

The Inestimable Gift of Divine Mercy!

(Taken from Fr. Winfrid Herbst, SDS 1953)

*Bless Me
Father,*



*For I Have
Sinned.*

The Sacrament of Penance is an abundant source of consolation and peace to every Christian soul. Confession means always an act of self-denial, as it is essentially an act of penance. Our Heavenly Father forgives the heaviest possible crimes, immediately and unrestrictedly when asked for mercy in the spirit of humility and contrition. God's infinite sanctity bars even the slightest compromise with sin. God hates sin infinitely. Hence, reconciliation with God and man is unthinkable so long as man stubbornly adheres to sin.

A good preparation is necessary for Confession. Daily spiritual reading and a careful daily examination of conscience are very important to forming a clear conscience. Pray to the Holy Ghost for light to know your sins, the strength to confess them and the grace to be truly sorry for them. Strive to go to Confession weekly or at least once a month. If you go every two weeks, you are eligible to gain all the indulgences and graces that are offered through Holy Communion on special Feasts and the offering of particular prayers and Novenas throughout the year which require Confession within the octave of the completed devotion. Under pain of Mortal Sin, you must make your Confession at least once in the year and receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season. You should confess your sin, the number of times it was committed and the circumstances under which it was committed, whether alone or with others.

For a good Confession, you must have sorrow for your sins. Contrition is a hearty sorrow for your sins and a firm determination never to commit them again. Sorrow must be interior; it must come from the heart and be felt in the soul. Tears, sighs and exterior signs are not necessary. See your sins to be the greatest of evils, detest them as you would a poisonous snake. You need not weep, sorrow is in the will. Your contrition must be universal: You must be sorry for every mortal sin; if you confess only venial sins, you must be sorry

for at least one of them. Contrition must be supernatural, not out of shame, but because you have offended Almighty God and lost grace and Heaven, and deserve Hell. If you are sorry because you have offended God, the best of Fathers, our loving Redeemer Who is all good, glorious, and amiable, your contrition is perfect. Imperfect contrition suffices to make a good confession.

Look upon Christ dying in agony on the Cross; Sin Nailed Him to It!

We must have a purpose of amendment to make a good Confession. This is a firm determination to change your life, avoid sin and have a definite resolve to suffer anything rather than commit a mortal sin. If you are resolved to avoid sin, you will be resolved to avoid the proximate occasion of sin - for instance, persons, places or times in which you are faced with temptation to sin. Resolve, always resolve to avoid every deliberate venial sin, for venial sins are the rungs on the ladder that lead to mortal sin! Always perform your Penance in a timely way. Be resolved to make good the wrong you have done. Perhaps, this will be restitution in goods, or in good name, or in soul, or by praying for those you have scandalized.

Confess your sins. Confession must be entire; you must tell all your mortal sins and if no mortal sin is present, at least one venial sin for which you are truly sorry. Your Confession must be clear, not vague. Give the sin, the circumstances and the number of times it was committed. Consider the Ten Commandments and confess your sins in that order. Be sure not to conceal, diminish or disguise your sins through false shame. Remember the silence of the Confessional is as the silence of the grave. No priest may ever reveal what he has heard in Confession. He may have to undergo torture or death, but he may not utter a single word he has heard in the Sacrament of Penance.

Accept the penance the priest gives you. In Confession, the eternal punishment due to sin is remitted, but the temporal punishment remains in whole or in part. The penance given is for the expiation, in part at least, for the temporal punishment due for your sins, and for the amendment of your life. Never sit, kneel or stand too close to the Confessional as you may inadvertently hear the confession of another.

The priest really does forgive sins in the Confessional. The dominant purpose of Christ is to seek and save sinners. Yes, only God can forgive a man who has sinned against God. But Jesus Christ is God; and the power of forgiving sins which is His, He gave to Peter and to the other Apostles to be used in His Name. ***"Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed in Heaven."*** (Matt 16:19) ***"Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."*** (John 20:22-23)

Christ gave this power to His Apostles and it was a power given to them in their official capacity as ambassadors of Christ, to be passed down through the Ages by apostolic succession, until the end of time. Can a priest forgive his own sin? No, he cannot! He, too, must go to Confession to another priest. The Pope and the bishops go to Confession regularly that their sins may be forgiven. From the beginning of time, there has been absolutely no sin, the remission of which has been refused to penitents by a universal law in the Catholic Church. The Church cannot by any means grant the right of refusing absolution to those who are guilty of sin no matter how great their crimes, provided they are rightly disposed. But, anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Ghost will not be forgiven, for it is morally impossible that he should meet the conditions for absolution. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is final impenitence and it frustrates, and is absolutely opposed to the remission of sins. Even God cannot pardon where there is no sorrow for sin. Man has a free will and God will never interfere with or force man's free will.

Through the Sacrament of Confession, the Holy Ghost will increase our self-knowledge, Christian humility will grow, bad habits will be corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity will be corrected, the conscience will be purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control attained and grace will be increased.

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all because I have offended Thee, my God Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy Grace to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.

Mortal sin strips our soul of the merits and graces of a life time. Everything is lost by mortal sin. But, how consoling this truth of our holy religion! Meritorious words revive when, through the forgiveness of mortal sin, grace is restored to the soul! All the merits of the pious works performed before the sinner fell while he was in the state of grace, are restored to the soul. God is so Good!!! But, while the soul is dead through mortal sin, it cannot gain one single favor from Heaven. How miserable and unhappy is the state of the sinner in mortal sin!

The amendment of our lives is the surest sign that our Confessions are good. If, since your last Confession you have been guilty of only venial sins, then include a grievous sin of your former life for which you are heartily sorry. In this way, even if your sorrow concerning the faults committed since your last confession should be somewhat wanting, you need not be disquieted about your confession or have doubts about whether you had sufficient sorrow for them. Form the firm resolution of never willingly offending God again.

The Sacrament of Confession was principally instituted for the forgiveness of mortal sin: and every mortal sin committed after Baptism must be confessed. Still, confession of venial sins is highly recommended by the Church as a great means of Christian perfection. By making frequent your confessions, you are exercising watchfulness over yourself and striving after perfection day by day. Through it, you will grow in His Love and His Grace. He that does not go forward in perfection will slip backwards. Here is a sort of model for devotional confession:

"Father, my last confession was a week ago. Since then, I have been slightly angry and have given expression to my feelings in unkind words. I have told three lies in unimportant matters, just to elevate myself in the estimation of others. And I wish to include in this Confession all the sins of my past life, especially the mortal sins I deliberately committed against the Sixth Commandment. I am sorry for these sins I have mentioned and I firmly resolve to avoid them in the future."

By the grace of God through frequent and sincere Confessions may you continually advance in holiness before God and Man!

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