

Why Does the Church Exist?

The Church cannot be understood without knowing who Jesus is and what He came to do because the Church is a continuation of Jesus' mission. This great mission, the greatest in history, can be summarized in one word: reconciliation.

Now, the word "reconciliation" tends to make us think of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. While the sacrament is a part of Jesus' mission, it is not the fullness of the mission. The mission of reconciliation is something bigger, something more cosmic. To understand this, we have to take a look at what the word "reconciliation" actually means. It comes from the Latin word "reconcilare," which means to "bring together again," or, more literally, to "make friendly again." In other words, to reconcile means to bring back together something that has broken apart. Reconciliation is a work of restoration, a means of

reestablishing union. And it is this word that St. Paul uses to describe the work of Jesus:

“Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

God was seeking to reconcile the world to Himself through Jesus. But, if to reconcile means to bring together again, something must have been keeping us separated from God — sin. Before we can understand the role of sin in salvation history, we have to consider the reason God created us in the first place.

The story of creation begins with God’s love. God created us for relationship with Him and through this relationship, we are opened to a life of goodness

and happiness in union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this is the goal of our lives, to love and be loved by God. In order to create beings capable of love, though, God had to give us freedom because love is impossible without freedom.

Think about a time you experienced authentic love, the kind of love that is given without any expectations or conditions. If someone says, “I will only love you if...,” they do not really love you. We also know that we cannot force someone to love us because that would not be love, either.

God could have programed us to obey His every command, but such beings would be incapable of love. Love can never be forced or programmed; love has to be freely given and freely received. God created us free so we would be capable of entering into a loving relationship with Him.

This is where sin enters the story. From the very beginning, we have misused our freedom and acted in ways that are contrary to the life for which we were created. We were created free precisely because we were created for love, which means that our freedom has a purpose — it is to be directed toward what is good and true. When we sin, we use our freedom in