

## This Month's Liturgy; October 2021

### *Bless me Father for I have sinned.....*

During his recent visit to Slovakia, the pope referred to confession as 'the Sacrament of Joy' ... but I wonder how often we have experienced it as such? The gift of the sacraments are that we 'may have life and have it in abundance' (John 10:10) and so this is also true for the sacrament of reconciliation – it is not so much an occasion for us to be judged as an opportunity for us once again to experience the embrace of the Father. "One does not go to confession," the pope explained to the young people, "as chastised people who must humble themselves, but as children who run to receive the father's embrace. And the father lifts us up in every situation, He forgives our every sin. Hear this well: God always forgives! Do you understand? God always forgives!" One is not going to a judge to settle accounts, but "to Jesus who loves me and heals me".

On 18<sup>th</sup> of this month we keep the feast of Saint Luke, the gospel writer, and it is through his writing that we receive the uplifting story about the prodigal son ...or should it be the forgiving father or indeed the reluctant and slightly resentful elder brother? (**Luke 15:11-32**). The son realises that he has squandered the richness and the inheritance which has been given to him and so as he approaches his father, perhaps a little sheepishly, uncertain of the welcome he will receive, he attempts to express how he has come to terms in his own mind with his failures and the fact that the best he can expect is that he will be treated like one of the servants or the hired hands on the estate... '*Father I have sinned...*', words which many of us have been brought up to speak at the beginning of our approach to confession, '*Bless me father for I have sinned...*'

There is a danger that we place ourselves at the center of Confession – it is about what **I** have done or failed to do. Now we rightly make an examination of conscience to help us understand ourselves all the better... and yet the first thing which we must **Confess** - in the sense of underline or stress - is the desire and the mercy of the father who has brought about the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of us all to himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus and has extended that to us through time by the working of the Holy Spirit. It is what the priest prays as the words of absolution, the words of forgiveness each time we come to the sacrament;

*God the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and has sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins.*

"God rejoices in forgiving us, every time," continued Pope Francis, "When he raises us up, he believes in us as he did the first time. He does not get discouraged. We are the ones who are discouraged, he is not. He does not see sinners to label, but children to love. He does not see people who have erred, but beloved children; wounded, perhaps; and then he has even more compassion and tenderness. And every time we confess — never forget this — there is a celebration in heaven. May it be the same on earth!"

May the 'Father of Mercies' renew within us the desire to receive the forgiveness and fullness of life which this sacrament can bring to us.

Father Philip

