

I have a friend who got married in early February. He and his wife had a great ceremony and a wonderful honeymoon. They got back on February 13. When he woke up on the 14th, he was surprised that his wife gave him a Valentine's gift. You see, he thought the honeymoon pretty much covered Valentine's Day, so he had decided not to get a gift for her. He soon learned this was a bad decision. Now he knows. She'll get something from him every year.

When we have an emotion in the heart, expressing that emotion makes it more real. You can think you have love for someone, but until you say it you may not really have it. You can think you're the best at your job, but until you show it, that may not be. You may think you're sorry, but until you apologize, you may not really mean it. You may think you've forgiven someone, but maybe you haven't until you've said so.

There is plenty of sin all around this gospel. The woman is guilty and the scribes and Pharisees are guilty as well. It's because they all acknowledge they are sinners that Jesus can forgive.

For many Catholics one of the highlights of the season of lent is celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation. In it the church lets us experience sorrow and forgiveness. In the Catholic Church, reconciliation is a sacrament. That means we meet Christ there as we meet him in the eucharist. Those who receive the eucharist actually receive the real presence of Christ. Those who celebrate the sacrament of marriage actually image the love of Christ. Those who are ordained share in the priestly ministry of Christ. And those who confess their sins actually experience the forgiveness of Christ. You can think you're sorry for your sins, but maybe you haven't said so; you may think God has forgiven you, but maybe you haven't heard it. By making reconciliation a sacrament, the church gives us an occasion to say what we mean and to hear what God means.

Lent is a season of forgiveness. It brings us to the resurrection of Christ, which promises salvation in spite of our sins. It invites us each year to put our past behind and to rise in the light of forgiveness. We are all sinners, and Christ forgives us all. A honeymoon doesn't take the place of Valentine's Day. Thinking you're sorry doesn't take the place of saying it. Let this lent be a time when we think about our sins, feel sorrow for them, and confess them to God in sacrament, so we can experience the reconciliation that Christ has won for us.