

CONFESSION

THE STRUGGLE OF CONVERSION (Nos. 1420-1498)

In the sacraments of initiation, we are brought into new life with Christ:

by baptism, we are reborn spiritually in water and the Holy Spirit;

in confirmation, we are strengthened for Christian service through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;

in the Eucharist, we are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ.

Just as God did not create the world and leave it on its own, so too he does not bring us into a relationship with him and let us struggle by ourselves. He knows that we may fail along the journey back to him, that we will need healing when we fall short and sin against him.

It is for this reason that he has given us the sacraments of healing

reconciliation

anointing of the sick

These two sacraments are for the health, well-being, and healing of our bodies and souls. Because we are creatures who are both physical and spiritual, health and healing refer to the whole person.

Just as the real gift of **faith** we receive needs **catechesis** to actualize this faith in real acts of **intelligent assent**, the real gift of **love** that we receive needs **continual repentance** from influences that militate against it, if we are to love in deeds not just in om words.

To understand the sacrament of Confession (or Penance, or Reconciliation) we must understand sin, and the different types of sin. Sin separates us from the life of God. God is holy, and all who would approach Him must become holy. Sin is offensive to God, and is the cause of death. For a more descriptive definition of sin, see #1850 of the Catechism. Original sin, with which all people are born (having inherited it from Adam and Eve), is washed away at Baptism. But despite its being washed away, its effects still remain. The effects of original sin are a tendency toward sin, and this tendency is known as “concupiscence” (see Catechism #1264). Any sins committed after Baptism are removed through the sacrament of Confession. Read Genesis 3:7- 9, 23 and list and discuss the effects of sin found there.

THE WORK OF ON-GOING CONVERSION.

Every Ash Wednesday, Catholics are reminded to seek conversion in response to Jesus, who taught, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15):' Our word "repentance" often translates the New Testament Greek word, *metanoia*, which means a change of mind or heart, or simply "conversion:'

The Church describes the process of conversion in two ways.

The first conversion occurs at baptism, which removes sin, adopts us into God's family, fills us with grace, and sets us on a course toward eternal life. It is the foundation of Christian life.

The second, ongoing conversion may seem less glamorous by contrast, but is equally important: it is the living out of our baptismal promises, and our daily *metanoia* (conversion or repentance), to avoid evil and to cling to what is good.

Our ongoing conversion is greatly assisted by staying close to the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving are practices that counteract temptation and help Christians fight the

three-fold temptation that leads to the seven deadly sins.

Desire for pleasure:

Fasting helps us say no to our desires. Helps us detach from worldly desires and comforts

Desire for possessions:

Almsgiving helps us give away our possessions. Helps us extend love and compassion to others

Pride:

Prayer helps us humble ourselves before God; Helps us focus on God instead of our worries

The Catholic Church encourages these practices all year, especially during Lent, but they should be practiced all year.

The sins which we commit are called “**actual**” **sins**, and they are two types:

mortal (meaning deadly)

A mortal sin is any serious offense against God which causes serious damage to our neighbor; it is an offense against charity. Essentially, breaking any of the 10 Commandments is a mortal sin. To be culpable, that is, held responsible by God for a sin, three conditions must be met:

1. the sin is mortal (a serious offense)
2. the person has knowledge that it is a sin
3. the person wills to do it anyway.

All mortal sins must be confessed. Hiding sins from the priest is itself a sin, and makes the entire Confession invalid.

Even if a person is not culpable, this lack of culpability does not diminish the seriousness of the sin itself. For example, a young woman may have an abortion without realizing that what she is doing is wrong. Nonetheless, a life has been taken. If a person dies in a state of mortal sin, objectively speaking the soul goes to hell.

venial

Venial sins are lesser sins, which damage, but do not destroy our relationship with God, and do not strongly harm our neighbor. Read #1863 of the Catechism. An example might be shouting at your spouse, or taking a box of pens from work, or telling a “white lie.” Venial sins lead to mortal sins, and even though they are not a serious, are still contrary to God’s will and must be avoided.

Three things are required for a person to be validly forgiven:

1. contrition (true sorrow for sin),
2. hatred of the sin committed,
3. the resolve to sin no more (this means avoiding even situations which might tempt us).

Contrition is of two types:

perfect contrition - sorrow for sin because it has offended God and betrayed His love.

imperfect contrition - sorrow for sin out of fear of the loss of salvation and of the fear of punishment.

Absolution is the forgiveness which the priest imparts, and it takes away the eternal punishment due for mortal sin. However, some temporal punishment, or restitution, is due for the wrongdoing. This restitution is called “**penance**.” The priest will assign you a prayer, or some deed to perform which is an indication that your heart has been turned back to God and set on the right path.

Confession restores us to both God and His Church. When we sin, we offend God, and also do damage to the holiness of His Church: His people. There is no such thing as a sin which harms only the individual. Each individual is a member of the Body, the Church; so, even if one member is sick, the whole body suffers. Therefore, sin is against God and His Church; and Confession reconciles us to God and to one another. After a good Confession your soul is as clean as if you had just been baptized! Read #1468 of the Catechism.

HOW DO I GO TO CONFESSION?

The faithful are obliged to make a Confession at least once a year, during the Easter season. However, we must go to Confession without delay whenever we become aware of having committed a mortal sin.

1. The first step to making a Confession is to examine your conscience. Take some time, preferably in prayer, to think about your life since your last Confession, and make a list of the sins you need to confess.

You must confess all mortal sin, and should include the number of times you committed each one. Priests are bound to secrecy by the “seal” of Confession. This means that what you tell the priest during Confession is in sacred trust, and the priest will never divulge to anyone what he has heard in Confession, even if it means his own death. The priest is not permitted to speak to you later about your sins, unless you first bring them up to him, and give him permission to discuss them. A priest who breaks the seal of Confession is subject to excommunication and the removal of his priestly privileges.

2. When you enter the Confessional, the priest will begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You say:
“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been _ (amount of time) _ since my last Confession,
or “This is my first confession”
and these are my sins.”
3. After confessing your sins, the priest will address you briefly to encourage you to live a better life, and give advice on how to do so.
4. Then he will assign you a penance.
5. Once you have received a penance, say an Act of Contrition
6. the priest will absolve you of your sins and dismiss you.
7. Do your penance as soon as possible after leaving the Confessional.

WHAT DOES CONFESSION GAIN US?

1. Returns us to covenant communion with God
2. Reconciles us with the Church
3. Triple disharmony due to original sin (concupiscence) can be reduced by regular practice of confession
4. Simple celebration effects a miracle of incredible magnitude
5. Confession is final judgment practice

"I don't need to confess my sins to a priest; I can go straight to Jesus!"

Sacramental confession (confession to a priest within the sacrament of penance) offers advantages over private prayer alone. Chief among them is the direct grace received to cleanse and to heal sins. St. Jerome offers this analogy: "If the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know:"

In the confessional a person reveals his or her hidden wounds - his or her sins against God and others. The priest, acting in the place of Christ, forgives those sins out loud, and offers personal absolution to the penitent. Just as Jesus met and forgave and healed individuals one by one, so too does the priest heal and pray for you in an unmistakable way: "I absolve *you*." Just as we are baptized through the ministry of the Church, our sins are forgiven and we are reconciled to God through the Church.

The priest may also offer specific counsel for doing good and avoiding evil in the future. The roots of sin can be also be addressed in confession.

Finally, we cannot ignore the social dimensions of our sins. Therefore, other benefits of priestly confession are that it provides accountability to the Church in the form of its representative and that it restores our communion with the Church. The penance we perform signals our resolve and renewed commitment to Christ and the Church.

Confession occasionally causes embarrassment; reminds us that shame for our sins is healthy. God uses sacrament of reconciliation to make our former pride a reason for humility.

We need external signs of interior, spiritual realities and accountability.

INDULGENCES

Indulgences are pardons granted by the Church which remove all or part of the temporal punishment due for sin. Although the guilt – that is, the eternal punishment – of a sin is removed by Confession, the temporal punishment remains to be atoned for by some act of penance, either on earth or in purgatory. Because the Church is holy, she has an overabundance of graces which she can apply to her children. These graces are called indulgences, and they make up for, or take the place of, personal acts of penance or charitable deeds. They are granted by the Church on certain occasions or for certain specified acts. For example, a partial indulgence is granted to anyone who prays the Rosary publicly and prays for the Pope's intentions. Indulgences may be gained for the living or the dead.

** Handout on plenary indulgences during the Jubilee Year **

GLOSSARY TERMS

Acts of the Penitent

Refers to what a penitent must do in celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation: contrition (sorrow), confession, satisfaction (Nos. 1450-1460).

Conversion

"A radical reorientation of our whole life" (No. 1431) away from sin and evil and toward God; this change of heart or conversion is a central element of Christ's preaching, of the Church's ministry of evangelization, and the sacrament of penance and reconciliation.

Indulgence

The remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, the guilt of which has already been forgiven (see Nos. 1471-1479).

Penance

Interior penance is a conversion of heart toward God and away from sin, which implies the intention to change one's life because of hope in divine mercy (No. 1431); external acts of penance include fasting, prayer, and almsgiving (No. 1434); the observance of certain penitential practices is obliged by the fourth precept of the Church (No. 2043).

Satisfaction

An act in which a sinner makes amendment for sins; the penance given by the priest in the sacrament of reconciliation constitutes such satisfaction (Nos. 1459-1460).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss why we need the sacrament of reconciliation if we were reconciled with God through baptism?
2. Most of us are familiar with external penances (almsgiving, prayer, and fasting), but the *Catechism* reminds us that there must be a corresponding interior penance. What is interior penance?
3. What does the Church mean when she speaks of the satisfaction of our sins as an integral part of a full confession?
4. What role does the communion of saints play in our ongoing battle of conversion?
5. Discuss how your experience of the sacrament of reconciliation as an adult has changed or grown since your first confession?

HOMEWORK QUESTIONS

Name: _____

From the *Catechism*, Nos. 1420-1449

1. What two things do we receive from the sacrament of reconciliation?

1. _____

2. _____

2. If baptism cleanses us from original and personal sins, why is the sacrament of reconciliation necessary? _____

4. What does tradition call the inclination to sin? _____

5. "In imparting to his apostles his own power to _____, the Lord also gives them the _____ to reconcile sinners with the Church:'

From the *Catechism* Nos. 1449-1498

6. What are the three acts of the penitent in celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation?

7. Imperfect contrition (also known as _____) is also known as the "contrition of _____; 'whereas perfect contrition is the "contrition _____

8. Who is the minister of the sacrament of reconciliation? _____

9. What are some of the effects of the sacrament of reconciliation? _____

10. What is the "ordinary way" the sacrament of reconciliation is celebrated? _____
