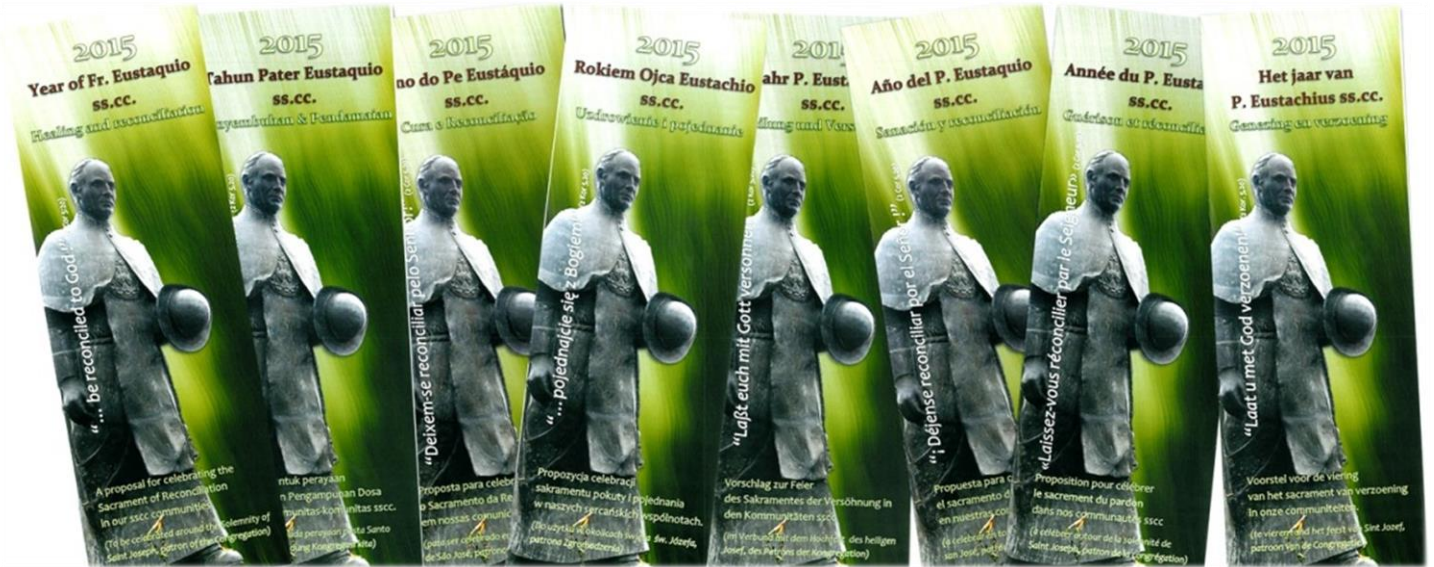
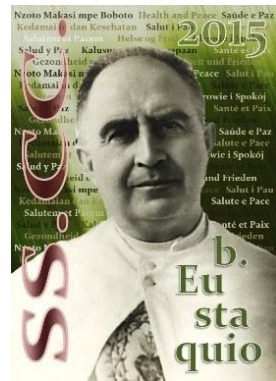


# Sacrament of Forgiveness

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We recognize our sinfulness... (Constitutions 4)  
We regularly receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation,  
which renews and strengthens our fidelity to the Lord (Constitutions 54.1)

## "Who touched me?" (Mk. 5:31)

The disciples are rightly surprised that Jesus asks who touched him, with such a crowd hemming in on them. However Jesus "looked around to see who had done it." The searching glance of Jesus meets that of the sick woman. And it is then that she speaks her whole truth, "The woman, realizing what had happened to her, approached in fear and trembling. She fell down before Jesus and told him the whole truth." (Mk. 5:32-33)

Why is the woman frightened? Is there something wrong about wanting to get close to Jesus? What is that she comes to understand at that moment? What is that truth that she confesses to Jesus?

These are not questions whose answer is found in a book. They are questions that can be a guide for our own journey of seeking Jesus. We too want to throw ourselves at his feet and tell him our whole truth.

Jesus reaction reveals the effect of **this encounter of two people who are searching for the other**, "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction." (Mk. 5:34)

These words are like those that Jesus uses when he declares the forgiveness of sins.

"Son, your sins are forgiven you." (Mk. 2:5). "Woman... Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin anymore." (Jn. 8:10-11) He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Lk. 7:48-50)

Often the Bible does not make a distinction between sickness and sin when speaking of the root cause of our need for redemption. "There is no health in my bones because of my sin." (Ps. 38:4) "LORD, take note of me; heal me, although I have sinned against you." (Ps. 41:5) In the Gospel, **healing** from illness and the **forgiveness** of sins are presented as two sides of the same reality: the salvation that takes place in Jesus. "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, pick up your mat and walk'?" (Mk. 2:9)

Let's stay with the image of the sick woman. She is looking to touch Jesus. Jesus is looking for her because he knows he's being sought out. And so happens the encounter in which she -frightened and trembling- understands what is happening to her and she adores Jesus (she prostrates herself before him) and opens her heart to him to tell him her whole truth. That encounter heals, transforms, forgives, saves. Hasn't something like that ever happened to you?

## The Sacrament of Reconciliation

There are many ways to draw close to the mercy of God. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an excellent way in which the Church brings about, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the encounter with Jesus that forgives, heals and saves. The sacrament shows that the initiative of redemptive love comes from God. I cannot achieve reconciliation just by my own efforts. The sacrament is a gift that we ask for and receive, a way to open ourselves to the Lord's grace and mercy.

In the sacrament, as with the woman in the Gospel, we seek the Lord and He seeks us. We throw ourselves at his feet and we confess our truth as sinners. In encountering Jesus, we understand better what is happening to us and - from the mouth of the Church's minister- we hear the words that make us healed and forgiven with respect to God and our brothers and sisters.

The Thirty-eighth General Chapter says,

In the face of violence and disregard for life, the abuse of power, the lack of communication and the fragility of human relationships, we see in the ordained ministry a privileged opportunity for **the SSCC mission** of reparation and reconciliation. Likewise, this is an opportunity to revitalize **the sacrament of reconciliation** as an experience of a personal **encounter** with Jesus and the healing of people's suffering. (Mission 24)

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an excellent way of carrying out the mission of reparative love. That was how **Blessed Eustaquio** understood it. It is interesting to note that Eustaquio, whose personal vocation was so particular, always believed that the principal instruments of his mission were the ordinary ones any priest had.

He wrote to Fr. Gil, the Provincial, July 25, 1941,

"The means that Our Lord inspired me about in a special way are: the priestly ministry, prayer, preaching, visiting the sick and all who suffer."

Extraordinary gifts of healing and counsel, for which Eustaquio would be better known, appeared in the course of his ordinary exercise of the ministry: in prayer, preaching, the celebration of the sacraments, visits to the sick; simple things that everyone can do. One of the features most characteristic of Eustaquio was the fact that he was a simple priest, dedicated and faithful, who offered himself without reserve to those who needed him



The greatness of Eustaquio is found precisely in his "low profile," discreet and simple, a generous pastor passionately dedicated to his people. Eustaquio can inspire any priest or Christian who strives to minister humbly and consistently with dedication and goodness, without resorting to the spectacular, complicated or abnormal.

Among the ordinary ways in which Eustaquio brought the mercy of God to people was the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to which he dedicated so many hours. Perhaps one of the reasons for the power of Eustaquio's priestly ministry resides in the fact that when he administered the sacrament of forgiveness, he did so as a "healed healer", in other words, as someone who has experienced in himself the wonder of being forgiven by God. He gave a glimpse into his soul when he wrote in his personal notes,

"You raised me from the ground. You drew me from the mud, you freed me from sin and you healed my sorrow. Oh, mercy of God! My heart was full of sin and you, Jesus, forgave me, you embraced me, you gave me joy, you set placed me by your side and you gave me to drink of the cup of your joy."

## **Celebrating forgiveness with the brothers**

One of the things that we have asked you to do to celebrate this year dedicated to Eustaquio is for each local community to look for a day, during this season of Lent, preferably around March 19 (solemnity of Saint Joseph, principal patron of the Congregation, to whom Eustaquio was so devoted) to have a communal celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation with individual confession as the liturgy indicates.

We have already sent each brother an outline for such a celebration. I hope you have received it. It can also be downloaded from our website.

When we celebrate the sacrament in community, we are not there as ministers who dispense it but **as penitents** who receive it. It will be beautiful to draw close to the Lord together, throw ourselves at his feet, admit that we are sinners (Const. 4), confess our whole truth and hear the simple and powerful words of absolution spoken to each of us:

"God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you **pardon** and **peace**, and I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Rite of Penance)

Receiving forgiveness renews and strengthens our faithfulness to the Lord (Const. 54.1) and we understand better that we are a community of **forgiven sinners**, always sinners and always forgiven (Rule of Life 42).

At the end of the celebration, you could leave in the house chapel, in a specially prepared place, a bowl with oil and another containing water, so that those symbols remind us during the whole year of the healing action of the Spirit (oil) and the reconciling power of Grace (water of baptism).

Let us go forth in peace along the way of conversion and may the Lord continue to heal us of our sickness.

