

Well good morning. Actually I know the topic is the sacraments of Anointing and Reconciliation, but **the topic has to be broadened to the whole mission of healing and wholeness, which is basic to Christ, and what he was all about.** So we begin by putting up the framework that the New Testament presents for understanding what the mission of Christ actually was, and it is a framework that is very alien to the modern mind. Very basic to the understanding the New Testament has is something that people often talk about today: **victimization. From the standpoint of the New Testament we are actually victims.** We are victims **of our ancestors who made wrong choices going from back to the very beginning.** Now St. Augustine famously talked about original sin, but it's much bigger than any story about some Adam and Eve in the garden. **It's really that human life has tried to create a false world of false goods and false goals, in contrast to the world God actually created and intended for human beings.**

Now in the story in the Book of Genesis God says, "If you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will die," and the serpent says, "You surely will not die." Well they are both telling the truth from a different level. The truth that God is teaching is that **true life and prosperity and thriving can only happen in communion with God.** And what the serpent is saying that—well there is a certain autonomy to nature and then surely we will not die physically—surely we will not die physically—and that's true. So history is now the continuation of this **choice of human beings to build their own world with their own values deciding what is good and what is evil** and what is good and what is bad and ignoring the truth and the reality of God, even in the point of inventing their own gods, **creating their own gods, and worshipping**

**their own creation, which is the most corrupt and preposterous of human crime from the standpoint of Scripture: idolatry.**

Now Jesus comes and what he announces is the presence of the reign of God, the kingdom of God, or the dominion of God in contrast to the dominion of darkness, which is what people are actually living in, and have been victimized by. So **Jesus invites people to this kingdom**, which is in him. He embodies the very life of this kingdom. He invites everyone to it, but he tells them that they have to change the way they think, which in Greek is *metanoia*. **He says change the way you think, change your purpose in life, and believe in the good news**, the good news being announcement of God's actual purpose and plan and will for humanity.

Now as Jesus proceeds to live out his own life **his touch is a healing touch. So he heals the sick, and he forgives the sinner, and this is all mixed together.** In our Western minds we clearly distinguish physical, spiritual, moral, psychological, emotional, mental, but not in the New Testament. Jesus' work is simply the work of healing and saving and redeeming and forgiving and delivering—one thing, whatever; so we cannot really clearly distinguish.

St. Augustine points out that even when it comes to the moral evil of sin he says we are not sinners because we sin, but we sin because we are sinners. In other words, **our moral compromise precedes our choices**; our brokenness precedes our choices and what we do with them and our opportunities. And **out of that moral compromise comes the disintegration of the human life, the human society, which demonstrates itself in social injustices and the domination of pagan powers**, in Jesus' day in particular the Roman Empire, but in different days different empires and various powers and so on. And **that's on a social level.**

**On a personal level it manifests itself in disease and disorder of every kind**, some of which we would call handicaps, some of which are congenital, some of which we would call

diseases, some of which we call mental illness. But even our distinction of **mental illness needs to be refined** because there are illnesses that are due to, you might say, **birth defects or something fundamentally wrong with the brain and nervous system or chemical imbalances**, but many other illness are really due to **traumas and injuries**. They are also mental illnesses. For example, very often children suffer great traumas, for example, they are abused physically or sexually at home. Later on they experience or they demonstrate hostility or fear or sleeplessness or great anxiety and they have to be put under someone's care, and we could say while they are mentally disturbed or they are mentally ill—they are traumatized. Their body, mind, feelings have been so injured that they don't work right anymore; the unity doesn't work; the harmony has been so disturbed. That's different from the origin being in chemistry, but **the result may be very similar, but the cure won't be the same**. That's why we have to know the cause, and that's what modern medicine does. It tries to get to the cause of things because **the treatment will be different depending on what the cause is**. Soldiers returning from the front are often totally shocked, traumatized. Well if we know what caused it, we can at least deal with it; but if we don't know what caused it, we don't know how to deal with it.

**In the Scriptures Jesus simply knows and in a word he speaks the healing**, except the one case where it took several steps, but usually it's immediate. And that immediate healing was called a **miracle**. But what he pointed out was that this is really a process that may not always be immediate, but it's still **beginning in him and will continue onward and upward forever the healing and the move toward wholeness, integrity, and ultimately eternal life**. And this is a work of the Church. Jesus makes it very clear that **his Church is supposed to continue his work**.

This is most clearly described in the Acts of the Apostles, but it's framed in with the language of "binding and loosing." **Binding and loosing has to do with the whole mission of Christ. To**

**bind means to restrict the power of evil.** So he talks about, he says, “If the owner of the house knew when the thief was coming.” And now what’s he talking about? He is talking about in our terminology the devil. The devil is the owner of the house. The house is the world; the devil has taken it over. And now **Jesus is coming as a thief in the night to steal away the devil’s possessions, which is of course us.** That’s what that language talks about. So binding and loosing, binding the power of evil, **loosing people from the grasp and the snares of evil in every way.** If it’s a leper, its restoration of the skin. If it’s a blind person, its restoration of sight. If it’s a lame person, it’s the restoration of locomotion. If it’s a dead person, it’s the restoration of life, and there are several cases where there is actually a raising of the dead. So these are different signs of this work, which is ongoing work that never ends, framed within this idea of binding and loosing.

**The first and foremost sacrament of healing, redemption, salvation, forgiveness is Baptism. Eucharist is also a very primary sacrament of healing and forgiveness, because it contains the blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins.** Now in the Church of Jerusalem there was practiced another healing sacrament called **the Anointing of the Sick.** In the Letter of James it says, “If there is any sick among you, call for the elders,” *presbyteroi* in Greek, the same word we use for priest later on, although at that time it’s not clear it really meant priest in our sense of the word. But that’s the word from which we get the word priest, *presbyteroi*, meaning elders. “Call for the elders of the Church. They will pray over him and anoint him in the name of the Lord, and the sick person will recover, and if he has committed any sins, they will be forgiven,” again, **the connection between forgiveness and healing of the body.**

Now the original meaning of the **anointing is healing of the body and forgiveness, not preparation for death.** Unfortunately this is one of the ways in which our tradition got off the

beaten path, created a new path, which wasn't very good, in which anointing was a preparation for death. That was not the original intention.

Now, again, in the gospel there is often this **intermixing between forgiveness and healing**. For example, the paralytic lowered from the roof, Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven." That of course began a big controversy: "Who can forgive but God alone," and so on. But the point is there is no clear distinction. When the man born blind was healed, the apostles asked, "Well now was this man guilty, was it his sin or his parents?" And Jesus said, "Well neither," but the point is if he was born blind because of his own guilt, then his sin would have been in a previous life; so that indicates that they did have some idea of reincarnation. That's also indicated by the question, "Who do people say that I am?" "Some say John the Baptist." Well that would imply reincarnation. And of course the question was has Elijah really returned in John the Baptist? Well Jesus said he did, which again implies **reincarnation or metaphor. So that idea is also part of the sort of indiscriminate background of the New Testament that later theology tried to clarify**, although I don't know by what criteria it does so. Sometimes when we clarify things we actually restrict and maybe we are more comfortable with restrictions, but that isn't really necessarily helpful. So this relation between all forms of evil and how Jesus came to lift us out of it.

Now the term, again, *metanoia*: one of the problems is **the Greek word cannot be translated into Latin**. So when St. Jerome translated the Greek into the *Vulgate*, well the Greek word has two meanings: change your ways, change your thinking, and change your purpose—that's one meaning. The second: repent. Well repent has a do with the past. In Latin there is no word for change your mind now, so he picked *poenitentiae agite*, which is a way of saying repent, which got into all translations. Again, **Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic and Celtic**

**cultures** had no idea of what repentance really meant in the sense of changing minds and learning and growing. They **didn't have a culture that was progress oriented**. So when the Church tried to preach, it was inhibited by the lack of understanding in the languages of the people it was preaching to, which is a problem with acculturating. We try to acculturate the gospel, yes, but **do the people we are trying to appeal to really understand, have the equipment they need to understand the unique message of the gospel?** And the answer is very often, no. This includes Europe and many of our traditions. **There are misunderstandings.**

So going back to healing, we have the healing of the **Anointing of the Sick, which is both healing and forgiving**, the sacrament of healing and forgiveness. **Then we have charismatic healing.** Now charismatic healing and ministry is not technically sacramental, but actually in many periods of the Church it was more important. In the Acts of the Apostles it was more important than any sacrament. There are also works of mercy; **the spiritual works of mercy are healing as well.** To counsel the doubtful, to offer spiritual direction, that is really a healing ministry. So **the idea of healing is manifold; it has many levels.** But in regard to the **Anointing of the Sick itself**, it is only in recent years that we have returned to the original understanding: **to heal people who are ill right now.** Even now I've been told by people, and they should know better, if I say, "Well do you want me to come and anoint Joe who is pretty ill?" They say, "Oh, not yet." "What do you mean 'not yet'?" "Well he is not near death yet." I say, "It's not about death." But that's the trouble; people get these wrong ideas, and getting them out of their head is very hard.

Now the second sacrament which is very much about healing and restoration is called **Reconciliation.** Originally in Latin was called *Poenitentia*, **Penance.** Again, **part of the problem with this sacrament is the misunderstanding of what *metanoia* meant.** If *metanoia*, which is this new thinking that precedes the acceptance of the good news, then that's one thing; but if it's

really repentance, if it's really about the past and about regret and remorse, then it's something else again. Unfortunately **this idea of regret and remorse became over emphasized in the history of the Church from relatively early on.** Again, not only did the **Latin language not have a word for *metanoia*,** but even in Greek where they had the word and the understanding, they misunderstood it there too because in modern Greek, if you look it up in modern Greek, they don't pronounce it the same. But today *metanoia* means to lie prostrate on the ground. Now what does that have to do with changing in the way you think? The answer is nothing. **So East and West a great deal of the gospel got lost through being transported into cultures that just didn't have the wherewithal to understand.** So the renewal of the Church that began in the twentieth century is very significant because by this time we have learned a great deal and we have now the capacity to study many cultures all at once and we are able to go back to Scripture and, you might say, **rediscover the original intention** in a way that earlier ages really didn't have the wherewithal to do.

Now going to the actual sacrament, on the one hand, Jesus' whole work is about forgiveness and mercy and receiving and handing it on, and there is absolutely no doubt about it. And there is no doubt that he empowered his Church to do the same. There's also no doubt that he intended this whole idea to grow and grow and grow. But **there is no actual sign that there was a specific rite, ritual, or sacrament associated with the forgiveness of sins, apart from Baptism. And you know Baptism cannot be repeated. So this created a crisis in the early Church.**

Before I get into the crisis, I will talk a little about St. Paul. St. **Paul had problems in his communities.** Occasionally there was someone who lived a life that was so much a contradiction that he said you have to exclude that person from your community. It's like a bad apple; it will cause the whole bushel to rot. And this was the beginning of what was called excommunication.

Now St. Paul didn't invent this idea. It existed among the rabbis as well. So **excommunication and re-communication, I wouldn't call it a sacrament, but it was a process.** It was not a ritual; it was a process that the Church did early on engage in in order to protect the common good of the communal life. But it was **always with the aim to bring them back, but when they were ready to live the Christian life.** Now that did involve a certain sort of repentance in the second sense, a certain **remorse for whatever they had done that was wrong.** but unfortunately now that took on such a capital importance that the original meaning was lost. **So then all the talk about *metanoia* then was taken to be talk about remorse and regret.**

Now as the Church developed, there were **three primary sins that were considered to be capital, meaning that they excluded people from the community.** One was **apostasy**, the most important one, apostasy, denying the faith. The second was **murder**; the third was **adultery**. Now **these were never secret.** An apostate was someone who publicly denounced Christ. An adulterer was someone who was publicly involved with someone else other than the person married to. And murder, again, was public; it was a public fact. Then the Christian Church said well we can't have people like that in our midst, so **they had to be excluded.** Then the question arose **can we ever take him back**, because sometimes they would say, well we want to come back?

This is especially true after the time of Constantine. Constantine allowed all religions to coexist, so then Christians no longer faced persecution. But some of the other Christians who had faced persecutions resented **those who had apostatized**, i.e., to save their own skin; **so they didn't want to forgive them.** So then a **controversy arose. Can the Church forgive? Should the Church forgive etc.? And there were three answers: yes, no, and yes, but only once.** Those are three different views. **Yes**, that view of yes the Church can and should forgive was **championed by basically the pastors, the bishops of the Church.** **No** was a group of basically

prophets. In the early Church there was **a class or a group of prophets that had a great deal of influence in teaching**, but they were very narrow and they were more or less apocalyptic. You know what that word means, apocalyptic? It means their vision was primarily oriented toward the end of the world, which they expected any moment; you understand this idea? So the prophets were apocalyptic people and they said no, no way, you cannot forgive. Once you are baptized, no more forgiveness. **So that whole group left the Church in a movement called Montanism.** Then of **the third group was well we can forgive, but only once after Baptism**, so you better decide once and for all if you want to be Christian; there won't be a second forgiveness. So that prevailed in some areas, but **gradually the whole idea was that the Church could and needed to forgive** because of the stories of, for example, Peter says, "How many times must I forgive, seven times seven?" and so on. So eventually that idea prevailed, but not without a struggle.

Now the discipline or the procedure or the process by which a person was alienated from the Church and then returned became to be called **Canonical Penance**. That's what it was called. **Was it a sacrament? Not a first.** What did it consist of? It consisted of people enrolling like in the RCIA, but instead they were **enrolled in** the group of penitents, **the order of penitents**. They signified their enrolling with **ashes** that were distributed especially at the beginning of Lent. In fact **part of the origin of Lent was a time for the penitents to begin the process of returning to Communion.**

Now the penitents were **expected to do things**, to do work, to take action that would somehow bring them closer to God, **bring reparation to what they had done to the community, and so on, all very vague ideas.** And this consisted in first of all prayer and also humiliation, because they were set apart; that was in a way humiliating. So **prayer, humiliation, fasting, and almsgiving**—they were expected to give alms and to help the poor. Now in that way we could see

the word reparation, repairing, helping; so there's a good side to this. The conclusion of Lent brought then their return to the Eucharist. There was no separate rite that we know of; however, **in time the works that they did became to be considered sacramental.**

By the time you get to Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, he has already received this tradition and he integrates what he has received with an a new idea that he brings in that the works that people do are all very nice, but they would be no good without the love of God, because well St. Paul said, "If I give my body for burning and have no love, then I am a noisy gong," and so on. **Aquinas points this out that it is not really the works that matter so much, but the love of God that infuses the soul and allows the person to actually be forgiven because it's love that forgives.** What Jesus did on the cross was to pour out love. It is really his love that is being symbolized in the blood. **So St. Thomas says it's the love that now becomes sacramentalized in the absolution, which he calls the form of the sacrament; and then the matter is the acts of the penitent. So now this has become a sacrament, and that's about the thirteenth century.**

But **the sacrament continues to change under two forces;** neither are very good ones either. One is canon law. **Canon law is introduced in the tenth century, and it tends to introduce a legalistic way of thinking about morality.** Now to some degree maybe society needed a legal basis, but society's needs on a legal basis and the Church's need for moral teaching are two different things. But one of the results of this was **a legalistic idea of not only right and wrong, but forgiveness and guilt.** So forgiveness was just remission in a sense of if you go to court and the judge says, "Not guilty"; **it's remission. It's not a healing.** It's not a change in the soul, in the person. It's extrinsic; it's sometimes called forensic. So this idea of forensic forgiveness enters through canon law and it's carried on in the Church up to the time of the Reformation, and **it is the basis of actually Luther's idea of forgiveness. It's forensic. It does**

**not change the person.** So Luther said that a person is a, well, what he actually says “a pile of shit covered with snow.” That’s actually what he said. He was rather vulgar. So his idea is the snow is God’s forgiveness that covers, but there is still the same intrinsic thing there. There is no transformation, which Aquinas said there was. But there’s no transformation. There is no change. There’s a covering over, and it’s a forensic declaration of innocence, but it doesn’t have anything to do with the actual person. And it was not only Luther that thought that way. **A lot of people thought that way because of the whole legalistic mentality that had developed.**

Now in addition to that, the Irish. Actually earlier, way before the Reformation, in the eighth century, **by the eighth century central Europe had lost the faith.** It had gained the faith and lost it already. Now **what kept the faith was Ireland.** So the Irish monks came to Europe and they brought the faith back, but now it was different. It was Celtic. It had a flavor, which was different. The Celtic people as well as the Germanic people and the Anglo-Saxons as well, all these were actually barbarians, and they had crude ideas about a lot of things, but in particular **now we are talking about guilt and punishment.** And they became preoccupied with the idea of what we call **satisfaction.** I used the word a minute ago, reparation, making up for something. And **they thought that they had to make up for sin, which actually you won’t read that in the New Testament.** The Jews had rites of atonement and expiation, but they were rites involving the blood of animals.

**Jesus eliminated that whole idea of the blood of animals and animal sacrifice and talked about the love of God and the mercy of God as an already active element in the world.** And then his followers said because of his death and resurrection, there was no more atonement needed. That’s the way they explained things. And they said **he is the atonement,** which is true insofar as **we don’t need any other atonement. But then it gave the indication that maybe his blood had**

**a sort of juridical effect**, which some people got that idea, especially later on. They said that somehow Jesus' death changed God's mind toward humanity. Now what is really wrong about that is that, **not only is it unworthy of God to change his mind, not only does it not authentically reflect the teaching of Jesus himself, but it puts a division between Jesus and God, whereas Jesus said, "The Father and I are one."** And if Jesus really is divine—you have to think about this, this idea that Jesus' blood somehow changed God's mind, as if Jesus was somebody other than God, it just doesn't make sense. But that is exactly the ideas that percolated through the Middle Ages and became part of the basic teaching of the Reformation. So this becomes, it really becomes very difficult to deal with.

So the idea now that people are trying to make satisfaction for their sins, which is probably one of the things that Martin Luther rebelled against because it's impossible; so he was right about that. And if that's what he meant by works, it's not exactly clear, but it could be, then he was right. **Any works of satisfaction are a waste of time. Whereas if by reparation you mean that you try to help others, well, you are supposed to do that anyway. So if reparation means to lead a good Christian life, extend your mercy and love to others, and so on, then fine; but if you mean that somehow you are going to erase the damage you have done, well that's ridiculous.** You are not going to erase any damage. So this all became part of the psychology of people.

**The Council of Trent** tried to deal with it, but did not do too well. They went back to the beginning, but they used forensic language too: **remission of sin, rather than the word forgiveness**, which is a better word; and **they used the word Penitentia for the sacrament. Reconciliation is a better word**, and so on. So we muddled through the counterreformation and get to Vatican II, and **Vatican II says**, we got off the beaten path here because we have become too individualistic; **our sense of sin is too individualistic.** Going back to the New Testament, **we sin**

**because we are sinners, and we are sinners because we are broken, we are broken because we live in a broken world, and we need healing and forgiveness and wholeness altogether.**

And it isn't so much my personal sin as our sin in not living a better life and not producing a better more integral world for God, so a restoration of the idea of the communal, communal responsibility and communal celebration of reconciliation and **the idea that reconciliation is a celebration of the return of God's people to communion.**

So going back to the story of the Prodigal Son, **the whole world is the prodigal son**, on a whole. **Religion is very often the elder son, and God is wanting everyone to come together, but just waiting for people to become desperate enough to come back. So God never forces anything.** But in a sense Jesus came to extend himself and to extend Godself, and of course it was the prostitutes and the publicans who actually saw him as God's extension and went to him, which he then defended when the Pharisees said, well, he is spending his time with sinners. Of course he was, and even eating with them. To eat with someone is to share intimately.

Now we are still at a point in our Church today where people are wondering **to what degree can the intimacy of Eucharist be shared with people**, for example, who are married outside the Church or living in proximity, you might say, with people of the same sex or the opposite sex but not married, and so on. This is a **controversy, and it's going on right now, and I don't know how it will turn out.** But the pope himself is encouraging the controversy. He is encouraging people to extend themselves. He is not giving answers, as Christ didn't either, but simply extending himself and encouraging that priests extend themselves and the people extend themselves, not saying that it's okay to do this, this, or that, but saying that **even if you do this, this, or that, you still should consider yourself a child of God, and you should consider the Church your home, and you need the bread of life for strength.** It's not a reward for being

good. But then of course that changes the whole discipline of the centuries that said that certain sins exclude a person from Eucharist. So this is not black-and-white at all. How it will work out, I cannot tell you. But **there is surely need for people to recognize their shortcomings and to celebrate God's healing mercy, but in celebrating it to extend it to others. So the sacraments continue to evolve, you might say, or change, as we try to become more authentic in following Christ.** What the future will bring, I do not know.

I want to go back to the twelfth century. **The twelfth century is when the idea of speaking, confessing, became prominent.** I said in the beginning sins were all public, **the sins that were dealt with in the so-called canonical penance, they were all public sins. Eventually private sins became the matter for confession.** Sigmund Freud said that that was the discovery of psychoanalysis, and I think he was right. **People actually need that, the ability to express their deepest problems in a very secret, safe place.** So we had a penance service that was very beautifully done by David Schimmel. He is a very good theologian and liturgist, and so we had a very beautiful service. But he told the people now because there are so many people here just say one sin. Well that didn't work because people want to unburden themselves. And so quite a few people spent quite a while talking about their issues, which I think is very healthy. Now that process didn't start until the second millennium. And when it did start it became under the influence of the **monks of Ireland** who were not ordained priests; they were just brothers. So what they would do—they **had a book called *Penitentials*.** So people would say, well, they did this or they did that. Well the brothers would say, "Okay, well, now **here is the satisfaction,**" so that's where the idea of satisfaction came in, **the penance,** literally the penance. It's this thing, this thing, that thing.

Now as I say, **going back to the early Church the three basic forms of penance were prayer, fasting, almsgiving.** Well the Irish made up many, many more. And they were really a form of self-punishment and self-purification. The problem was this became a preoccupation from about, well, **the end of the first millennium until Vatican II, this preoccupation with self-purification, self-punishment.** We don't have to punish ourselves, and we don't have to purify ourselves. **God purifies us. Grace purifies us.** And **purification is basically about letting go of self-love and self-will, which is egoism.** And this is all under God's control—I shouldn't say control, but under God's providence. **God is providentially offering us ways to let go of our self-centeredness.** But if we could do it for ourselves, that would only increase our self-centeredness. You see? It's a Catch-22. That's why Jesus said, "When you give alms do not let your left hand know what your right is doing," because then you would congratulate yourself, and then that would only increase your pride or self-centeredness. That's also the reason for secrecy when praying: go to your room; shut your door so no one will see. That's not just so you can be in quiet, but so no one will see you. **So God works in all of us progressively, each of us what we need when we need it, and we don't have to be worried about penance in the sense that it came to the fore in the Middle Ages: self-purification, self-punishment.** We don't need that. **So leaving that behind of course that also changed a great deal of sacramental practice. And here we are today still evolving.**