

A Mission Church

CONFESSION — WHO NEEDS IT?

*Confession, Penance & Reconciliation
are at the core of the sacrament*

Again, we get the straight talk from Jack Patnik, on a subject we think we can ignore. Jack is a catechist with our Adult Formation and RCIA programs, who shoots straight from a former lifestyle, like most of us, when the sacrament and its purpose was questioned and ignored. Enjoy!

Confession – who needs it?

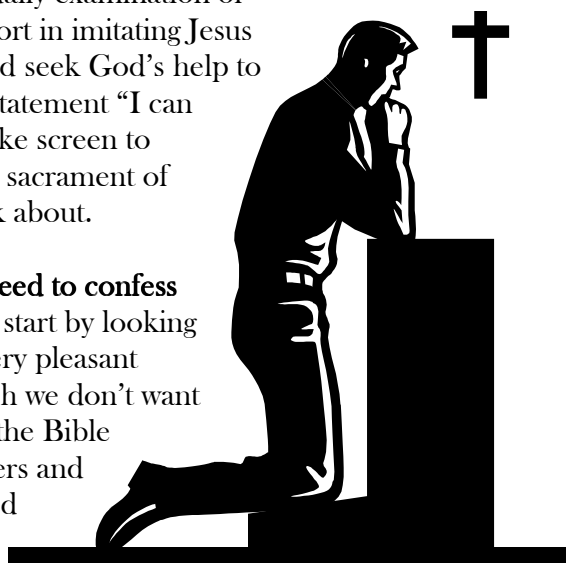
Lent certainly is a good time to ask that question. Most non-Catholic Christians (and many Catholics for that matter) would say that, “I can confess directly to God. I don’t need to confess to some man (priest).” Well this is partially true. But partial truths can be as damaging as flat out lies – maybe even more so.

We can (and should) confess directly to God. The Church calls all to conduct a daily examination of conscience, to see where we fell short in imitating Jesus that day, seek God’s forgiveness and seek God’s help to do better. Do we do that or is the statement “I can confess directly to God” just a smoke screen to avoid facing the theology about the sacrament of Reconciliation? Something to think about.

Let’s examine why we do need to confess to a priest (not just any man). Let’s start by looking at the nature of sin. This is not a very pleasant exercise as it reveals to us that which we don’t want revealed. For me, the key verse of the Bible explaining why I (and all my brothers and sisters) am not yet what God created me to be is Genesis 3: 5. Satan tells Eve while discussing God’s command to not eat from the Tree of Knowledge, “No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and **YOU WILL BE LIKE GODS KNOWING WHAT IS GOOD AND WHAT IS BAD.** We hate to face the truth. We work to hide the truth. We deny the truth. But the truth is that each and every one of us wants to be God. Oh, maybe we don’t

want the whole job, but knowing God is busy we’re willing to help Him out in the tiny little portion of the universe where we exist. He can rule the world. But He should let us help Him by letting us rule our lives, by letting us decide what is good and what is bad. This is particularly the case since I know what’s best for me. Every time we sin we follow our will rather than God’s, we decide what is good or bad rather than let God decide, we tell God thanks but no thanks I’ll call the shots.

You might be thinking, “Oh that’s such a brutal way to view things. It makes our “slight indiscretions” seem so monstrous.” Since these “slight indiscretions” (sins are what they are) are an offense against God, the all perfect, the all knowing, the all powerful, the all holy source and sustainer of our life, and rupture the communion that we have with Him, they’re damned (word used specifically) monstrous. This needs to be taken seriously and not just sloughed off.



Man sinned. God, the Second Person of the Triune God, came to earth as Jesus of Nazareth to save us from our sins. Jesus returned to Heaven but did not leave us abandoned. He left us his Church as His physical presence as He would no longer be here physically with us. This is why St. Paul repeatedly refers to the Church as the Body of Christ. (There are at least 10 references as such in Romans, First Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians).

When Jesus founded His Church He said in Matthew 16:18 “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” That’s some pretty good protection. The power of Hell cannot overcome the Church or cause her to error in faith or morals. Wow. But there’s more. In Matthew 16:19

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Jesus says, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." Again wow. If Peter forgives it is forgiven in Heaven. If Peter doesn't forgive there is no forgiveness in Heaven.

Later in Matthew 18:18 and John 20:21-23 extends this power to the Apostles. Why did Jesus do this? Well only He knows for sure, and maybe you'll get the chance to ask Him. But the fact is that He did do it. But although He gave the Apostles the power to forgive sin or NOT forgive sin, He did not give the Apostles the power to read minds. So the Apostles could only forgive sins if forgiveness was sought, that is if some one came to them and asked for forgiveness. But who would forgive a person of an unknown transgression? In order to forgive someone a person needs to know what the transgression is, the sorrow of the transgressor and the transgressor's willingness to cease such action. That sure sounds like the sacrament of reconciliation to me.

Now you might be thinking, "So OK that's what the Bible says, but that power was only given to the Apostles. The Apostles are dead and gone. So there is no longer a need to confess to another person." Let's think about this. Jesus founded the Church and its still here. Jesus didn't just give us the Church for Peter's lifetime. That makes no sense. We need the Church even more than the believers of Peter's time did because none of us experienced the physical Jesus. So why would we think that there is no power to forgive sins once the Apostles were all dead. It is illogical for Jesus to have given that power for a restricted period of time. They needed it but we don't? That's insane.

So let's go back to the initial question, "Confession - who needs it?" We do, or Jesus wouldn't have given it to us.

Let's look at why we need confession.

[1]. When we sin we sin against God as sin is primarily an offense against God that ruptures our communion with Him. But the Church is the Body of Christ that brings God to us through the sacraments especially the Eucharist. So if sin ruptures our communion with God, it also ruptures our communion with the Church. So not only must we seek God's forgiveness but must also seek the forgiveness of the Church God's chosen vehicle of salvation. We must go to the Church and seek forgiveness and to be reconciled with the Church. Luckily we can go to the

Church's representative (the priest) and not the entire Church.

[2]. Any and all sins are grave because they are an offense against the Lord of the universe. That means forgiveness is not cheap. Jesus paid a dear price for our sins. Can we expect to be forgiven just because? Don't we need sorrow/contrition for our sins? Don't we need to repent of our sins? How do we show contrition and repentance? Is it by looking Heavenward and saying, "Hey God how about forgiving me?" That's akin to being out on the golf course, cheating on your score, looking to the green and thinking "Hey guys how about forgiving my cheating?" That's cheap, cowardly and just doesn't cut it.

[3]. Why do I sin? I sin because my pride drives me to think that I am God and can call the shots. What's the only way virtue that can defeat my pride? Humility is the nuclear weapon in the war against my sinful pride. Incidentally if you think you don't sin your pride really needs to get bombed into oblivion by humility. No humility no holiness. No holiness no Heaven. It's that simple. We need to seek out that humility. We need to humble ourselves. What is more humbling than going to another and confessing that we are not the person that we should be or even the person we pretend to be? The only thing more humbling is going to another and admitting that we know that the person we are, and seem to be, is not what we want to be. Jesus knew this so He gave us this sacrament to help us grow in humility.

[4]. We are all prodigal sons/daughters. We need to be forgiven. But we also need to hear that we've been forgiven. Some people pay lots of money to psychiatrists and/or psychologists for help to get out from under their guilt. And this is often times necessary and can't be minimized. But neither can we minimize the truth that we all need to come clean and hear those most wonderful words of the priest acting *in persona Christi*, "I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Just typing that last quote gives me goose bumps and brings a joyful tear to my eye. So this seems like a good place to quit. Hope to see you at Confession soon and often.

