

The 1986 movie “The Mission” is the story of two men bringing civilization to a native tribe deep in the jungles of South America. One of the men in his earlier life in a fencing duel with an opponent over some minor infraction lunged at his opponent and killed him. Overcome with remorse he leaves the settlement. Strapped to his back is his armor which he carries as a sign of his murderous act. His journey finds him scaling rocky mountain passes, sometimes perilously close to raging mountain waterfalls which make the rocks slippery. A couple of times he is nearly swept off these precipices. Finally, he reaches a church mission out post high in the mountains among the native peoples. He is met by the priest who, sensing the man’s sin and guilt, reaches into the net the man has been carrying containing the armor, and drawing out the sword that had inflicted the mortal wound, severs the net. The heavy armor falls from the man’s shoulders down a raging waterfall never to be seen again.

A similar scene plays itself out in today’s Gospel story. Jesus does not ask the woman any questions about her actions. Her physical remorse is enough to move him to remove both the burden of her sin and guilt. She is set free and admonished to do her best to avoid falling into sin again.

St. Paul in today’s second reading exuberantly proclaims how this same grace of God also set him free of the burden of sin and guilt. “I consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. ...I consider [ my past] so much rubbish.” (Phil 3:8)

In the first reading God speaking through the prophet Isaiah tells us: “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not, see, I am doing something new!” (Is. 43:17). God does not desire us to wallow in guilt or shame over our sins. God forgives, and even more importantly, forgets, releases us from our past. The Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance is the means given us by Jesus through the Church through

which this forgiving, unburdening, renewing grace of God is available to each of us. Like the woman in the Gospel, St. Paul and the man in the movie, all that is required is a sincere turning on our part to God. If it has been a long, or very long, time since you have experienced this grace through the Sacrament of Penance I invite to prayerfully consider God's invitation to you to do so before Easter. As a priest, and fellow sinner who needs, and does, experience God's forgiveness and release of the burden of guilt in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I stand ready to help you.

In the case of St. Paul and the man in the movie, their initial encounter with the power of God's forgiveness in Jesus was further developed by also being the recipients of the grace of faith shared by members of the larger church community. The book of Acts tells us that Paul was taken to the house of Ananias where he was instructed not only by him, but very likely the other members of his family as well as experiencing their hospitality and that of the Christian church in Damascus. The man in "The Mission" was welcomed by the native villagers and eventually himself became a priest in their community. Paul and the man in "The Mission" were the recipients of the sharing of the "time and talents" of fellow Christians.

Two weeks ago we all received a catalog of the many opportunities our parish offers us to share our time and talent. Last weekend many of these opportunities were showcased at the "Ministry Fair." Having, hopefully, studied and prayed about some way or ways I am called by God to share a gift, or gifts, of my time and talent, this weekend we will momentarily be invited add our personal gifts of "time and talent" on the commitment sheet given last week to the sacramental gifts of bread and wine to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ for the building up of our parish and Jesus' on-going work salvation in the world. Like the woman in the Gospel story, St. Paul and the man in "The Mission," our gift of service to a fellow brother or sister can be a means of grace that opens them, and us, to something new God is doing in our lives.