

“Stewards of Forgiveness” FR ANTHONY MCSWEENEY SSS

Fr Anthony (Tony) McSweeney SSS is a Blessed Sacrament Father at St Francis’ Church in the city of Melbourne, which is one of the busiest churches in the country. The city parish offers a range of pastoral support services and can receive up to 10,000 visitors in any given week. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is offered throughout the week, a ministry which Fr Tony is only too happy to offer. He says, “For me it’s a chance to meet people in their struggles, their suffering and their aspirations.”



POINTS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:

1. *“We all have doors inside that are locked very tightly ... if we can help each other unlock those doors... then a lot of mud comes out. And then there’s healing.”*
Do you resonate with this statement from Fr Tony? How so / why not?
2. Fr Tony reflects on his ministry as a Confessor and on the importance of listening. He says, *“One of the most touching things is when someone feels you’ve understood them.”* Have you encountered someone who is a good listener? How did that make you feel? What might you learn from that experience? Discuss.
3. Fr Tony draws on psychotherapy and neuroscience in his ministry to help people understand that *“many behaviours are compulsive. People can’t simply choose not to do them, it’s a process.... (yet) many people feel frustrated and angry with themselves when they don’t change.”* Have you ever experienced this yourself or with someone you know? How can we be more forgiving towards ourselves and others?
4. Reflecting on his ministry as a Confessor, Fr Tony says that *“every person is made in the image of God, and no matter what they’ve done wrong, that image is what we’ve got to keep in mind.”* He recalls Jesus’ invitation to welcome the ‘outcasts’ of society --- the encounter with the adulterous woman (John 8: 1-11), the woman at the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) and Zaccheus the tax collector (Luke 19:1-10). How are you challenged by this invitation?