

CONFESSION

To set this world spinning the right way round, I think we Catholics need to do just one thing: Start going to confession again. Then take our kids to confession - Once a month would be OK, once a week even better. Don't believe me? Then ask a group of Grade 10 teens who went to Confession a short while ago. I'm sure we could change the world if you could just get our kids alone to go to confession,.

I am in my fortieth year as a Catholic priest and I love hearing confessions during these years of my priestly life. I have experienced fatherhood in a special way whenever I've heard confessions and granted absolution from sin to repentant souls. For the priest to forgive mortal sin in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and bring us all back to supernatural life is a greater act than if God permitted him to restore physical life to a man who laid there as a dead corpse.

Pope Pius XII [1939-1958] said, "Mankind is losing its sense of sin." Pope John Paul II [1978-2005] said, "Mankind has lost its sense of sin." Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the need for confession. The corruption of sin is evident everywhere in the world. This is evident even among some who consider themselves practicing Catholics, but go to Holy Communion without first making a good confession after sins such as fornication, masturbation, adultery, deliberate drunkenness, serious dishonesties in business dealings, neglect of the family, and financing by poor planning. How many today realize that it is seriously sinful to deliberately entertain unclean thoughts with no effort to control the mind and imagination? Jesus said that if a man even looks at a woman with lust he has already committed that sin. All mortal sins, of which penitents after diligent self-examination are conscious, must be recounted by them in confession even if they are most secret. [Catechism of the Catholic Church 1456]

According to the Church's command, "After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year." Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution. [CCC 1457] Children must go to the sacrament of penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time. [CCC 1457] Going to Holy Communion with mortal sin on the soul is another mortal sin called a sacrilege. What about going to confession when only venial or every day, small faults have been committed? Without being strictly necessary the Church nevertheless encourages confession for spiritual growth.

To make a good confession one must confess all mortal sins and circumstances which may change their nature. It would be a bad or sacrilegious confession to deliberately conceal or not to confess a known mortal sin. One could fool a priest, but not God who is really the one who forgives sin through the instrumentality of the priest, who by ordination in Holy Orders has the indelible mark of Christ's priesthood sealed on his soul forever. In addition to confessing our sins we must have contrition for them.

Contrition is sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the sincere resolution not to commit the sin again. Sorrow (contrition) for sin may be perfect or imperfect. Perfect sorrow is the ideal sorrow and is based on love of God whom one has offended. Imperfect sorrow is a gift from God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit, and comes from the fear of eternal damnation. The act of contrition is a free decision that includes a detestation of and grief for sins committed and also a determination not to sin again. This detestation is an act of the will that causes the sinner to regret having committed the sin.

Before going to confession one ought to examine his or her conscience based on the light of the Word of God, the Bible, and the teaching of the Church. One must be willing to do the penance the priest gives him. The penance is to help make satisfaction to God and neighbor whom one has offended. For example, the return of stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, and pay compensation for injuries. Such is required by the justice of God. Sin weakens oneself and often harms one's neighbor. All sin is social in the sense that it offends the church of God of which we are members. This is why confession is also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It reconciles the sinner with God and the Church.

ABSOLUTION With the priest's absolution, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," sin is washed from the soul of the penitent, yet the disorder or weakness we inherited with original sin remains and this weakness must be fought against for our entire lifetime. Those who make a good confession leave with peace of soul.