

What if I can't get a priest?

Do you remember in the old translation we had an acclamation after the Consecration that ran,

'Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory'.

It didn't appear in the acclamations in the new translation of about eight years ago because it is not there in the original Latin of the Missal. The responses we use now are fairly close English versions of what is there.

The idea behind the line of course is still part of our belief and understanding. It is a weaving of ideas that can be found particularly in the writings of Saint Paul.

The first bit is very important and needs to be thought about.

When someone dies it seems as if that is the end of them. All that they were seems to disappear and fade away. We may remember them; there may be mementoes and keepsakes that remind us of our loved ones. But they have gone.

One of the most powerful reminders for those who are rich and powerful is that no matter how much they may avoid hardship or struggle they, like the rest of us, will one day die. Great monuments and cities may be built to the glory of princes and premiers but one day they will die and all their mighty works will pass.

For Christians there is a flame of hope that burns in their hearts; death is not the end. We believe this because when Jesus died he

destroyed our death.



It doesn't mean that we won't die. We believe that the power of death has been broken. Jesus is the only one who could make sure that it cannot hold us in its grip for ever.

The only one way to really to destroy death is by making life a new possible for those who have died. That is why we had the other half of the acclamation

'rising you restored our life'.

Jesus experienced death because he was a real human being and that is what happens to all of us. But he overcame his own death and he does it for all of us.

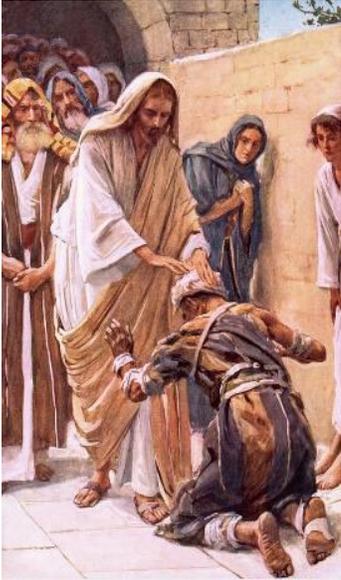
As members of the Church we are told that it is important that as death approaches we can turn to God for his mercy. We are all aware that there are things we have done that we still would like to ask the Lord for forgiveness.

We must be careful – when God forgives, he forgives. So we should not worry about things long past that we have regretted and already come back to our loving God asking for a fresh start. We can trust

with conviction that what God has done he has done properly. When he forgives, you are really forgiven.

It may be that there is nothing on my conscience – in which case I should not worry. It may be that I can think of something I still want to talk to God about, so I ask for mercy with hope and trust.

Normally we ask a priest to come to someone who is dying so that the words of forgiveness in that great Sacrament of Reconciliation might be said and the Anointing of the Sick that heals our souls can ease our concerns and give us comfort. These wonderful gifts of mercy are one of the first things to think of when a loved one is dying or when we are thinking about ourselves.

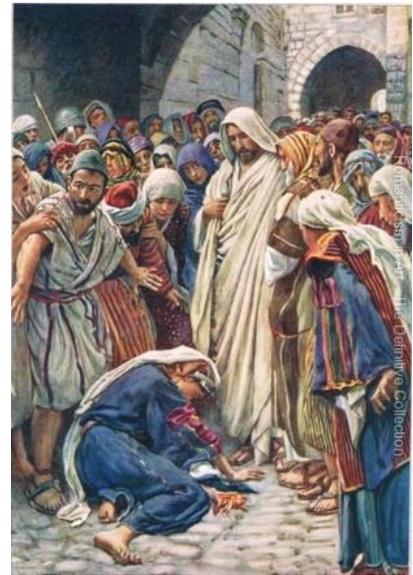


But sometimes it is just not possible. Imagine a person dying alone on a desert island far away from any priestly ministry. Do we imagine that God is there ready to catch them out because they couldn't get a priest? No, God is there to catch us like a father catching their child jumping from a tree (only he's better at it!) Do we imagine that God turns his back on people because the circumstances make it impossible to receive the Sacraments? No, he comes running.

Time and again, Jesus turned to people who were in need to help them in his earthly ministry. The Gospels tell us repeatedly that Jesus broke through red tape and rules to reach out to those in difficulty. Does it make sense to say he will turn us away because the rules of lockdown meant we couldn't get a priest?

So if I am in this situation what do I do? I say to God with all my heart that I love him and I ask his forgiveness, mercy and love. He will never say, 'no'.

So do we need the Sacrament of Forgiveness at all? Yes! Jesus gave us it for a reason – to help us and give comfort whenever we can celebrate it. At the same time we recognise that the power of Jesus which works through the Sacraments is also active and at work in the world at large. It is about realising that the Church is bigger than what we see; the mercy of God reaches further than our reach, the love of God is deeper than our understanding.



A writer, now seen by some as a bit sentimental, put it this way over a hundred and fifty years ago:

*There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in God's justice which is more than liberty.*

Frederick William Faber 1814-1863

We do not say the acclamation any more. But it is still part of the prayer of the Church. We hear it on Easter Day when the priest prays the Preface at Mass. He says,

*For he is the true Lamb who has taken away the sins of the world;
by dying he has destroyed our death, and by rising, restored our life.*