

APOSTLES OF THE REAL PRESENCE
Devoted to Restoring the Faith and Understanding in the Real Presence of
Jesus Christ in the Eucharist

GETTING COMFORTABLE IN CONFESSING MY SINS

Confession means acknowledgment. It is the acknowledgment of our sins which we must make to a priest to obtain our pardon from God. To confess is to go to a priest, a minister of Jesus Christ, and acknowledge to him, in simplicity and repentance, all the sins we have had the misfortune to commit. God wills that we confess; He Himself established Confession, And what He has established is permanent. When God came on earth, He chose a certain number of disciples, whom He made His priests. To these He gave the command to go and preach penance to all men-and He gave them and their successors, to the end of time, the power of pardoning sins in His name. Our Savior Jesus Christ raised confession to the dignity of a Sacrament, and established it in His Church, as an inexhaustible source of salvation and consolation, as the refuge of poor sinners and the support of human frailty. Have faith, and endeavor to see God concealed for your sake in the priest. It is to God, to Jesus Christ, that we confess when we acknowledge our sins to His representative. It is Jesus Christ who forgives us when the priest gives us sacramental absolution in His name. (Msgr. Louis Gaston de Segur, *Confession, A Little Book For The Reluctant*, Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, IL, 1-4, 13)

Jesus showed His Wisdom in providing for the forgiveness of sins through a priest because sometimes people are not sure what to confess, or how to confess, or if they are sorry enough, or if they are really forgiven. The priest understands the penitents concerns because he too is human, and therefore a sinner. The priest's role is to help the penitent make a good Confession, and to judge whether or not the penitent is truly guilty of sin and sorry. However, the priest also heals the one making his Confession, accepting his sorrow, pardoning his sin in the name of Christ, and reconciling him to God and the Church. Jesus also showed His Wisdom by making the telling of sins to a priest an integral part of Confession. There is something healing about telling your faults to another person (see James 5:16). (*The Little Catechism on Confession*, Catholic Bishop of Lincoln, NA, 29)

The Catholic Church requires that her members who have attained the "age of reason" (around age seven) make a Confession of their mortal sins at least once a year. Someone who knows he has committed a mortal sin should go to Confession as soon as possible. Cut off from God's Grace one cannot receive Holy Communion, nor merit for good things he does, and it is more difficult to resist future temptations without God's strength. Besides all that, why would anyone wait when "you know neither the day nor the hour" of death and judgment. (Matthew 25:13). (*The Little Catechism on Confession*, Catholic Bishop of Lincoln, NA, 34)

This obligation to make a good Confession once a year is like saying, "if you are a Catholic, you must at least do as much." However, more is better, especially since "this is the will of God, your sanctification." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) In fact, it is good spiritual practice to regularly make a Confession once a month, or even more frequently! Just look at some of the benefits of making a regular Confession: the certainty of having been forgiven; reconciliation with God and the Church; the gift of Sanctifying Grace is restored or strengthened; help to avoid sin in the future by sacramental graces received; advice on how to amend one's life is offered by the priest; the opportunity to take inventory of one's life; the opportunity to grow in self-knowledge; and the opportunity to unburden oneself of a guilty conscience and shame. (*The Little Catechism on Confession*, Catholic Bishop of Lincoln, NA, 35)

WHAT ARE THE GENERAL STEPS IN MAKING A GOOD CONFESSION? With trust in God's love and mercy, the penitent (the one making a Confession) prepares to seek forgiveness and reconciliation by doing the following: examining their conscience to know what sins to confess; expressing sorrow for their sins; resolving to never sin again; making a Confession of their sins to a priest; and doing the penance assigned to them by the priest in Confession.

Examination of Conscience: When preparing for Confession, a person first prays to the Holy Spirit to help them know their sins. They then think about the period of time since they made their last Confession. They try to remember all the times when they deliberately did something their conscience told them was bad, or did not do something it told was good. The best way to examine one's conscience is to check it against the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church, and to ask, "would Jesus desire, say, or do that?" They then make a mental list of all the mortal sins they have committed, and may also add any venial sins which they remember. The more frequent a person examines their conscience, the easier it is to do.

Sorrow for Sin: A person becomes a penitent when they remember their sins, recognizes that they are guilty, and are sorry for their sins. Guilt must not be confused with shame, which is a bad feeling most people have when their sins or crimes become known to others. They feel shame because their pride is wounded, and not so much because of what they did. Guilt, on the other hand, is a feeling of sorry for having committed a sin or crime. Guilt is not a "Catholic thing," nor is it a bad thing. A feeling of guilt shows that a person's conscience is normal and healthy. It is most important for a person to be sorry for their sins because there is no forgiveness without sorrow. To be sorry for committing sins means to hate them and to resolve never to sin again. All these things are expressed in the prayer called the *Act of Contrition* (another word for sorrow).

The Resolve to Never Sin Again: There is no true sorrow without the resolution to never sin again. Some people argue that there is not much point in making a Confession and resolving to never sin again because, as weak as human beings are, they will sin again. The same argument could be used against bathing or washing clothes, yet people wash themselves and their clothes regularly. Why? Because they want to present themselves as best as they can, and because they have self-respect. These are the same reasons why a person goes to Confession regularly, resolving to never sin again each time. The main reason is because of the warning the Lord Jesus gives: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) All a person can do is call on God for help and to keep trying to do good and avoid sin. That is all that God asks, and God who knows the thoughts of man, knows when there is an honest effort. (see Romans 2:15-16) Remember, when a person dies and appears before God to give an accounting of their life, God will not judge them according to their successes, but their efforts. (*The Little Catechism on Confession*, Catholic Bishop of Lincoln, NA, 24-28)

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