struggle with the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Do you wonder why the Church says you need to go to Confession? Has it been a long time since you stepped into a confessional? Does this sacrament, like no other, scare you? Join with Fr. Tom Washburn, OFM, and learn about the history of this sacrament, its theology and perhaps even its renewed importance in your life. Using Scott Hahn's latest book, *Lord Have Mercy*, we will explore this healing sacrament. This class will meet at 7 p.m. on Tuesdays, February 23, March 2, 9, 23.

**Location:** St. Leonard's Church in Boston's North End.

**Topic:** Adult religious education series on the Sacrament of Reconciliation called "Lord, Have Mercy."

**Dates:** Sessions take place on Tuesday's (February 23, March 2, 9, and 23) from 7-9 p.m. in St. Leonard's Church Hall.

**Time:** 7pm on each evening.

**Signups/RSVPs:** Call the St. Leonard parish office to sign up 617-523-2110, so we can have enough books on hand.

All are welcome.



**Fr. Washburn has also written an article for *The Pilot* as part of *The Light Is On For You*.**

### Today, I get to be sin free!

Fr. Tom Washburn, OFM

For Pilot, February 26, 2010 (please include photo of Fr. Washburn and TLIOFY logo)

A number of years ago, I was preaching at the prayer service for First Reconciliation for the young people in my parish. During my homily, I brought all of the young people into the sanctuary and asked them all the usual questions – did they understand what was taking place today? Had they prepared themselves well? What was Reconciliation all about? Among the questions, I asked if anyone was nervous about making their first Confession. Hands went up. Some of the responses named things like not being sure what to say; being concerned about what the priest would say to them; or not sure what their sins were. Then, I asked the children if anyone was excited about making their first Confession. One hand went up immediately and enthusiastically. I asked the young girl why she was excited and she said proudly, "I'm excited because today I get to be sin free!"

I would love to have t-shirts made up that I could hand out as people leave the confessional proclaiming the same joyful sentiment – today, I am sin free! This young girl was able to proclaim something that I think many of us miss when it comes to this sacrament – that it is a sacrament of joy; and a sacrament of freedom. One of the challenges in our modern times is that too often we have turned Reconciliation in our own minds from this great moment of rejoicing into an experience of the Divine Courtroom. The modern construct views us as entering a courtroom (the confessional), guilty of a crime (sin), standing before the judge (the priest) and placing ourselves at the mercy of the court. Our greatest hope is to receive a light sentence.

This isn't the image that God intends. The image we get over and over again in Scripture is an image of joy and freedom. As we hear in John's Gospel, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3.17) It is the same with the parable of the Lost Sheep, the Woman Caught in Adultery, the Prodigal Son, and so on – these are images of freedom from our sins and the joy that comes from unity again with our God. "Today, we get to be sin free!"

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says this about the effect of this sacrament, "The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship...reconciliation is usually

followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation. Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true spiritual resurrection, restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God.” (No. 1468)

The time has come for us to cast off these unhelpful notions of the Divine Courtroom that only serve to keep us away from God’s fount of mercy and love. The time has come to ask a simple question in the depths of our hearts – do I want to be free? God offers this freedom; freedom from the burden of our sin; freedom from the corruption of the world; freedom from the impurity that surrounds us; freedom from the daily struggles to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Do you want to be free? Let the grace of God’s healing sacrament descend upon you and give you a joy, a peace, a freedom that cannot be found anywhere else.

**Fr. Tom Washburn, OFM**, is a Franciscan priest and Vocation Director for the Franciscan Province of the Immaculate Conception, in residence at St. Leonard’s Church in Boston’s North End. He is currently offering an adult religious education series on the Sacrament of Reconciliation called “Lord, Have Mercy.” Sessions take place on Tuesday’s (February 23, March 2, 9, and 23) from 7-9 p.m. in St. Leonard’s Church Hall. Call the parish office to sign up 617-523-2110.