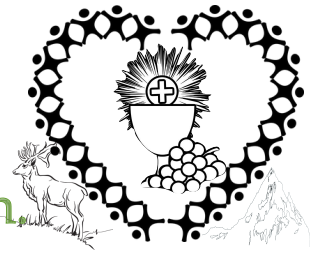


*Our Weekend Mass Schedule for the Elk Valley is:*

*Fernie on Saturday evening at 5pm,  
Sparwood at 9am Sunday morning,  
and Elkford at 4pm Sunday afternoon.*



*The Sunday Mass is broadcast via Zoom from Fernie & Sparwood (see below).*

22nd/23rd October 2022

**Dear All,**

The weekly e-mail is back... for just one week. This coming week I am doing various different things and I think that it is unlikely that I will have time to produce an e-mail for next weekend. So to make up for it, in this week's e-mail there are a lot of words, and many of them are quite long and complicated, like "metanoia" – okay, perhaps not that long, but certainly a bit complicated.

Attached at the end of this e-mail is a piece that I have written to give a bit of light to the Gospel reading this weekend and to fill out the issues on which I will be preaching. So if you are joining us at the weekend, either in person or on-line, please do try to have a little read of the attached before the Sunday Mass.

Weather wise, here in the Elk Valley we have had a wonderful few weeks, with warm sunny days. But I fear that this bright and mild period is drawing to a close and I am bracing myself for the first blast of winter.



During this lovely weather, as well as beautiful morning skies (*above*), Thumper and myself have managed to get out for some good runs... or at least, Thumper has run and I have peddled (*left*).

With prayers,

*Fr. David @ Thumper*

Our churches are open to those *without* any Covid symptoms.  
**But Covid is still a real threat – thus caution is needed!**



## Zoom Links – To Our Sunday Masses

### Link to Our Sunday Masses

To get the link to our two weekend Masses please send an e-mail to one of our parish offices with your name and you will then receive the link each week.

[info@holyfamilyfernie.ca](mailto:info@holyfamilyfernie.ca)

[ElkValleyRC@gmail.com](mailto:ElkValleyRC@gmail.com)

### Audio Only

*Don't forget, if you don't have the internet but have a phone you can still listen to Mass via a phone call to our Zoom link.*

*Again, e-mail the office for the link for this.*

### Chat:

*Feel free to greet people via the chat when you join our broadcast, and if you are praying for anything particular, do share this with others on the Chat.*

### Waiting Room:

*Please note when you log on you will be put in a "waiting room". Hopefully as soon as we see you waiting we will let you in. If there is a bit of a delay, please just wait; we will be with you as quickly as we can.*

### Those who are attending church in person, **be careful:**

**Covid is still about and some people still have vulnerabilities.**

Please continue to be careful and continue to sanitise your hands; wear a mask if you wish and always think of the good of others. As you move about in church you might come within a 'breath distance' of others, so please be conscious that others might have health vulnerabilities that you don't know about.

*Everyone still needs to be careful.*



## *Sin, Repentance and Metanoia*

*Many years ago I was visiting a middle aged couple, neither of whom were Catholic, and we were just chatting when the wife said, “Of course, you would say that we are living in sin because actually we never got married.” They were a lovely couple who were very good, kind and honest people. So I smiled and said, “When I was at university we used to say that something was only a sin if we enjoyed it!” To which the husband instantly chipped in and said, “Well. that’s alright then!”*

Many years ago a joke that we had in Britain revolved around an advert for ‘Unipart’, a company selling replacement car parts. Their advertising slogan was, “*The answer is yes. Now what’s the question?*” This was a few decades after the Second Vatican Council and Catholics were still exploring what was and what wasn’t allowed. So the joke was that if you went to the priest to ask a question you would be greeted with, “*The answer is no. Now what’s the question?*”



Obviously this was very negative and not too helpful, but it was a feeling that we had as students. It appeared that anything enjoyable was a sin, thus the assumption that if we didn’t enjoy it then it might not be a sin! Was having a good meal with friends ‘gluttony’? Was going out to a party ‘drunkenness’? Was kissing one’s girlfriend or boyfriend ‘debauchery’? We seemed to be surrounded with rules that it was impossible to keep, or at least, impossible to keep and to live a normal life. It was very binary: either we kept to the rules or we didn’t; nowhere were concepts like grace, growth and love mentioned.

While the concept of sin as the breaking of the law has roots in the scriptures, the New Testament looks at sin in many ways. The emphasis on sin as ‘offending God’ comes from one part of Europe during the Middle Ages; in other places and at other times the concept of sin has been looked at in significantly different ways.

Speaking very generally, until the great Schism of 1054AD the Christian Church was one Church across Eastern and Western Europe. Then there was a break within the Church and we ended up with what is often called the Orthodox Churches in the East, and the Roman Church in the West.

To make it clear, this is nothing to do with the Protestant Churches breaking away from the Catholic tradition; this is the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church and other Eastern Churches breaking away from the authority of Rome and the Pope. While there were some theological differences that went with this split, to this day we recognise the validity of the sacraments in these Churches and we recognise their ‘orthodoxy’.

### ***St. Anselm of Canterbury***

Soon after this split of the Churches in East and West, a very influential Bishop was installed in Canterbury, England. St. Anselm was a wonderful writer and a gifted theologian; he was also a very spiritual person who wrote with love.

One of the most famous papers he wrote was called ‘Cur Deus Homo’ (Why God was a Man). This was about the incarnation of Jesus, that is, why God sent his only son to us as one like us. As with other parts of Anselm’s work, it was written to illustrate one theological point, but it was a small part of the argument that he made that was remembered. So here Anselm was showing why Jesus was fully divine and fully human, but the legacy that came from it was about sin as being an affront to God that had to be paid for.

Anselm’s argument is based upon the idea that one of God’s characteristics is justice, so any offence against God’s justice is an affront to God. Generally, if we do an injustice to someone, then there is a price to pay in reparation; similarly to God, because of our ‘fallen’ state we constantly do acts against the laws of God, thus there is a price to pay to God, or in theological language, an ‘atonement’ has to be made. Divine justice demands restitution – *atonement* – for our offences but humans are incapable of providing this restitution.

So Anselm’s argument in ‘Why God was a Man’ involved bringing the legal concepts of justice and recompense to situations where God’s law is broken.

At that time intellectuals were playing with mathematical concepts like infinity, and this, along with other mathematical ideas came into Anselm’s thoughts and writings. So he argued that our breaking of the laws of God demanded restitution for the offences we had committed against God’s dignity. But as God’s dignity was infinite, and God’s justice was absolute, our restitution also had to be infinite. The enormity of the price we owed God led Anselm to reject personal acts of atonement – *that is, anything we can do to put it right* – as inadequate and ultimately vain because they will always be small, imperfect and tainted by sin. Full recompense could only be made by one without sin, which is God alone.



*Bishop Anselm from the church of Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Cambridge, England.*

The good news is that God is love, so God's loving nature inclines God to provide this atonement for us – that is, to 'ransom' us by paying the price of our sins. Atonement for humanity could only be made through one who was both fully human – *thus able to accept responsibility for all humans* – and also fully divine – *thus sinless and able in his death to offer a sacrifice that more than covers the damage done by our sins*.

Now this might all seem a bit heavy and a bit technical, but I hope that in it you see words like sacrifice, atonement, ransom, and other words that we often use in church. My guess would be that most of us have some idea of their meaning, but often we don't understand the full concepts behind them, the context in which they were used or what issues they were trying to explain.

### ***Eastern Orthodox View of Sin***

The Catholic Church holds all of these teachings of Anselm's as basically true: Christ's death did bring our salvation because Christ paid the price for our sins. But this is the truth of our salvation expressed through the concepts of justice, exchange, and value. So while not disputing these truths in anyway, it is very important that we see that there are other ways of looking at these issues using different perspectives that are equally true and valid.

The Eastern Orthodox Church, while holding to the same truths, expresses them through different language and concepts. In this case the Eastern Church does not follow the 'juridical' [to do with justice] approach about a debt of honour to God. The terms used in the East are more medical: sickness, healing, wholeness. While they are less exact without the mathematical concepts of value and balance, they do relate more to the human condition.

Sin, therefore, is not first and foremost seen as breaking a rule (*whether one enjoys the experience or not!*), but rather it is a falling short, a recognition of lack of wholeness, a manifestation of brokenness. Thus the recognition of sin in one's life should be an impetus to seek healing and to become more whole.

By this definition one still might seek God's mercy because one has broken one of God's laws, but additionally, one might also seek God's life giving mercy because one recognises one's need of healing and wholeness.

As with the virtue of humility that we looked at a couple of weeks ago, or with prayer that we looked at last week, the focus must always be on God and not on ourselves. While we need to recognise our brokenness, our sickness, the areas of our lives where we most need God's grace, the important part is not us but rather the action of God.

*When I was in Northern B.C., a number of times at Reconciliation Services I would stand at the door of the church and as I welcomed people I would say, "For large sins please sit on the left and for small sins please sit on the right." And people would look at me in panic thinking I actually meant this. What, of course, I should have been saying was, 'All those in need of healing enter here.'*

The move from mathematical preciseness to more medical concepts means we don't have to worry about calculating our exact debt to God, we simply have to recognise our need for healing. This means that our primary focus moves away from ourselves and towards God's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

### ***This Sunday's Gospel Reading***

In this Sunday's gospel we get the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector who both went up to the temple to pray. According to the Law of the Old Testament, the Pharisee probably had got his life pretty well sorted out, and when he was praying the point he was making was that, compared to the tax collector, he didn't have many sins to be put into the scales to be weighed. In contrast to this we have the tax collector who prays, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

The Eastern Church would see God's mercy as having an effect that is even greater than justice because it deals with ideas like growth and health. So in the East they might equate the experience of coming before God in prayer seeking mercy in ways unrelated to sin. For example, they might use analogies like:

*A snake sheds its skin, not because the old skin is bad or wrong, but because it is holding the snake back from growing into something better.*

*A child acts in a childlike way, which can be sweet and charming, but at a certain point that child has to move on, not because childlike ways are bad or wrong, but because the child is being called to the fullness of adulthood.*

We might do something wrong and feel very sorry about it, but that is not the only reason to change; love of God is a reason to change.

### ***Metanoia***

And this brings us to the word 'metanoia', which literally means 'changing one's mind' but in the bible it means 'change of heart', especially a spiritual conversion. In the New Testament the word metanoia is used in various forms more than fifty times, but commonly it is translated as 'repent'. We heard it a couple of weeks ago when the rich man in agony in Hades appeals to Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." (Luke 16:30)



Repentance is often seen as having remorse for a particular action, but metanoia isn't only prompted by remorse or fear of judgement or punishment, it can also be brought about by seeing another's example of love, then it is an enactment of one's freedom, a renewed choice to strive to be more Christlike. So metanoia is a much larger concept than just remorse or even repentance. It is a chance to expand one's life in such a way as to have a new perspective on one's self, on the world and on God. This change of heart is turning us back to the path that leads to union with God – our original state which was lost with original sin.

In the Orthodox Churches redemption isn't seen as the 'ransom' of us by Christ; it is the reconciliation of God with us, the manifestation of God's love for humanity through God's healing powers. Thus, in this understanding, it is not the anger of God the Father but God's love that lies behind the death of his Son on the cross.

So we might say that our redemption, won for us by the act of Christ at Calvary, is also a present reality as God continues to pour out God's love and to share God's divinity – which God does in the Eucharist. This initiative belongs to God, but presupposes our active acceptance. This active acceptance, while requiring a certain inner attitude, will be visible in a person's actions. So metanoia is both a change of heart and mind, and a change of actions and focus.

## **Confession**

When coming to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, that is Confession, many people worry about whether they have remembered all their sins and so have 'calculated' correctly the wrong they have done. Sometimes I wonder whether this is distracting them from focusing on God's love. In such cases I want to say,

*If we were to put into a set of scales our sins on one side  
and God's love on the other, the two are just not comparable,  
thus we should not worry whether we have correctly calculated  
the weight of our own sin,  
but rather we should be bracing ourselves and look at how  
we are going to receive such an extraordinarily large gift from God.  
Just drop those sins that you are carrying and don't worry about them,  
rather free your hands  
so that they can be filled to overflowing with God's mercy!*

It is not our sins that make the sacrament, it is God's love. Both those *with* grave sins and those *without* grave sins are in need of God's mercy, healing, and wholeness to change and become more perfect images of Christ, and whatever one's personal situation, all of us can fruitfully receive God's grace to deepen our relationship with God and to become more fully what God is calling us to be.

This less legalistic and more 'medical' understanding of repentance can be seen in the way we celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. Along with the Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist, the Church sees the Sacrament of Reconciliation as one of the healing sacraments, and the use of words like sickness, healing and wholeness help us understand what God is offering to us.

If in Confession our focus is on what we have done wrong, how we have broken the law and thus offended God, then accounting for every sin might seem significant. But if our focus is on God, then we will only look at ourselves to see how we can receive God's gift of forgiveness and mercy to bring about a change in our lives, to bring about metanoia, a change of heart so we can move from our brokenness to wholeness.

Vatican II brought to us in the West many of these treasures that were first worked out in the Eastern Churches. So we in the Roman Catholic Church also have this wider understanding that God's forgiveness brings healing and wholeness. And this is not just a theory that we have been given, it is very clearly visible in the way that Confession is commonly celebrated.

If someone wants to come into Confession and put a list of sins into the scales, then that is fine and they can be sure that God's mercy will infinitely outweigh their offences. But slowly since Vatican II, more often people come in to Confession and, while still recognising that they have done wrong, they seek God's mercy in a wider way, a way that brings healing, wholeness and assistance to walk more fully in the way of Christ.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is increasingly linked to the spiritual development of the individual, through advice on how to move forward from our brokenness that is shown in "what I have done and what I have failed to do", towards greater involvement in the life of grace and the activities of the Church.

*In many parishes the Deacon, although they can't sacramentally pronounce forgiveness, assist or 'walk beside' someone preparing for Confession, helping them be ready for the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.*

### **To Sum Up**

My prime purpose in writing this was to lay the groundwork for this Sunday's gospel and the sermon that I will be giving.

It is worth noting that in the parable of the two people who came to the temple to pray, from the second person we have the roots of what is called the Jesus prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Or we could write it as:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me,  
a flawed individual in need of your healing and wholeness.*

Last week we talked about prayer and also ministry in the Church, and how these should be proactive and should have the focus on the needs of others. Before that we talked about humility, and that lovely quote that summed up C.S. Lewis' thoughts, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.". And here again we have that same movement away from focus on ourselves towards focus on God. So our change of heart, our metanoia, our deepening of our faith will always be a turning out from ourselves towards others and most particularly towards the healing love of God.