

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: A LITURGICAL CATECHESIS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has suffered more than any other Sacrament in the Catholic Church because of many factors. The significant fact of the Sacrament of Reconciliation today and much ever is the need for the weak, the sinner and the broken hearted to be strengthened and healed of their sins (Pennock, 1981). In our daily encounter and experience the young people seems to be marked as alienated being in our Churches. Many of them seem to live in a fragmented lifestyle and as a result they seem to lose the mission of the Church with regards to the Sacrament of Reconciliation with God, with others, with self and with nature. How is it possible that the Church can reach out to these young people yearning and longing to encounter this compassionate and merciful God? This work aims at stimulating the young people and all the Christian faithful to take effective action in reclaiming their experience of God's love and mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is an attempt at finding a way to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation better understood, more meaningful and relevant to young people in in the Church in Africa as well as the whole Catholic world. And therefore this work deals and touches those elements of the need for catechesis and its relevance by proposing a liturgical catechesis for the young people as well as other faithful – giving catechesis on the Rite of Penance in the area of the words used in celebrating the Sacrament, the role of the minister and the penitent, the Sacramental environment, signs and symbols and other elements relevant to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Keywords: Church, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Liturgy, Africa

Introduction

Pope John Paul II noted in his Post-Synodal exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance that: “the Sacrament of Reconciliation is in crisis” (John Paul II,1984). The Sacrament of Reconciliation has suffered more than any other Sacrament in the Catholic Church because of many factors. The reasons of this crisis especially in African is probably due to all-embracing idea of relativism and globalization as well as the way the Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated, lived and understood was not well assimilated. It may also be the fact of freedom and the disposition and attitudes of young people and the priests and how this Sacrament is celebrated may bring about the appreciation of this Sacrament. Are the young people been helped to understand in depth the encounter with God who is so merciful and love? From this point therefore we shall look at the challenges and obstacles to the Sacrament of Reconciliation especially among the young people. The presence of the young people in the Church in Africa is challenging. The

alienation of the younger generation from the Church and especially in its Sacraments is equally alarming and there is a great need for liturgical catechesis. Any religious educator or pastor regarding the faith-celebration of young people will always and happily give his or her time to the young people. To this fact, the Sacred Congregation's response to the needs of young people, in the form of guidelines in the General Catechetical Directory (1971) and in the Directory for Masses with Children (November 1, 1973). In our daily encounter and experience the young people seems to be marked as alienated being in our Churches. Many of them seem to live in a fragmented lifestyle and as a result they seem to lose the mission of the Church with regards to the Sacrament of Reconciliation with God, with others, with self and with nature. How is it possible that the Church can reach out to these young people yearning and longing to encounter this compassionate and merciful God? This is the point to highlight that the Church can reach out to their brokenness through the meaningful celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This calls for a re-contextualization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (L. Lambert, 2008). This work therefore, is about proposing a liturgical catechesis to young people so that they are better helped to appreciate and to encounter God's love in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It shall give catechesis on the Rite of Penance in the area of the words used in celebrating the Sacrament, the role of the minister and the penitent, the sacramental environment, signs and symbols. It shall also touch the Pastoral liturgical catechesis whereby it shall offer catechesis to the actual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and lastly the adaptation and inculturation. Our aim and purpose of this research is to stimulate the young people and all the Christian faithful to take effective action in reclaiming their experience of God's love and mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is an attempt at finding a way to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation better understood, more meaningful and relevant to young people in African Church as well as the whole Catholic world.

Catechesis and Typical Edition

Very often the young people are the focus of great concern as regards handing on faith. The *General Directory for Catechesis* makes this quite clear by calling young people 'the first victims of the spiritual and cultural crisis gripping the world perhaps is because many of them after their Christian initiation are very backward in the practice of the faith (L. Kelly, 2000). Therefore, liturgical catechesis comes in handy to keep the faith of our young people. Catechesis is an essential ministry in the Church with its primary goal to help people grow in faith (CCC No.5). Growing in faith is a lifelong process. It is a call for us to be attuned to God's presence in our lives, to be able to name that presence in terms of our tradition, the faith of the Church, and to respond to God's call to build his Kingdom here on earth (M. Gallagher, 1998).

Fundamental Tasks of Catechesis

"In general it is observed that the first victims of the spiritual and cultural crisis gripping the world are the young. It is also true that any commitment to the betterment of society finds its hopes in them. This should stimulate the Church all

the more to proclaim the Gospel to the world of youth with courage and creativity” (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 181). The fundamental task of catechesis is helping the faithful to know, to celebrate and to contemplate the mystery of Christ. This is in line with the suggestion of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on full, active and conscious participation of the faithful in liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 14). This task can be achieved by promoting knowledge of the faith. Anyone who has encountered Christ desires to serve him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father which he revealed. Knowledge of the faith is required by adherence to the faith (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 85). It is also through liturgical catechesis. Christ is always present in his Church, especially in liturgical celebrations (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 7). Therefore, in each celebration we are in communion with the salvific presence in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Another task proposed is the moral formation. Following Christ is being configured to him. Therefore, liturgical catechesis must transmit and help the young people to undertake a journey of interior transformation in which by participating in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord they move from the old way of life to a new life which is made perfect in Christ. The last of these tasks is to teach the young people how to pray. When a liturgical catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 85).

Adaptation of Catechesis for Young People

“The Synod has been valuable for the whole Church by seeking to trace with the greatest possible precision the complex characteristics of present-day youth; by showing that these young persons speak a language into which the message of Jesus must be translated with patience and wisdom and without betrayal; by demonstrating that, in spite of appearance, these young people have within them, even though often in a confused way, not just a readiness or openness, but rather a real desire to know “Jesus who is called Christ”; and by indicating that if the work of catechesis is to be carried out rigorously and seriously, it is today more difficult and tiring than ever before, because of the obstacles and difficulties of all kinds that it meets; but it is also more consoling, because of the depth of the response it receives from children and young people. This is a treasure which the Church can and should count on in the years ahead. Some categories of young people to whom catechesis is directed call for special attention because of their particular situation” (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 40). Adaptation must be understood as a maternal action of the Church, who recognizes people as “the field of God”(1 Cor 1: 3, 9) not to be condemned but to be cultivated in hope. Adaptation is realized in accordance with the diverse circumstances in which the Word of God is transmitted. These are determined by “*differences of, age, spiritual maturity and social and ecclesial conditions amongst all of those to whom it is addressed*” (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 169-170).

Characteristics of Catechesis for Young People

The diversity of the religious situation should be kept in mind: there are young people who are not even baptized, others have not completed Christian initiation, others are in grave crises of faith, others are moving toward making a decision with regard to faith, and others have already made such a decision and call for assistance. It should also be remembered that the most successful catechesis is that which is given in the context of the wider pastoral care of the young people, especially when it addresses the problems affecting their lives. Hence, catechesis should be integrated with certain procedures, such as analysis of situations, attention to human sciences and education, the co-operation of the laity and of young people themselves. Among the diverse forms of youth catechesis, provision should be made, in so far as circumstances permit, for the youth catechumenate during school years, catechesis for Christian initiation, catechesis on specific themes, as well as other kind of occasional and informal meetings (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 184-185).

Liturgical Catechesis: Church's Responsibility

Pope John Paul II said that the Church has always looked on catechesis as a sacred duty and an inalienable right. Catechesis is certainly a duty which springs from the Lord commands and on those who in the New Covenant have received and answer the call to the ministry of being pastors. On the other hand, as a baptized person, the faithful including the youth has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education to enable them enter on a truly Christian life; and from the viewpoint of human rights, every human being has the right to seek religious truth and adhere to it freely (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 14). On the same note the General Directory for Catechesis which was published in 1997 gives an overview of the vitality of catechesis today. Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and Sacramental action. Catechetical programs in most cases of the Diocese are left to the catechist. And as I speak, there is limited attention given to liturgical symbols and rites and in some cases catechetical courses have little or no connection to liturgical catechesis hence it is marginalized (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 30).

Meaning and Relevance of Liturgical Catechesis

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI (Emeritus) on *Sacramentum Caritatis* speaks about interior participation in the celebration of the liturgy when he says that fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one's life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world. For one to arrive at this state of interior disposition they are to be helped through mystagogical catechesis. It is true that there is no clear distinction between mystagogical catechesis and liturgical catechesis. Mystagogical catechesis is a post-baptismal instruction which must be concerned with presenting the signs and symbols contained in the rites, interprets the rites in the light of the events of our salvation and bringing out the significance

of the rites for the Christian life in all its dimensions (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 64). Liturgical catechesis is an

“integrated process, rooted in biblical and liturgical signs, rites, and symbols in the context of the community. The purpose of liturgical catechesis is to lead communities and individual members of the faithful to maturity of faith through full and active participation in the liturgy which effects and expresses that faith in conscious living out of a life of justice ... It aims to uncover the meaning of the words and actions so that believers may gradually realize that, when they participate in the sacramental actions, they are actually participating in the saving action of Christ that the Sacrament signifies” (C. Dooley, 2004).

Liturgical catechesis is an active responsibility when one realizes that the liturgy is primarily an act of the people. It is for this reason of liturgy being a public act, a contribution is made freely by the faithful to celebrate and manifest of the visible life of the community (M. Michels, 1965). “Liturgical catechesis precedes and confirms, but does not replace religious education. It does not exclude dogma but offers the experience of a relationship with the divine that dogma seeks to put into words. Liturgical catechesis is catechesis into mystery. It is the experience of this mystagogy that allows a person to say of dogma, ‘this is true’ – not because you say so but because I have experienced it for myself” (V. M. Tufano, 2001). Before we can have an effective liturgy we must develop a sense of community. Liturgical catechesis underlines this. Hence, our young people should be led to realize that we are one people in Christ. That we and the Church scattered in our daily encounter of God, of our different occupations but when we come together to celebrate the Church is given a symbolic meaning of the family of God (M. Michels, 1965). In this sense therefore, liturgical catechesis is about the formation of the world-view that sees in everything a spark of the holy, an image of the divine, a revelation of God (V. M. Tufano, 2001). Therefore, “liturgical catechesis does not require that we force all catechesis into the context of liturgy; rather, it challenges us to retrieve our primary experience as a Catholic Christian people” (A. G. Vasrga, 1993).

Liturgical Catechesis and Biblical Foundations

In is good to note the importance of the Word of God in the Rite of Reconciliation for one penitent by giving meaningful lists of the Biblical passages (The Rite of Penance, Nos. 67-84). This is also true in the Rite of Reconciliation for several penitents (The Rite of Penance, Nos. 101-201). The Bible is not merely a source to learn “about” God. It is also a means for the weak to meet God. The Bible is concerned with a real God, real people and real life situations which is an account of life as it really is and an encounter with God. The Bible presents the salvation history – the narration of God’s involvement in the affairs of human being and the response to that divine intervention that comes from human being themselves (C. W. Paris, 1971). Hence, liturgical catechesis is now donning with a new garment – styling itself with the times and minds of today’s people. This new attire is what we should all be ready to put on for the sake of the kingdom of God on earth, here

and now. Our young people should be assisted in returning to the Scripture as the basis of our Christian faith and life – that Scripture is not out of fashion. The challenge that is presented by a liturgical catechesis should not be a theology which creates a new God or a psychology which produces a new man but rather, a methodology by which the traditional God is made known to contemporary man must be fitted to the modern man's concerns and experiences as found in his or her everyday living (C. W. Paris, 1971).

Old Testament Teaching and Liturgical Catechesis

There are several Biblical texts for such catechesis such as: the restoration of the dead bones (Ez 37: 1-10), the good shepherd leading sinners home (Ez 34: 11-16), the confession of sin and trust in God's mercy (Ezra 9: 6-15, cf., Dan 9: 4-19), true repentance and the place of penitential rituals (Joel 2: 12-13). God made us to live in relationship with him but sin disrupted this kind of relationship. Sin makes us closed up ourselves before God but God never abandon us. He constantly enters into our history in order to save and reconcile us to himself. For this reason the Biblical catechesis is so crucial for our young people. They are to be made aware that in the Old Testament God is represented as a God of mercy who make frequent calls to conversion of heart and make a return to the covenant of love and holiness (G. V. Lobo, 1990).

New Testament: Christ's Teaching and Liturgical Catechesis

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1: 14-15). Jesus proclaims the merciful love of the Father and mediates divine pardon. Christ shades his blood for the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26: 28). Acts 2: 38 summarizes everything and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit brings inner transformation foretold by Prophet Ezekiel and gathers together the “Spirit filled community” which becomes the sign and means of reconciliation for its members and for the whole world. The mystery of reconciliation is so prominent in God's redemptive work in the world (Rite of Penance, Nos.1-2). This mystery gives focus to the Church's mission and ministry and it is the primary Sacramental experience of reconciliation. The mystery is powerfully present in the Church's reconciliation of penitents (Rite of Penance, Nos.3-7). In reconciliation God always take the initiative. A classic example of such is seen in Jesus who shows divine compassion by welcoming sinners and calls them to conversion. Through the Paschal Mystery Christ reconcile us back to his Father. The mystery of reconciliation is a divine initiative and human response cannot be separated (James Dallen, 1986). Therefore, the Church should become ever more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children and always be ready to celebrate reconciliation as a core invitation of Christ to carry out his mission on earth (International Theological Commission, 2000). Jesus' teaching about conversion and the kingdom cannot, then, be understood as a “call to interiorization” in a religious world which thought only in terms of legal prescriptions [using clearance cards to go for confession], cultic regulations and external observances. Nor can we think of Jesus' message as an “ethics of the

heart,” as opposed to a presumed Pharisaic “ethics of Law. All what Christ speaks about is a *metanoia*. It is about conversion – a change of heart so as to enjoy the salvation God has given to us out of his great love. St. Paul sees God’s “salvation and justification of humanity in terms of God’s reconciling activity. It is all God’s work. God reconciles us to himself through Christ and has given the Church this work and ministry of Reconciliation. In other words, the 2 Cor. 5: 18-19 says that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled(N. Mitchell, 1978).

The Place of the Word of God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Rite of Reconciliation for individual penitent says that, “through the Word of God the Christian receives light to recognize his sins and is called to conversion and to confidence in God’s mercy” (Rite of Penance, No.17). In the same line the Rite of Reconciliation for several penitents with individual confession and absolution indicates that the Sacrament of Reconciliation should begin with the Word of God because it is through it that the penitents are led to repentance and true conversion (Rite of Penance, No.24). They all highlight the place of the Word of God in our journey to conversion. The Word of God helps us recall the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection are the pinnacle of the revelation of the divine mercy. It is out of love that Christ offers himself to the Father for the redemption of sinful humanity: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15: 13). In celebrating reconciliation we need to give the Word of God a proper place. The Word of God during the celebration is so prominent that it helps the penitent in the process of examination of conscience before actual confession (R. R. Barr, 1998). However, with the rite of individual confession and absolution the Word of God seems to have no place as many confessors would say because of time and the number of penitents they have to skip it.

The Word of God in Everyday Encounter

The passage of the Scripture during the celebration remains in the heart of every penitent. Their daily encounter of life will always have a bearing from the Gospel values which they have heard. Therefore, in celebrating reconciliation at least a passage from the Scripture is necessary. If we do not enrich them in their longing for the Word of God for their lives, then our catechesis has missed the direction.

Liturgical Catechesis and Anthropological Foundations

We have raised in chapter two relativism, consumerism, secularism caused by globalization as the problems that torn apart some of our traditional values and make our young people decline in the Christian calling to authentic life and encounter of God’s love in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There seems to be a great alienation of young people in our Parishes and even as adults to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This also owes to the fact that anthropology and culture in some cases are in isolation, hence the inability for the faithful to perceive the cultural and anthropological dimension of this Sacrament. In cultural anthropology there has been a serious crises linked to the reflexivity and

representation (R. J. Kennedy, 1998). We have seen many challenges and obstacles to the Sacrament of Reconciliation which may not be necessary to list here since the previous chapter dealt with it. Anthropology can be describe as a study relationships of human beings which in a way is a holistic, scientific and social study of human being by comparing the human culture, behavior and how they change in time. With these in mind the Church and its minister should be able to understand and underline the changes among young people with the signs of time. Without a solid foundation in knowing the people and the changes around them it is difficult to catechize. Instead of complaining of certain behaviours of our young people in the Church why can we start doing liturgical catechesis incorporating those cultural elements that can help them appreciate the Gospel? Liturgical catechesis is the preferred mode of Catholic catechesis, but this is a mystery to many Parish ministers. Pastors need to be on board to make it work. With introducing Liturgical Catechesis, a parish leader can immerse the entire pastoral team over several sessions in both the concepts and the methods of liturgical catechesis. In this process religious instruction and catechesis requires an underlying anthropology which will permit us to get closer to supernatural realities without falling into empty wordiness. The big task of contemporary catechetics in many Dioceses will be to work out a presentation of the faith which will bring the young people closer to God and closer to the historical reality of their life (R. Echarren, 1970).

Facing the Anthropological Crises

What we have seen in the last chapter regarding the challenges to the Sacrament of Reconciliation have both Ecclesial and secular factors. These secular factors are the anthropological crises which have resulted in ecclesial factors. It is important to note that if one is not sound with the very basics of human maturation it is even more difficult to affirm that one has mature in his or her faith. Looking back at those lists of challenges it is only through liturgical catechesis that can help bring about change and attitudes toward this very Sacrament. We thank God and all those agents of the gospel who have done so much in the Diocese with regard to evangelization. I therefore propose that coupled with evangelization there should be a liturgical catechesis. Every human being has to mature in a lifelong process of growth. This process inevitably implies a number of crises which demand that he or she constantly start afresh. Growth in the faith is not exceptional. Therefore, it is important for those in charge of catechesis of the young people in our parishes to understand the natural pre-conditions of the faith and to take them seriously. For example, if a young person has little experience of not being trusted, then he or she will not be able to bring himself or herself to trust and believe the encounter and experience they have in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (R. Echarren, 1970).

Liturgical Catechesis towards the Challenges of Reconciliation

I have personal experience of seeing so many young people on Sunday Masses. That is encouraging that a good number of them turn up for Mass and in fact, they take great part in the singing, readings and during offertory. I also observed on the other side to see how many do go for confession. They are very few. Our sinful

humanity invents false image of God and this is exactly our experiences when we sin. We create many images around ourselves and hide within ourselves to which our interior self is hunting us. The basic issue in our time is the rationalization mentality. In everything the human being wants to rationalize and justifying even unjustifiable facts. This itself blocks the docility of one's heart and mind to God in his or her discernment. Sin brings fear and separation. Simon Peter said, "Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man" (cf., Lk 5: 8). We always fear when we discover that, God has entered into our inner life. Sin and holiness do not mix. Because of sin Judas went 'into the night.' He separated himself from the rest (cf., Jn 13: 21-30). In the liturgical catechesis it should be underlined that the celebration of reconciliation for instance, has nothing to do with the morality of the minister but works towards removal of fear and lack of confidence. In fact, liturgical catechesis if properly done will give the young people confidence within themselves as well as their pastors.

Formation of the Young from their Root

In the previous chapter we raised a question, if the present Rite will transform the Sacrament or the faithful. In whatever transformation that may be there is need for formation of the young people from their root. Very often at this time the pre-adolescent, in receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, formally concludes the process of Christian initiation but from that moment virtually abandons completely the practice of the faith. This is a matter of serious concern which requires specific pastoral care, based on the formative resources of the journey of initiation itself. Youth liturgical catechesis must be profoundly revised and revitalized through the youth ministry (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 181). In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. Genuine catechists know that catechesis "takes flesh" in the various cultures and milieux: one has only to think of the people with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 53). Liturgical catechesis is not teaching people how to behave or act at liturgy but to encourage and to enable transformation. This is the primary goal (C. Dooley, 2004). If decline in penance is due to a lost in the sense of God and of sin, then some concern may be appropriate. But the fact that few young people go to confession does not necessarily imply a loss of reverence for God or for the things of God. If it is any comfort, history tells us that other eras were much worse off than we. From about the fourth to ninth centuries, the Sacrament of Penance was usually postponed to the death bed. Hence, we have the task of forming our young people from what they know and have already. They are very much aware of traditional implications of reconciliation as well as the Church. Liturgical catechesis comes in proper in the formation of the youth (N. Mitchell, 1978).

Pastoral Liturgical Catechesis

We have somehow or briefly spoken about celebrating the Rites in the context of which we saw that the first form is commonly used. In a pastoral context there is need for liturgical catechesis. "Liturgical catechesis must always be based on the actualization of the mystery commemorated and celebrated. It must insist incessantly on the fact that to celebrate a mystery is not to celebrate a past but rather a "today" for a tomorrow" (A. Nocent, 1977). From the pastoral point of view it is in the coherent unity of the celebration that liturgical catechesis encounters its major difficulty and where we sometimes find profound disagreement between the liturgical guidelines and the pastors responsible for imbuing the mentality and current lives of the young faithful with its riches (A. Nocent, 1977). All liturgical catechesis or religious instruction aims at promoting and nourishing the life of faith. However, there are complexities of faith which is not adequately expressed among the people in many Dioceses. It is because conversion has not taken root after many years of Christianity? Or people are so much into theology that does not have a bearing in the lived religious experience? Liturgical catechesis aims at introducing the faithful and especially the young people to an encounter with the presence. Living a reconciled life is a life of conversion. It is life of total wholeness in the Lord. It is a life of faith (R. Echarren, 1970). Therefore, as we preach for many to attend Mass we should not lose sight of liturgical catechesis within the pastoral plans of the Parishes.

Reconciliation in the Pastoral Context

The biblical foundation of sin, conversion and repentance among the Hebrews is a clear indication of the use of the word within its context. The history of the Israelites shows their infidelity to Yahweh. And therefore they needed reconciliation often. In many Dioceses many people know too well that sin is a denial and a refusal of God's love and a rejection of the covenant thus, they go to confession each time the Parish Priests announces there will be confessions. It is important to note with the understanding of liturgical catechesis to make the celebration more an experience and encounter of a loving Father. Toinette M. Eugene began his article by asking a very relevant question; does reconciliation have a future? We too can readdress this question to ourselves and in our parishes. Does reconciliation have a future in our parishes? (R. J. Kennedy, 1998). For the sustainability of this Sacrament it is of great importance that each celebration is accompanied by a sound and well prepared penitential services.

Relationship between Liturgy and People's Life

"The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a parable of this reign or kingdom of God. Far from being an occasion of private surgery where sins are aborted in secret, reconciliation publicly announces the central paradox of Christian faith: the fact that the words "God," "love" and "sinner" must be put together in the same sentence" (N. Mitchell, 1978). Liturgical catechesis should help the young people to understand the relationship between what they celebrate in liturgy. "Every liturgical celebration is an action of Christ the priest and of his Body the Church. It

is a sacred action surpassing all others and no other action of the Church can match its claim to efficacy, nor equal the degree of it”(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 7). And the more mature a Christian community becomes in faith, the more it lives its worship in spirit and in truth (cf. Jn 4, 23) in its liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist. Therefore, catechesis must promote an active, conscious, genuine participation in the liturgy of the Church, not merely by explaining the meaning of the ceremonies, but also by forming the minds of the faithful for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for a community spirit, and for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds(*General Directory for Catechesis*, No. 25).Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and Sacramental activity, for it is in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the transformation of human beings. On the other hand, the catechesis that prepares for the Sacraments is an eminent kind, and every form of catechesis necessarily leads to the Sacraments of faith. On the other hand, authentic practice of the Sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, Sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the Sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in Sacramental practice (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 30).

Encountering God in Daily Life Experience

When we look carefully at the Gospel of John 9: 2, we realize that sin is seen as a disorder and where our human consciousness of sin begins. For many, this man born blind is considered as a defilement whose physical challenge is thought to be moral failures. “The experience of sin as a subjective event, an event in which we discover ourselves culpable, might be described as the failure to accept responsibility for our own humanness.” Nowadays the symbolism of sin has shifted from the language of “stain” and “uncleanness” to “turning away” from God.In the experience of sin we are very familiar with the categories of mortal and venial sin. However, these categories remain vague in many minds of the young people today. As mature Christian we can understand their distinction only if there is a proper liturgical catechesis but then if one operates only out of categories the end result may be self-centred morality (T. Guzie and J. Mcilhon, 1979).The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI in his homily on 29th March 2007 when he presided at a penitential celebration with thousands of young people from the Diocese of Rome said that Christians cannot live without love and if they do not find true love they cannot even call themselves fully Christian because ... “being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Benedict XVI, 2007). Encountering God’s love and forgiveness (cf., Jn 3: 16) in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a daily experience (G. A. Maloney, 1924).

In the Old Testament God constantly showed mercy and compassion to his people. In times when the Israelites went astray he sent his prophets to talk to them and gave them sense of direction. In the fullness of time he sends his Son to come and reconcile us to himself. In the earthly ministry of Christ we have seen his mission

to the weak, the sick and the sinners (Lk 5: 31-32). All what Jesus did to the sinners was to say “welcome,” “your sins are forgiven”. Hence, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation we only encounter the forgiving God (J. Arnold, 1993). Encountering God’s love and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation consists in *metanoia* – a change of inner attitudes. This reconciliation is not obtaining a declaration that we are acquitted from the court but asking God to be received back into his house. The story of the prodigal son elaborates this point very clear. The return of this son re-establishes the loving relationship with his Father (G. V. Lobo, 1990). The encounter of Jesus and his disciples after his resurrection was a personal encounter (cf., Jn 20: 22). “Peace be with you” is Jesus’ greeting to his disciples. Peace is a divine gift won by Christ with his victory on the cross. As the fruit of love, peace is dispensed to us personally as a special fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5: 22) through the Sacramental channel of reconciliation. Peace comes when we realize that now we have been restored to wholeness – which our relationship with God is once again made well (D. E. Rosage, 1984). Reconciliation is an encounter between the penitent and God. It is an encounter of love where God’s action remains always and ever ready to welcome the penitent to a share in the compassionate love – the Christ.

The Sacrament of Penance and its Parts

The Church’s ministry of reconciliation is meant to extend the reconciling work of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in time and culture, until God is “all in all” (1 Cor 15: 28). Every Parish must therefore continue the work of making the processes of initiation the foundation of ecclesial life. The season of Lent needs to be restored as time of Baptismal and Post-baptismal Reconciliation without any string attachment to paying dues in the Church. It is the Church’s time for learning again the ways of peace, conversion and for committing ourselves to the mission of God’s kingdom and not our own (R. J. Kennedy, 1987).

The Rite of Penance gives four parts of confession and they are as follows:

1. **Contrition:** A sincere examination of conscience brings a person face to face with the many weaknesses of his soul. Hence, he only says, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). To get back into God’s favour by confession, the sinner must sincerely repent of his wrongdoing. He must be truly sorry from a supernatural motive and detest his sins with his whole heart, firmly resolving not to commit them again. Without this sorrow or contrition, there can be no pardon for sin. The priest has no power to absolve a sinner who does not have true contrition (The Rite of Penance, No. 6).
2. **Confession of Sins:** Confession is the “declaration of personal decisions and circumstances within the confines of a community. Those who approach the Sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offence committed against him, and are at the same time reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and work by charity by example and by prayer labours for their conversion. The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls confession the Sacrament of second baptism (The Rite of Penance, No. 6).

3. Act of Penance: The penitent must make known to the minister the exact state of his soul. To gain this self-knowledge, it is necessary for the penitent to search seriously into his or her life since the time of his last Confession, reflecting his thoughts, words and deeds so that the minister may give the actual penance (The Rite of Penance, No. 6).
4. Absolution: Through the sign of absolution God grants pardon to the penitent who manifests a change of heart. The prayer of absolution is so enriching if we pay attention to the wordings. Unfortunately many pastors have resolved to use the shorter form. The reason being that when you have many penitents it takes time. But when the penitents are few what happen?(The Rite of Penance, No. 6).

A good Confession opens anew the portals of Heaven. It clothes souls with the beautiful nuptial garment of Sanctifying Grace. It restores past merits, which are lost by even a single mortal sin. It renders the soul capable again of performing acts meritorious of an eternal reward. It confers Sacramental graces. Hence, to partake in fullest measure of these blessings of the Sacrament of Penance, it is necessary for the penitent to know how to make a good Confession.

Liturgical Catechesis on the Rite of Reconciliation

The Words used in Celebrating Reconciliation

The Praenotanda underlines the words use especially the words of absolution. And in chapter two we spoke about the power of the word. These are very important because the “words expressing the manifold content of mercy in all languages are many: compassion, pity, clemency, charity, forgiveness, indulgence, benevolence, benignity, meekness” (R. R. Barr, 1998). The task, therefore, of liturgical catechesis today should not be simply making use of modern means of expression but should also take the inductive path which lead the young people from the visible to the invisible, from the aspirations found in the signs and symbols to the aspirations which lead them to an encounter and experience of God (R. Echarren, 1970). Therefore, word used must be sound, clear and orthodox.

The Role of the Minister of Reconciliation

The Rite of Penance says that the Church exercises the ministry of the Sacrament of Reconciliation through the Bishops and priests(The Rite of Penance, No. 9). The minister of Reconciliation is also known as the confessor. In fact, in the past there has been some polarity whether the minister in the strict sense,

... should maintain a careful psychological distance ... keeping his own emotions and affections carefully out of the relationship with penitents so as to ensure that the Sacrament is as fully as possible the action of Christ and not of another, and so as to encourage the penitent to relate directly to Christ and not of another. This option would seem to be the logical one if the role of confessor is seen primarily as a judicial role and the Church in

whose name he speaks and acts primarily or exclusively as institution. The other possibility is that the confessor should precisely make it his business to be and to act as a friend of his penitents, to get his emotions involved in the relationships, cultivating affection for them and winning their affection for him. This option would seem to be the better one if sacramentality is understood ... in terms of the charity and life of the whole Church as the mediation of the grace of Christ and therefore as the matrix within which particular Sacramental celebrations take on their meaning(M. K. Hellwig, 1982).

Following this the Rite of Penance says that “By receiving the repentant sinner and leading him to the light of the truth the confessor fulfills a paternal function: he reveals the heart of the Father and shows the image of Christ the Good shepherd” (N. Mitchell, 1978). “The Confessor is the penitent’s expectation of Christ. The good Confessor is the one who lives up to that expectation – patient, compassionate, merciful teacher, guide, encourager... Christ was a man people came to with their burdens ... He was a man people came to and he heard them all and he didn’t shout at them and they were glad they came” (T. Waldron, 1994). The Rite mentions various pastoral abilities that are needed by the minister of reconciliation so that he fulfills his ministry properly and faithfully. Hence, the minister should understand the disorders of the souls of many young people and apply the appropriate remedies to them. He should fulfill this ministry wisely by acquiring knowledge and prudence which are necessary through serious study and updates which are guided by the teaching of the Church (The Rite of Penance, Nos. 13-14). The minister though concerned with the sins of his penitent as he listens should not overlook the penitent’s grace experience. In this way he can give the penitent a positive approach to Christian conversion. Thus, the celebration of reconciliation can be clearly seen as a celebration of grace and not a depression over sin (N. Mitchell, 1978). The Rite of Penance in its introduction suggests the friendly nature of relationship between the penitent and the confessor which is very much highlighted in welcoming the penitent with fraternal charity and if occasion permits address them in a friendly manner (The Rite of Penance, No. 16).

In Persona Christi and Persona Ecclesiae

It is important to note that pastors of reconciliation should strive to be a friend to the penitent and let them be loved as persons and not just possessors of Sacramental power. They are ministers of conversion as they administer the Sacrament in the name of Christ and the Church and by the power of the Holy Spirit they ‘bear witness to the remission of sins and impart it’ (J. D. Crichton, 1993). The Rite of Penance states that reconciliation is worship (The Rite of Penance, Nos. 4, 7, 11). The major obstacle here to full implementation of the Rite of Penance is our inability to see Reconciliation as the activity of the Spirit-filled community acting as the presence of Jesus’ saving mystery. Priests and penitents together should share and celebrate the liturgy by which the Church itself seeks and receives renewal in the Spirit of Jesus(The Rite of Penance, Nos. 11).It implies that if celebrating reconciliation is liturgy and the community engage themselves

in ritual prayers then the focus must be God who takes always initiative of showing mercy to his people. Hence, reconciliation for the young people must be seen as a proclamation of the Church's faith in God with a heart full of gratitude and thankfulness for the gift of forgiveness (James Dallen, 1986).

The Confessor as the Wounded Healer

In John chapter 20: 24-29 we hear the story of Thomas who doubted. Thomas is brought to faith in a reconciling act on Jesus' part. He does not upbraid Thomas for his lack of faith, something he surely had a right to. Instead, he invites Thomas to touch his wounds, to see for himself that this is truly Jesus standing before him. By walking with those who have been hurt, we need to come to know their stories so that we are able to enter into their worlds as fully as possible (R. J. Schreiter, 1998). George Weigel says that priests should minister to others out of their own experiences of struggle in living the fullness of Catholic faith. According to him when "wounded healer" becomes the center of priest's identity, the danger could be his moving away in his self-understanding that which can lead to further intellectual, spiritual, and behavioural self-deception. Hence, the "wounded healer" who thinks of himself primarily in these terms would definitely give himself endless tacit permission slips and may end up wounding others (G. Weigel, 2002). There are those who are supportive of this wounded healer syndrome.

The Penitents in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Modern young people come to the minister of Reconciliation with hope of receiving the life-giving word which will remove their doubt and help them to overcome evil (N. Mitchell, 1978). Who is the penitent? The penitent is called to dispose his or herself to God's loving mercy and confesses his or her sins (The Rite of Penance, No. 11). The penitent is a "human being affected by Calvary. This is someone sent here by God. This is someone who at this moment is where God wants him or her to be. This is someone who is sorry for sin, and who wants to be free of it. This is someone who wants, feebly or desperately or somewhere in between, to be a new creation. So this is someone whose life at this moment is a meeting place for God's hopes and desires and human hopes and desires" (T. Waldron, 1994).

The Role of the Christian Community

We have spoken about the offices of confession where the *Praenotanda* underlines the community in the celebration of Penance as the whole Church, priestly people that acts in different ways in the work of reconciliation which has been entrusted to it by the Lord (The Rite of Penance, No. 8). We have also known the effects of reconciliation in our context as bringing communion, peace and harmony in the community. The Christian community therefore, feels the need to correct sinners and not fault-findings but a gift of charity (1 Thes 3: 12-13; 1 Cor 8: 11-12; 1 Thes 5: 11-12; Heb 3: 13-14, 10: 25). The Gospels (Mk 2: 5-12; Mt 18: 15-18; Jn 20: 19-23) link forgiveness of sin to healing; Reconciliation is an integral part of the healing (Js 5: 16); Jesus' promise of the power of binding and loosing (G. V. Lobo, 1990 and International Theological Commission, 2000). In all these we see the

community play a great role in the confessions of sins and requests for forgiveness. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Church as priestly people who act in various ways in the work of Reconciliation which have been entrusted to it by the Lord (The Rite of Penance, No. 8).

“Sin in human life is manifested in the inability to escape alienation in denial of the victory of Christ over sin. The Church, correspondingly, is the privileged place where alienation is overcome by experiencing the victory of Christ in community ... To gather validly and authentically at the community’s table means an acceptance of the life of the community. That acceptance is not merely a passive consent; it is an active involvement in the common life of apostles and witnesses who recognize the risen Lord in the breaking of the bread ... Valid and authentic gathering at the table, then, is the goal of any process of reconciliation taken up by the Church” (J. Lopresti in K. Hughes and J. A. Favazza, 1977).

Therefore, “Sin is a spreading sickness of the spirit and demands prompt healing. To deal with it, we need a passion for communion ... so great that we will not fear the painful work of reconciliation” (E. Hay in K. Hughes and J. A. Favazza, 1977). Pope Benedict XVI on one of the Sunday’s Gospel passage about the healing of the ten lepers says that the illness that truly disfigures the person and society is sin, and that only God can heal this infirmity. Jesus uses the expression, ‘your faith has saved you.’ Faith saves the human person and re-establishes in them the profound relationship with God, with himself, and with others. Faith involves, then, the openness of the person to the grace of the Lord to recognize that all is gift, and that all is grace (Benedict XVI, 2007). It is not sin which is at the heart of the sacramental celebration but rather the mercy of God. This was the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI that it is necessary to assist those who confess to experience that divine tenderness to repentant sinners. The Pope continues to say that what counts most is to make people understand that in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, whatever sin is committed, if it is humbly recognized and the person involved turns with trust to the priest-confessor, he or she never fails to experience the soothing joy of God’s forgiveness (Benedict XVI, 2008).

The testimony of the Fathers of the Church is very clear on this. Tertullian would tell the penitent that the prayer of the Church is the prayer of Christ himself. St. Ambrose says that whenever the entire church prays and weeps, it does so with the penitent, thereby underlining the water and tears for the forgiveness of sins. The water is the water of baptism while the tears are the tears of penance. St. Augustine on his part points out the community’s power of intercession contributed by both the minister and the people to the process of reconciliation. St. Leo the Great remarks that the most complete pardon is obtained when the whole Church as one prays for the penitent. In concrete terms what he meant is the community that assembled. In all these the people’s role may now be seen in what is called, the “formula of absolution.” Prayer of absolution is single prayer today but for many years they were simply collects and prayers of petition to God to forgive sinners. Today the whole church is praying through the mouth of the priest (N. Mitchell,

1978). “The sacrament of penance is given to us to build up the community to better reflect the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Penance does not “work like magic.” We do not run to confession to be forgiven by God and forget about those we have harmed, but rather, we seek forgiveness from the people we have harmed, and then, after realizing that this is also an offense against God, we seek God’s forgiveness through the Church community” (M. Gallagher 2009).

Penitential Services before Confession

In many Diocesan context people don’t just jump into reconciliation without a time frame to prepare oneself for it. Otherwise, such reconciliation will only be considered as lip service. Therefore, there is reason and richness in Penitential Services before Confession. It is to foster the spirit of penance, help the faithful prepare for confession and to help the young people to gradually form the conscience about sin (The Rite of Penance, No. 37). Liturgical seasons emphasize particular commemoration of the Christ’s Paschal events. The Scriptures help us reflect and recreate the suitable moods that give expression to these seasons. It is important that the mood emerge from and be expressive of the participating community (W. J. Koplik and Joan Brady, 1981). The liturgical year and seasons are proper occasions we can prepare the penitential services for our young people. For instance, penitential service can be designed for Advent (waiting for the coming of the Lord), Christmas (Emmanuel – God with us), Lenten penitential service at the beginning of Lent could mean a lot to our young people. The symbolism of the ashes and light reminds us to return to our creator (W. J. Koplik and Joan Brady, 1981). Holy Week is yet another grace-filled opportunity to invite our young people to penitential service (The Rite of Penance, No. 13). Penitential service for Pentecost is a wonderful opportunity we can offer to our young people to experience the grace of the spirit. In many Parishes the Pentecost vigil is remarkable, full of expectation and experience of the gifts of the spirit of God. This is another night of encountering God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The experience of a forgiving God who is full of compassion and love did not look upon our weakness and sinfulness sent the Holy Spirit to be our advocate and guide. This same Spirit is in us and always leads us to reconcile with God through his Son Jesus Christ. This kind of Vigil is a night of renewal (W. J. Koplik and Joan Brady, 1981). Similarly, penitential service can also be organized for other solemnities of the Church. The Rite of Penance gives so many alternatives; hence, it is good that we briefly give an outline of how such penitential service may look like.

1. Introduction (Song, greetings and opening collect)
2. Liturgy of the Word (Psalm and Response)
3. Homily
4. Moment of Silence and Examination of Conscience
5. Litany may be said together
6. Individual confessions and Absolution
7. Thanksgiving in praise of God
8. Dismissal.

Penitential service does not require that the parish priest has to do everything. He should be behind such initiatives but it is acceptable that he invites priests from nearby parishes and religious congregations for these services. The young people appreciate this.

Liturgical Catechesis and the Sacramental Environment

The norm of active participation concerning the place of Reconciliation is fleshed out in two documents: (1) the “Order of the Blessing of a new Confessional,” which is found in the *Book of Blessings*, and (2) *The Rite of Penance*. The introduction of the “Order of Blessing of a New Confessional” states that “the practice of reserving a special place in churches for the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation is a clear expression of the truth that sacramental confession and absolution constitute a liturgical action which involves the entire body of the Church and is intended to renew the participation of the faithful in the Church’s offering of the sacrifice of Christ (M. G. Boyer, 1990).

Sacrament of Reconciliation in its proper celebration gives ample opportunity for all who are engaged in the ministry to shape the creative environment within which receptive dispositions enhance the operative grace of the Sacrament (W. J. Koplik and Joan Brady, 1981). Here we talk about suitable Liturgical Space. The Church or oratory is a suitable place for sacred celebrations and for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (The Rite of Penance, Nos. 12). Its symbolism of Church stands out very clear as the heavenly home. However, we should not close ourselves up in the confessional boxes. Young people may be hindered by the dark confessionals. As at time I am writing this work many young people prefer open space as long as there is a priest while others will still prefer the secrecy of the confessional box. In fact, we need to have confessional rooms where all the symbols of Reconciliation (candles, crucifix, the Holy Bible and the Stole) are in place. Otherwise, during days of penitential service provisions should also be made that priests are available at different positions within the Church vicinity for the Sacrament of Confession rather than waiting for that one or two confessionals inside the Church.

Signs and Symbols of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has the following symbols (a copy of the Bible, the Cross, the Candle and extension of hands over the penitent. The symbol used in the Sacrament of Reconciliation has to be a living symbol, an effective symbol that conceal but also reveal and offer the divine realities and explanation. The Sacramental life of the Church reflects symbols of the divinity touching humanity. “Reverence of symbols and of the realities they represent is basic to religious tradition, but religious symbols can be so easily overlooked in a culture dominated by practicality and efficiency” (D. C. Smolarski, 2002). The Sacraments ritualize the concrete and the community’s experience of living out the Gospel values through a continuous proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In a sense, the

Sacrament of Penance is the way the church solidifies its work of forgiving and reconciling, and building the community. Hence, the Sacrament of Penance embodies what the Church is and is becoming. All rituals help people express who they presently are and who they seek to become. The Sacrament reveals the extraordinary in the ordinary. By extension of hands over the penitent at the prayer of absolution it is the comforting hand of the Church over her children. It is the invocation of the Holy Spirit over the penitent for God's grace and strength in his or her journey toward conversion. Sacraments keep alive the mystery of faith and the rituals help the young people to express their thoughts and experiences (J. Stoutzenberger, 1993).

Everyday living out what we celebrate

In living out what we celebrate Reconciliation becomes spirituality. It is important that we focus on the Paschal Mystery of Christ in order to understand the spiritual dimension of Reconciliation. Reconciliation is spirituality because it has to do with rebuilding shattered lives so that social reconciliation becomes a reality. To be reconciled is all about an experience which becomes the key to a new way of living and how that can affect the other members of the community (R. J. Schreiter, 1998). It is about the love of God poured out upon us to become new creation new person in Christ. This kind of emphasis on God's initiative may lead many to assume a position that we have nothing to do in the reconciliation process. The communion between human and divine involve divine initiative coming through human action (R. J. Schreiter, 1998).

Adaptation and Inculturation

In chapter one of this thesis, the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy says that the Rite and formulas of Penance are to be revised in such a way that they may more clearly express the nature and effects of this Sacrament (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, No. 72). The Rite of Penance says that "in preparing a particular rite the conferences of Bishops may adapt the rite of penance to the needs of individual regions so that after confirmation by the Apostolic See the rituals may be used in the respective regions" (The Rite of Penance, No. 38) and it lies within the competent ecclesial authority. Adaptation and inculturation is a constant challenge to the Church today. The Church continues to speak of the constant need for adaptation and inculturation. How much ever the Church continues to speak it also requires from the same Church a "fundamental attitude of openness to the needs of the world and the mentality of contemporary man especially the young people (C. Brusselmans, 1970). Recent development in most of our parishes in the Diocese shows that catechesis is for the adult converts. On the other side the young people seems to be left hanging. Their days of catechism were a kind of "sacramentalization" rather than for an initiation into a progressive maturity in living one's faith meaningfully and dynamically (C. Brusselmans, 1970). For these reason there is no much of catechesis in schools since the return of mission schools to government (My Primary and Secondary School Experience). "One of the greatest challenges in catechesis is to go beyond simply knowing the creed and the doctrine of the Church to knowing how to open up the Church's treasures so that

they speak to modern people” (M. Gallagher, 1998). The understanding of Jesus as God in the flesh underlines the belief that Jesus is the fullest – the most complete Sacrament of God to the world. The goal of liturgical catechesis and education is to bring about a meeting (an encounter) between two people, the believer and the living God. The element that seems to have been lost or overlooked in the catechetical formation is that of encounter (M. Michels, 1965). “The Sacrament of Penance cannot be renewed except in the broader context of community renewal” (N. Mitchell, 1978).

Conclusion

Our catechesis need to re-echo again in the hearts, minds and eyes of our young people Christ’s event, from his birth to his resurrection. The Paschal Mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection is the pinnacle of the revelation of the divine mercy. It is out of love that God sent his Son into the world. It is out of love that Christ offers himself to his Father for the redemption of our sinful humanity (R. R. Barr, 1998). It is out of love the risen Christ bestows the Holy Spirit on his Church: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20: 22-23). The significant fact of the Sacrament of Reconciliation today and much ever is the need for the weak, the sinner and the broken hearted to be strengthened, healed of their sin so that true reconciliation can take place with God and with neighbours (M. Pennock, 1981). Good things don’t just happen. For any eventualities to be avoided liturgy must be planned to enable that active, full and conscious participation of the faithful in our parishes. Planning a liturgy demands a serious commitment whereby we don’t just reduce a truly meaningful liturgical experience to a series of mechanical components. Planning a liturgy is many people working together to provide their community with the best possible liturgical experience. It is giving focus to a liturgy. It is coordinating all the elements of a given liturgy – reading, prayers, homily, music and etc (J. P. Mossi, 1976).

The Church should move from just levels of gratitude and appreciation in the books to the level of action to preserve those youthful desires. Jesus puts himself in their place and considers as done to him what is done to them: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you do for one of these least brothers of mine you do for me” (Mt 25:40). We are all called to minister to all state of life thereby working for the coming of the kingdom of God according to the diversity of callings and situations, charisms and ministries (*Christifideles Laici*, No. 45). “*The life and ministry of the priest must also adapt to every era and circumstance of life*” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, No. 5). People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching and in life and action than in theories (*Redemptoris Missio*, No. 42 and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 41). The Church,

... must be recognized, moreover, that today’s young people, with the vigour and vitality typical of their age, are also bearers of ideals: the thirst for freedom, the recognition of the inestimable value of the person, the

need for authenticity and sincerity, ... a convinced and earnest seeking after a more just, sympathetic and united world, openness and dialogue with all, and the commitment to peace (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, No. 9).

In all these there is a principle which guides and animates the true shepherd. That is, the pastoral charity. This is the gift of oneself. It is a total self-giving to the Church following Christ's example of self-giving and service (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, No. 23). Pope John Paul II once said, "I have come to this land as a pilgrim pastor, a servant of Jesus Christ. I have come to proclaim Christ's Gospel of peace and reconciliation; I have come to celebrate his saving action in the Sacraments of the Church. I have come to call you to Christ" (John Paul II, 1982). We are called to stimulate creativity and initiatives in our young people with required vigilance and help spread among the communities the joy of bringing the mystery of Christ to the world (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 4). We need to develop a liturgical catechesis that touches life experience (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 22, 27) with an experience of Jesus in the Sacraments (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 23, 28) and brings about communion in the Christian community (*Catechesi Tradendae*, No. 24, 29). Liturgical Catechesis is called to be the fertile field for the renewal of all the ecclesial community hence it must illustrate the positive values as it leads the young people to full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy and also to maturity in faith. It must bring into play the first vocation to love (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1983).

Liturgical catechesis is not just a history or a theory to be taught and kept in the libraries. They are to be experienced. Liturgical catechesis is rooted in the Scripture, Tradition, and Church teaching, and is nourished by prayer. The challenge is now to take into the parish community a vision and ministry of liturgical catechesis built on the good practice (L. Kelly, 2000). The young people and, I suppose the elderly faithful ones too would need a catechesis that inspires not the intellectual assimilation of faith, but that which touches the heart and transforms their Christian life and conduct. Liturgical catechesis will therefore bridge all the gaps that give more reasons to young people not frequenting the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It will bring forth the Christian message, good cultural values and above all the fruits of true holiness (General Directory for Catechesis, No. 205). Liturgical catechesis on the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not rehearsing the candidates or penitents through the details of the ceremony or a prerequisite for reception of Holy Communion but it is the opening up of the young people for an encounter that is not yet to come but that which is present already (A. G. Vasrga, 1993). Hence, we will all together arrive at *Lex Vivendi. Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi* as the "law of worship is the law of belief" is a reliable maxim (J. A. Coriden, 1997). Many of the faithful believe and they also know how to pray but what is lacking especially among young people is how to live. Therefore, liturgical catechesis is getting in touch with our own faith experience (CCC No.5). In celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation our aim must always be to provide direction for the young people as they grow toward maturity in their life and in their Christian faith (H. Hall and et al., 1975).

The liturgy is the strongest catechetical tool we should have in the parish. Our challenge as a religious educator is to learn how to take full advantage of it so that the young people as well as the adults and children experience vibrant liturgical and catechetical experiences. Hence, the first step in creating a liturgical catechesis process is to get the right textbook. The right textbook for this process is the liturgy (which includes Sunday Mass, seasonal celebrations and Sacramental celebrations). This is because the Church “in its liturgical year unfolds the whole Mystery of Christ from his Incarnation and Nativity through his Ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord”(Sacrosanctum Concilium, No. 102 § 2). It is also important to understand the ways in which catechesis can enhance the experience of the liturgy so that the whole Mystery of Christ can be more effectively revealed. Liturgical catechesis can first of all prepare the young people to celebrate the liturgy. And by helping them learn the prayers, gestures of the liturgy, some basic meanings of the rituals and symbols, we will be helping the members of our Christian community to enter more fully into the liturgical celebration. The second way in which catechesis interacts with the liturgy is mystagogical. It is mystagogical in sense that it reveals the mysteries. It is catechesis that usually happens after a liturgical celebration, and it is a reflection on the liturgical experience. Here the focus is on helping our young people to go back over the experience in their minds and come to some insight about what they have celebrated. The challenge is to prepare for the catechetical session in a way that leaves the outcome open to the Spirit (N. Wagner, 2009).

The critics of liturgical catechesis seem to fear that if we center our catechesis on the liturgy we will be leaving out a lot of essential information and doctrines. If liturgical catechesis is done properly over the three circle of liturgical year the experience of God becomes enriching because all the elements of our faith is now part of our catechesis. One of the advantages of liturgical catechesis is that it is “spiral” rather than “linear.” That means someone is not exposed to a doctrine or practice only once but rather, the teachings and practices of the church are interwoven in a repeating cycle throughout each liturgical year. Since liturgical catechesis is not linear, it has no beginning or ending point and no “graduation” from liturgical catechesis but it is a life-long process. The mystery of Christ continues unfold as participants celebrate the liturgical cycle over and over throughout their life time. None of this happens automatically, of course. It requires a careful, spirit-filled catechetical team that is willing to put in the preparation and prayer required to lead people deeper into the Paschal Mystery (N. Wagner, 2009). Lastly, it is important to draw curtain with the dimensions of the Sacrament of reconciliation.

a) Anthropological, Ecclesial and Christological Dimensions: The seven Sacraments are for us and if they are for us then the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not in exclusion. This is true because there is an aspect of personal involvement of the penitent in the celebration. We become involved in the Sacrament of Reconciliation when we feel sorry for our sins (contrition), confess them and do

penance. This sacrament also reveals to us our human condition by which Christ came to reconcile. It reflects that our humanity is restored in Christ. In this sacrament God's mercy comes through a mediation which is easily assimilated by us – which Christ became our mediator. The priest in this case is a mediator who acts in *Personae Christi*. It is important to underline that in the anthropological dimension the words, signs and symbols play a significant role in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The sacrament of reconciliation brings about the sense of belonging to the family of God – the Church. In it the principle of reconciling community is central. In the Christological dimension we can underline the fact that Christ's paschal mystery brings about the effectiveness of our celebration of the sacrament. Through this act he infuses God's breath in us that we may stand again to praise him with our full sonship in him. It is this paschal mystery which brings about reconciliation by which when we celebrate we make 'present' the living Lord.

b) Trinitarian and Pneumatological Dimensions: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit takes initiative to reveal himself as the merciful, compassionate and loving father. The Father takes initiative and the Son through his paschal mystery reconciles us to the Father while the Holy Spirit fills our hearts and strengthens us that the grace of reconciliation bears fruit. In this way we share in the inner life of the Trinity. When we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation it is the Holy Spirit that empowers us to live a reconciled life. It assists us our conversion.

c) Sacramental and Eschatological Dimensions: In the sacramental dimension the underlining point is the fidelity of God that by his presence he gives us his life in abundance hence, our covenant with him is re-established. Living out our sacramental reconciliation we are energized in our journey of faith, hope and love. Conversion is not just here and now. It is also about our life to come. In the sacrament of reconciliation we receive strength to lead a reconciled life.

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