

Confession – Don't take the easy way out

There is no such rule in the Anglican Church, that a priest can refuse communion to one of his parishioners who does not come to confession. In this sense, then, confession is not "compulsory." But what is the real significance of this? Simply that the Anglican Church has, rightly or wrongly, placed the responsibility of receiving the sacrament of Penance, when it is needed, upon the individual, and refrains from legislating on the subject. The removing of responsibility to the individual in no way excuses the parish priest from teaching his people definitely and clearly the necessity of the sacrament. In fact, it puts an additional responsibility upon him to teach most carefully, so that his people may not approach the altar in a state of serious sin. In the case of a person in danger of death, he is called upon to be even more insistent; the rubric directs that "the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins." In view of this rubric, an unbiased moralist could not fail to rule that a parish priest would be gravely remiss in his duties if he failed to impress upon the sick person the urgent necessity of making his confession.

In the ordinary course of parochial work it would appear that the priest will have performed his duty if he carefully explains to his people at frequent intervals, by sermons, addresses, and other suitable means, the importance of receiving this sacrament. If the people do not then respond to his teaching, the fault lies with them and not with him, as he has done his best to bring them to the sacrament. It is fatal to say the Penance is "optional." It is neither "optional" nor "compulsory."

Once a priest allows his people to assume that there are two ways of receiving absolution, one easy and the other hard, he may expect to find his confessional unfrequented, for he ministers to frail human beings who will almost inevitably attempt to "rationalize" their desires, and choose the easier way. – The Rev. Francis Belton

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Confessions are still regularly heard at St. Barnabas by the current rector The Reverend Father Robert F. Scheiblhofer as announced and by special appointment.