

- **Where does the Bible say that the Church has the power to forgive sins?**

As one strives to comprehend the theology that underlies the sacrament of reconciliation, the first question that might be asked is: from where, or better from whom, does the Church's power to reconcile sinners arise? The short answer to that question, of course, is Jesus Christ. In both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of John, Jesus explicitly grants this power to his disciples. In Matthew we read "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter said in reply, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' ... 'And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'" In John we read, "On the evening of that first day of the week, ...[Jesus] said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'" The power to both loose and hold bound, then, is seen through this statement, a characteristic of the true nature of the Church.

It must first be noted that this role of the Church is subservient to the reality that God alone is the one who forgives our sins. The Church's role is to help facilitate this forgiveness by leading the sinner to recognize and repent of the sin he or she has committed. This role, though secondary to God, is still of utmost importance, for sin ultimately has a social dimension to it. There is, in a Christian context, no such thing as a truly private sin: all sin by its very nature affects the community. Therefore, it is appropriate for the community to have an important role in reconciling the person both with God and the community.