

## **Repent, For The Kingdom Of Heaven Is At Hand**

**'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt.3:2). With these words, first uttered by St John the Baptist, Jesus Christ began His own mission (Matt.4:17). Christianity was from the very beginning a call to repentance, to conversion, to a 'change of mind' (*metanoia*). A radical transformation of one's entire way of life and thought, a renovation of the mind and senses, a rejection of sinful deeds and thoughts, a transfiguration of the human person: these are the main elements of Christ's message.**

**The pattern for repentance is set by Jesus Christ in his parable of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-24). Having lived a sinful life 'in a far country', that is, far away from God, the prodigal son, after many tribulations, comes to himself and decides to return to his Father. Repentance begins with his conversion ('came to himself'), which is then transformed into determination to return ('I will arise and go'), and finishes with his return to God ('he arose and came'). This is followed by confession ('Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you'), which results in forgiveness ('Bring quickly the best robe'), adoption ('this my son'), and spiritual resurrection ('was dead, and is alive again'). Repentance is therefore a dynamic process, a way towards God, rather than a mere act of recognizing one's sins.**

**Every Christian has all of his sins forgiven in time of Baptism. However, 'there is no man who shall live and sin not'. Sins committed after Baptism deprive the person of the fulness of life in God. Hence the necessity of the 'second Baptism', the expression use by the Church Fathers for repentance, emphasizing its purifying, renovating and sanctifying energy.**

**The sacrament of Repentance is Spiritual healing for the soul. Every sin, depending on its gravity, is for the soul either a small injury, a deep wound, sometimes a serious disease, or perhaps even a fatal illness. In order to be Spiritually healthy, the person must regularly visit his father-confessor, a spiritual doctor - 'Have you sinned? Go to Church and repent your sin... Here is a physician, not a judge. Here nobody is condemned, but everybody receives forgiveness of sins', says St John Chrysostom.**

**From the very beginning of Christianity, it was the duty of the Apostles, and then of bishops and presbyters, to hear the confessions and to give absolution. Christ said to His Apostles: 'Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matt.18:18). The power of 'binding and loosing', which was given to the Apostles and through them to bishops and priests, is manifested in the absolution which the priest gives to the one who repents on behalf of God.**