

Confession: Be Not Afraid
Holy Angels Adult Education
Monday, November 16, 2009

1. Why are we afraid of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Penance, or Confession?
 - a. Embarrassment
 - b. Humiliation
 - c. Admitting wrong
 - d. Bad experiences
 - e. Afraid of what the priest will say
2. What does society say about this sacrament
 - a. I'm okay, you're okay
 - b. As long as it feels good
 - c. I am not really hurting anyone
 - d. Only have to go to God
3. What does the Church say about the Sacrament
 - a. How often do we have to go?
 - b. Is there a benefit in feeling embarrassed
 - c. Catholic guilt
 - d. Why is it good to go to the priest
4. What are the benefits of going to confession
 - a. Right relationship with God
 - b. Feel relief
 - c. Some spiritual direction
 - d. Help on journey of faith
5. What should happen before the sacrament
 - a. How should I prepare
 - b. What is an examination of conscience
 - c. What is true contrition
 - d. What is a mortal sin
 - e. What is a venial sin
6. What happens during the sacrament
 - a. What should I say
 - b. What should I do
 - c. Which Act of Contrition
 - d. What is my penance, why do I have a penance
 - e. How do I know my sins are forgiven/what is absolution
7. What should I do after I leave the confessional
 - a. Penance
 - b. Resolve to sin no more
 - c. Pray for strength to overcome temptation to sin
 - d. Pray for others who are going to confession or those who are afraid to go

Guide for a good Confession

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

1. *I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.*

- Do I give God time every day in prayer?
- Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
- Have I been involved with superstitious practices or have I been involved with the occult?
- Do I seek to surrender myself to God's word as taught by the Church?
- Have I ever received communion in the state of mortal sin?
- Have I ever deliberately told a lie in Confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?
- Are there other "gods" in my life? Money, Security, Power, People, etc.?

2. *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*

- Have I used God's name in vain: lightly or carelessly?
- Have I been angry with God?
- Have I wished evil upon any other person?
- Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object?

3. *Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.*

- Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation?
- Have I tried to observe Sunday as a family day and a day of rest?
- Do I do needless work on Sunday?

4. *Honor your father and your mother.*

- Do I honor and obey my parents?
- Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
- Have I given my family good religious example?
- Do I try to bring peace into my home life?
- Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?

5. *You shall not kill.*

- Have I had an abortion or encouraged or helped anyone to have an abortion?
- Have I physically harmed anyone?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs?
- Did I give scandal to anyone, thereby leading him or her into sin?
- Have I been angry or resentful?
- Have I harbored hatred in my heart?
- Have I mutilated myself through any form of sterilization?
- Have I encouraged or condoned sterilization?

6. *You shall not commit adultery.*

- Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thought and action?
- Have I engaged in any sexual activity outside of marriage?
- Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control in my marriage?
- Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life?
- Have I been guilty of masturbation?
- Do I seek to control my thoughts and imaginations?
- Have I been guilty of any homosexual activity?
- Do I seek to be chaste in my thoughts, words, actions?
- Am I careful to dress modestly?

7. *You shall not steal.*

- Have I stolen what is not mine?
- Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?
- Do I waste time at work, school, and home?
- Do I pay my debts promptly?
- Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?
- Have I cheated anyone out of what is justly theirs, for example creditors, insurance companies, big corporations?

8. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

- Have I lied? Have I gossiped?
- Do I speak badly of others behind their back?
- Am I sincere in my dealings with others?
- Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
- Have I injured the reputation of others by slanders?

9. *You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.*

- Have I consented to impure thoughts?
- Have I caused them by impure reading, movies, television, conversation or curiosity?
- Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations?
- Have I behaved in an inappropriate way with members of the opposite sex: flirting, being superficial, etc.?

10. *You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.*

- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Do I envy the families or possessions of others?
- Am I greedy or selfish?
- Are material possessions the purpose of my life?

A GUIDE TO CONFESSION

How to go to Confession

1. You always have the option to go to confession anonymously, that is, behind a screen or face to face, if you so desire.
2. Make the sign of the cross. He may choose to recite a reading from Scripture, after which you say: "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how long) since my last confession. These are my sins."
3. Tell your sins simply and honestly to the priest. You might even want to discuss the circumstances and the root causes of your sins and ask the priest for advice or direction.
4. Listen to the advice the priest gives you and accept the penance from him. Then make an Act of Contrition for your sins.
5. The priest will then dismiss you with the words of praise: "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. You respond: "For His mercy endures forever." The priest will then conclude with:"The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace." And you respond by saying: "Thanks be to God."
6. Spend some time with Our Lord thanking and praising Him for the gift of His mercy. Try to perform your penance as soon as possible.

PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

O most merciful God! Prostrate at your feet, I implore your forgiveness. I sincerely desire to leave all my evil ways and to confess my sins with all sincerity to you and to your priest. I am a sinner, have mercy on me, O Lord. Give me a lively faith and a firm hope in the Passion of my Redeemer. Give me, for your mercy's sake a sorrow for having offended so good a God. Mary, my mother, refuge of sinners, pray for me that I may make a good confession. Amen.

AN ACT OF CONTRITION

Oh my God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong
And failing to do good,
I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ
suffered and died for us.
In His name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

CHAPTER TWO

THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

ARTICLE 4

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

1422 "Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion."⁴

I. WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?

1423 It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father⁵ from whom one has strayed by sin.

It is called the *sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.

1424 It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."⁶

It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God."⁷ He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."⁸

II. WHY A SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AFTER BAPTISM?

1425 "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."⁹ One must appreciate the magnitude of the gift God has given us in the sacraments of Christian initiation in order to grasp the degree to which sin is excluded for him who has "put on Christ."¹⁰ But the apostle John also says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."¹¹ And the Lord himself taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses,"¹² linking our forgiveness of one another's offenses to the forgiveness of our sins that God will grant us.

1426 *Conversion* to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us "holy and without blemish," just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is "holy and without blemish."¹³ Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life.¹⁴ This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.¹⁵

III. THE CONVERSION OF THE BAPTIZED

1427 Jesus calls to conversion. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."¹⁶ In the Church's preaching this call is addressed first to those who do not yet know Christ and his Gospel. Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism¹⁷ that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life.

1428 Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal."¹⁸ This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.¹⁹

1429 St. Peter's conversion after he had denied his master three times bears witness to this. Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter and, after the Lord's resurrection, a threefold affirmation of love for him.²⁰ The second conversion also has a *communitarian* dimension, as is clear in the Lord's call to a whole Church: "Repent!"²¹ St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, "there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance."²²

IV. INTERIOR PENANCE

1430 Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the *conversion of the heart, interior conversion*. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.²³

1431 Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart).²⁴

1432 The human heart is heavy and hardened. God must give man a new heart.²⁵ Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: "Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!"²⁶ God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.²⁷

Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance.

1433 Since Easter, the Holy Spirit has proved "the world wrong about sin,"²⁹ i.e., proved that the world has not believed in him whom the Father has sent. But this same Spirit who brings sin to light is also the Consoler who gives the human heart grace for repentance and conversion.³⁰

V. THE MANY FORMS OF PENANCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

1434 The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*,³¹ which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity "which covers a multitude of sins."³²

1435 Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right,³³ by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.³⁴

1436 *Eucharist and Penance.* Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrifice of Christ which has reconciled us with God. Through the Eucharist those who live from the life of Christ are fed and strengthened. "It is a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sins."³⁵

1437 Reading Sacred Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Our Father - every sincere act of worship or devotion revives the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of our sins.

1438 *The seasons and days of penance* in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice.³⁶ These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works).

1439 *The process of conversion and repentance* was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father:³⁷ the fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy - all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life - pure worthy, and joyful - of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart Of Christ Who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way.

VI. THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

1440 Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.³⁸

Only God forgives sin

1441 Only God forgives sins.³⁹ Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven."⁴⁰ Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.⁴¹

1442 Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the "ministry of reconciliation."⁴² The apostle is sent out "on behalf of Christ" with "God making his appeal" through him and pleading: "Be reconciled to God."⁴³

Reconciliation with the Church

1443 During his public life Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A

remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at his table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.⁴⁴

1444 In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ's solemn words to Simon Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."⁴⁵ "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of the apostles united to its head."⁴⁶

1445 The words *bind and loose* mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. *Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.*

The sacrament of forgiveness

1446 Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace."⁴⁷

1447 Over the centuries the concrete form in which the Church has exercised this power received from the Lord has varied considerably. During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism (for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery) was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this "order of penitents" (which concerned only certain grave sins), one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the "private" practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day.

1448 Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same *fundamental structure* is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; on the other, God's action through the intervention of the Church. The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.

1449 The formula of absolution used in the Latin Church expresses the essential elements of this sacrament: the Father of mercies is the source of all forgiveness. He effects the reconciliation of sinners through the Passover of his Son and the gift of his Spirit, through the prayer and ministry of the Church:

God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and the resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

VII. THE ACTS OF THE PENITENT

1450 "Penance requires . . . the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction."⁴⁹

Contrition

1451 Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."⁵⁰

1452 When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.⁵¹

1453 The contrition called "imperfect" (or "attrition") is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear). Such a stirring of conscience can initiate an interior process which, under the prompting of grace, will be brought to

completion by sacramental absolution. By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance.⁵²

1454 The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an *examination of conscience* made in the light of the Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the Ten Commandments, the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings.⁵³

The confession of sins

1455 The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.

1456 Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly."⁵⁴

When Christ's faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know."⁵⁵

1457 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."⁵⁶ 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, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession.⁵⁷ Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.⁵⁸

1458 Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.⁵⁹ Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful.⁶⁰

Whoever confesses his sins . . . is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: when you hear "man" - this is what God has made; when you hear "sinner" - this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made. . . . When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light.⁶¹

Satisfaction

1459 Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.⁶² Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

1460 The *penance* the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him."⁶³

The satisfaction that we make for our sins, however, is not so much ours as though it were not done through Jesus Christ. We who can do nothing ourselves, as if just by ourselves, can do all things with the cooperation of "him who strengthens" us. Thus man has nothing of which to boast, but all our boasting is in Christ . . . in whom we make satisfaction by bringing forth "fruits that befit repentance." These fruits have their efficacy from him, by him they are offered to the Father, and through him they are accepted by the Father.⁶⁴

VIII. THE MINISTER OF THIS SACRAMENT

1461 Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation,⁶⁵ bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

1462 Forgiveness of sins brings reconciliation with God, but also with the Church. Since ancient times the bishop, visible head of a particular Church, has thus rightfully been considered to be the one who principally has the power and ministry of reconciliation: he is the moderator of the penitential discipline.⁶⁶ Priests, his collaborators, exercise it to the extent that

they have received the commission either from their bishop (or religious superior) or the Pope, according to the law of the Church.⁶⁷

1463 Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe ecclesiastical penalty, which impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place or priests authorized by them. In danger of death any priest, even if deprived of faculties for hearing confessions, can absolve from every sin and excommunication.⁶⁹

1464 Priests must encourage the faithful to come to the sacrament of Penance and must make themselves available to celebrate this sacrament each time Christians reasonably ask for it.⁷⁰

1465 When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.

1466 The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ.⁷¹ He should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior, experience of human affairs, respect and sensitivity toward the one who has fallen; he must love the truth, be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, and lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity. He must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy.

1467 Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives.⁷² This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the "sacramental seal," because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains "sealed" by the sacrament.

IX. THE EFFECTS OF THIS SACRAMENT

1468 "The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship."⁷³ Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation."⁷⁴ Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true "spiritual resurrection," restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God.⁷⁵

1469 This sacrament *reconciles us with the Church*. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members.⁷⁶ Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland:⁷⁷

It must be recalled that . . . this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation.⁷⁸

1470 In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way *the judgment* to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin.⁷⁹ In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and "does not come into judgment."⁸⁰

X. INDULGENCES

1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.

What is an indulgence?

"An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."⁸¹

"An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin."⁸² The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.^{NT}

The punishments of sin

1472 To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has a *double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal

punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain.⁸³

1473 The forgiveness of sin and restoration of communion with God entail the remission of the eternal punishment of sin, but temporal punishment of sin remains. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man."⁸⁴

In the Communion of Saints

1474 The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."⁸⁵

1475 In the communion of saints, "a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things."⁸⁶ In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin.

1476 We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*, which is "not the sum total of the material goods which have accumulated during the course of the centuries. On the contrary the 'treasury of the Church' is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy."⁸⁷

1477 "This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission in the unity of the Mystical Body."⁸⁸

Obtaining indulgence from God through the Church

1478 An indulgence is obtained through the Church who, by virtue of the power of binding and loosing granted her by Christ Jesus, intervenes in favor of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity.⁸⁹

1479 Since the faithful departed now being purified are also members of the same communion of saints, one way we can help them is to obtain indulgences for them, so that the temporal punishments due for their sins may be remitted.

XI. THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

1480 Like all the sacraments, Penance is a liturgical action. The elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, reading the word of God to illuminate the conscience and elicit contrition, and an exhortation to repentance; the confession, which acknowledges sins and makes them known to the priest; the imposition and acceptance of a penance; the priest's absolution; a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and dismissal with the blessing of the priest.

1481 The Byzantine Liturgy recognizes several formulas of absolution, in the form of invocation, which admirably express the mystery of forgiveness: "May the same God, who through the Prophet Nathan forgave David when he confessed his sins, who forgave Peter when he wept bitterly, the prostitute when she washed his feet with her tears, the publican, and the prodigal son, through me, a sinner, forgive you both in this life and in the next and enable you to appear before his awe-inspiring tribunal without condemnation, he who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen."

1482 The sacrament of Penance can also take place in the framework of a *communal celebration* in which we prepare ourselves together for confession and give thanks together for the forgiveness received. Here, the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common. This communal celebration expresses more clearly the ecclesial character of penance. However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesial and public action.⁹⁰

1483 In case of grave necessity recourse may be had to a *communal celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution*. Grave necessity of this sort can arise when there is imminent danger of death without sufficient time for the priest or priests to hear each penitent's confession. Grave necessity can also exist when, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors to hear individual confessions properly in a reasonable time, so that the penitents through no fault of their own would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In this case, for the absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of individually confessing their grave sins in the time required.⁹¹ The diocesan bishop is the judge of whether or not the conditions required for general absolution exist.⁹² A large gathering of the faithful on the occasion of major feasts or pilgrimages does not constitute a case of grave necessity.⁹³

1484 "Individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the Church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession."⁹⁴ There are

profound reasons for this. Christ is at work in each of the sacraments. He personally addresses every sinner: "My son, your sins are forgiven."⁹⁵ He is the physician tending each one of the sick who need him to cure them.⁹⁶ He raises them up and reintegrates them into fraternal communion. Personal confession is thus the form most expressive of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

IN BRIEF

1485 "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week," Jesus showed himself to his apostles. "He breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (*Jn* 20:19, 22-23).

1486 The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by a particular sacrament called the sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation.

1487 The sinner wounds God's honor and love, his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and the spiritual well-being of the Church, of which each Christian ought to be a living stone.

1488 To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world.

1489 To return to communion with God after having lost it through sin is a process born of the grace of God who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men. One must ask for this precious gift for oneself and for others.

1490 The movement of return to God, called conversion and repentance, entails sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed, and the firm purpose of sinning no more in the future. Conversion touches the past and the future and is nourished by hope in God's mercy.

1491 The sacrament of Penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest's absolution. The penitent's acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.

1492 Repentance (also called contrition) must be inspired by motives that arise from faith. If repentance arises from love of charity for God, it is called "perfect" contrition; if it is founded on other motives, it is called "imperfect."

1493 One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church, must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience. The confession of venial faults, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.

1494 The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of "satisfaction" or "penance" to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ.

1495 Only priests who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ.

1496 The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are:

- reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace;
- reconciliation with the Church;
- remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins;
- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin;
- peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation;
- an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

1497 Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and with the Church.

1498 Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory.

4 LG 11 # 2.

5 Cf. Mk 1:15; Lk 15:18.

6 OP 46 formula of absolution.

7 2 Cor 5:20.

8 MT 5:24.

9 1 Cor 6:11.

10 Gal 3:27.

11 1 Jn 1:8.

12 Cf. Lk 11:4; Mt 6:12.

13 Eph 1:4; 5:27.

14 Cf. Council of Trent (1546) DS 1515.

15 Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1545; LG 40.

16 Mk 1:15.

17 Cf. Acts 2:38.

18 LG 8 # 3.

19 Ps 51:17; cf. Jn 6:44; 12:32; 1 Jn 4:10.

20 Cf. Lk 22:61; Jn 21:15-17.

21 Rev 2:5, 16.

22 St. Ambrose, ep. 41, 12; PL 16, 1116.

23 Cf. Joel 2:12-13; Isa 1:16-17; Mt 6:1-6; 16-18.

24 Cf. Council Of Trent (1551) DS 1676-1678; 1705; Cf.

Roman Catechism, II, V, 4.

25 Cf. Ezek 36:26-27.

26 Lam 5:21.

27 Cf. Jn 19:37; Zech 12:10.

28 St. Clement Of Rome, Ad Cor. 7, 4 PG 1, 224.

- 29 Cf. Jn 16:8-9.
- 30 Cf. Jn 15:26; Acts 2:36-38; John Paul II, DeV 27-48.
- 31 Cf. Tob 12:8; Mt 6:1-18.
- 32 1 Pet 4:8; Cf. Jas 5:20.
- 33 Cf. Am 5:24; Isa 1:17.
- 34 Cf. Lk 9:23.
- 35 Council Of Trent (1551) DS 1638.
- 36 Cf. SC 109-110; CIC, cann. 1249-1253; CCEO, Cann. 880-883.
- 37 Cf. Lk 15:11-24.
- 38 Cf. LG 11.
- 39 Cf. Mk 2:7.
- 40 Mk 2:5, 10; Lk 7:48.
- 41 Cf. Jn 20:21-23.
- 42 2 Cor 5:18.
- 43 2 Cor 5:20.
- 44 Cf. Lk 15; 19:9.
- 45 Mt 16:19; cf. Mt 18:18; 28:16-20.
- 46 LG 22 # 2.
- 47 Tertullian, De Paenit. 4, 2: PL 1,1343; cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1542.
- 48 OP 46: formula of absolution.
- 49 Roman Catechism II, V, 21; cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1673.
- 50 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1676.
- 51 Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1677.
- 52 Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1678; 1705.
- 53 Cf. Mt 5-7; Rom 12-15; 1 Cor 12-13; Gal 5; Eph 4-6; etc.
- 54 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1680 (ND 1626); cf. Ex 20:17; Mt 5:28.
- 55 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1680 (ND 1626); cf. St. Jerome, In Eccl. 10, 11: PL 23:1096.
- 56 Cf. CIC, Can. 989; Council of Trent (1551): DS 1683; DS 1708.
- 57 Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1647; 1661; CIC, can. 916; CCEO, can. 711.
- 58 Cf. CIC, can. 914.
- 59 Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1680; CIC, can. 988 # 2.
- 60 Cf. Lk 6:36.
- 61 St. Augustine, In Jo. ev. 12, 13: PL 35, 1491.
- 62 Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712.
- 63 Rom 8:17; Rom 3:25; 1 Jn 2:1-2; cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1690.
- 64 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1691; cf. Phil 4:13; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17; Gal 6:14; Lk 3:8.
- 65 Cf. In 20:23; 2 Cor 5:18.
- 66 Cf. LG 26 # 3.
- 67 Cf. CIC cann. 844; 967-969; 972; CCEO, can. 722 ## 3-4.
- 68 Cf. CIC, cann. 1331; 1354-1357; CCEO, can. 1431; 1434; 1420.
- 69 Cf. CIC, can. 976; CCEO, can. 725.
- 70 Cf. CIC, can. 486; CCEO, can. 735; PO 13.
- 71 Cf. PO 13.
- 72 Cf. CIC, can. 1388 # 1; CCEO, can. 1456.
- 73 Roman Catechism, II, V, 18.
- 74 Council of Trent (1551): DS 1674.
- 75 Cf. Lk 15:32.
- 76 Cf. 1 Cor 12:26.
- 77 Cf. LG 48-50.
- 78 John Paul II, RP 31, 5.
- 79 Cf. 1 Cor 5:11; Gal 5:19-21; Rev 22:15.
- 80 Jn 5:24.
- 81 Paul VI, apostolic constitution, Indulgentiarum doctrina, Norm 1.
- 82 Indulgentiarum doctrina, Norm 2; Cf. Norm 3.
- 83 Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712-1713; (1563): 1820.
- 84 Eph 4:22, 24.
- 85 Indulgentiarum doctrina, 5.
- 86 Indulgentiarum doctrina, 5.
- 87 Indulgentiarum doctrina, 5.
- 88 Indulgentiarum doctrina, 5.
- 89 Cf. Indulgentiarum doctrina, 5.
- 90 Cf. SC 26-27.
- 91 Cf. CIC, can. 962 #1.
- 92 Cf. CIC, can. 961 # 2.
- 93 Cf. CIC, can. 961 # 1.
- 94 OP 31.
- 95 Mk 2:5.
- 96 Cf. Mk 2:17.
- NT CIC, can. 994.

Q. 721. What is the Sacrament of Penance?

A. Penance is a Sacrament in which the sins committed after Baptism are forgiven.

Q. 722. Has the word Penance any other meaning?

A. The word Penance has other meanings. It means also those punishments we inflict upon ourselves as a means of atoning for our past sins; it means likewise that disposition of the heart in which we detest and bewail our sins because they were offensive to God.

Q. 723. How does the institution of the Sacrament of Penance show the goodness of Our Lord?

A. The institution of the Sacrament of Penance shows the goodness of Our Lord, because having once saved us through Baptism, He might have left us to perish if we again committed sin.

Q. 724. What are the natural benefits of the Sacrament of Penance?

A. The natural benefits of the Sacrament of Penance are: It gives us in our confessor a true friend, to whom we can go in all our trials and to whom we can confide our secrets with the hope of obtaining advice and relief.

Q. 725. How does the Sacrament of Penance remit sin, and restore to the soul the friendship of God?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits sin and restores the friendship of God to the soul by means of the absolution of the priest.

Q. 726. What is Absolution?

A. Absolution is the form of prayer or words the priest pronounces over us with uplifted hand when he forgives the sins we have confessed. It is given while we are saying the Act of Contrition after receiving our Penance.

Q. 727. Does the priest ever refuse absolution to a penitent?

A. The priest must and does refuse absolution to a penitent when he thinks the penitent is not rightly disposed for the Sacrament. He sometimes postpones the absolution till the next confession, either for the good of the penitent or for the sake of better preparation -- especially when the person has been a long time from confession.

Q. 728. What should a person do when the priest has refused or postponed absolution?

A. When the priest has refused or postponed absolution, the penitent should humbly submit to his decision, follow his instructions, and endeavor to remove whatever prevented the giving of the absolution and return to the same confessor with the necessary dispositions and resolution of amendment.

Q. 729. Can the priest forgive all sins in the Sacrament of Penance?

A. The priest has the power to forgive all sins in the Sacrament of Penance, but he may not have the authority to forgive all. To forgive sins validly in the Sacrament of Penance, two things are required:

1. The power to forgive sins which every priest receives at his ordination, and

1. The right to use that power which must be given by the bishop, who authorizes the priest to hear confessions and pass judgment on the sins.

Q. 730. What are the sins called which the priest has no authority to absolve?

A. The sins which the priest has no authority to absolve are called reserved sins. Absolution from these sins can be obtained only from the bishop, and sometimes only from the Pope, or by his special permission. Persons having a reserved sin to confess cannot be absolved from any of their sins till the priest receives faculties or authority to absolve the reserved sin also.

Q. 731. Why is the absolution from some sins reserved to the Pope or bishop?

A. The absolution from some sins is reserved to the Pope or bishop to deter or prevent, by this special restriction, persons from committing them, either on account of the greatness of the sin itself or on account of its evil consequences.

Q. 732. Can any priest absolve a person in danger of death from reserved sins without the permission of the bishop?

A. Any priest can absolve a person in danger of death from reserved sins without the permission of the bishop, because at the hour of death the Church removes these restrictions in order to save, if possible, the soul of the dying.

Q. 733. How do you know that the priest has the power of absolving from the sins committed after Baptism?

A. I know that the priest has the power of absolving from the sins committed after Baptism, because Jesus Christ granted that power to the priests of His Church when He said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

Q. 734. How do we know that Our Lord, while on earth, had the power to forgive sins?

A. We know that Our Lord, while on earth, had the power to forgive sins:

1. Because He was always God, and;
2. Because He frequently did forgive sins and proved their forgiveness by miracles. Since He had the power Himself, He could give it to His Apostles.

Q. 735. Was the power to forgive sins given to the apostles alone?

A. The power to forgive sins was not given to the apostles alone, because it was not given for the benefit merely of those who lived at the time of the apostles, but for all who, having grievously sinned, after Baptism, should need forgiveness. Since, therefore, Baptism will be given till the end of time, and since the danger of sinning after it always remains the power to absolve from such sins must also remain in the Church till the end of time.

Q. 736. When was the Sacrament of Penance instituted?

A. The Sacrament of Penance was instituted after the resurrection of Our Lord, when He gave to His apostles the power to forgive sins, which He had promised to them before His death.

Q. 737. Are the enemies of our religion right when they say man cannot forgive sins?

A. The enemies of our religion are right when they say man cannot forgive sins if they mean that he cannot forgive them by his own power, but they are certainly wrong if they mean that he cannot forgive them even by the power of God, for man can do anything if God gives him the power. The priest does not forgive sins by his own power as man, but by the authority he receives as the minister of God.

Q. 738. How do the priests of the Church exercise the power of forgiving sins?

A. The priests of the Church exercise the power of forgiving sins by hearing the confession of sins, and granting pardon for them as ministers of God and in His name.

Q. 739. How does the power to forgive sins imply the obligation of going to confession?

A. The power to forgive sins implies the obligation of going to confession because as sins are usually committed secretly, the priest could never know what sins to forgive and what not to forgive, unless the sins committed were made known to him by the persons guilty of them.

Q. 740. Could God not forgive our sins if we confessed them to Himself in secret?

A. Certainly, God could forgive our sins if we confessed them to Himself in secret, but He has not promised to do so; whereas He has promised to pardon them if we confess them to His priests. Since He is free to pardon or not to pardon, He has the right to establish a Sacrament through which alone He will pardon.

Q. 741. What must we do to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily?

A. To receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily we must do five things:

1. We must examine our conscience.
2. We must have sorrow for our sins.
3. We must make a firm resolution never more to offend God.
4. We must confess our sins to the priest.
5. We must accept the penance which the priest gives us.

Q. 742. What should we pray for in preparing for confession?

A. In preparing for confession we should pray to the Holy Ghost to give us light to know our sins and to understand their guilt; for grace to detest them; for courage to confess them and for strength to keep our resolutions.

Q. 743. What faults do many commit in preparing for confession?

A. In preparing for confession many commit the faults:

1. Of giving too much time to the examination of conscience and little or none in exciting themselves to true sorrow for the sins discovered;
2. Of trying to recall every trifling circumstance, instead of thinking of the means by which they will avoid their sins for the future.

Q. 744. What, then, is the most important part of the preparation for confession?

A. The most important part of the preparation for confession is sincere sorrow for the sins committed and the firm determination to avoid them for the future.

Q. 745. What is the chief reason that our confessions do not always amend our way of living?

A. The chief reason that our confessions do not always amend our way of living is our want of real earnest preparation for them and the fact that we have not truly convinced ourselves of the need of amendment.

We often confess our sins more from habit, necessity or fear than from a real desire of receiving grace and of being restored to the friendship of God.

Q. 746. What faults are to be avoided in making our confession?

A. In making our confession we are to avoid:

1. Telling useless details, the sins of others, or the name of any person;
2. Confessing sins we are not sure of having committed; exaggerating our sins or their number; multiplying the number of times a day by the number of days to get the exact number of habitual sins;
3. Giving a vague answer, such as "sometimes," when asked how often; waiting after each sin to be asked for the next;
4. Hesitating over sins through pretended modesty and thus delaying the priests and others; telling the exact words in each when we have committed several sins of the same kind, cursing, for example; and, lastly, leaving the confessional before the priest gives us a sign to go.

Q. 747. Is it wrong to go to confession out of your turn against the will of others waiting with you?

A. It is wrong to go to confession out of our turn against the will of others waiting with us, because:

1. It causes disorder, quarreling and scandalous conduct in the Church;
2. It is unjust, makes others angry and lessens their good dispositions for confession;
3. It annoys and distracts the priest by the confusion and disorder it creates. It is better to wait than go to confession in an excited and disorderly manner.

Q. 748. What should a penitent do who knows he cannot perform the penance given?

A. A penitent who knows he cannot perform the penance given should ask the priest for one that he can perform. When we forget the penance given we must ask for it again, for we cannot fulfill our duty by giving ourselves a penance. The penance must be performed at the time and in the manner the confessor directs.

Q. 749. What is the examination of conscience?

A. The examination of conscience is an earnest effort to recall to mind all the sins we have committed since our last worthy confession.

Q. 750. When is our confession worthy?

A. Our confession is worthy when we have done all that is required for a good confession, and when, through the absolution, our sins are really forgiven.

Q. 751. How can we make a good examination of conscience?

A. We can make a good examination of conscience by calling to memory the commandments of God, the precepts of the Church, the seven capital sins, and the particular duties of our state in life, to find out the sins we have committed.

Q. 752. What should we do before beginning the examination of conscience?

A. Before beginning the examination of conscience we should pray to God to give us light to know our sins and grace to detest them.

LESSON 18 - ON CONTRITION

Q. 753. What is contrition, or sorrow for sin?

A. Contrition, or sorrow for sin, is a hatred of sin and a true grief of the soul for having offended God, with a firm purpose of sinning no more.

Q. 754. Give an example of how we should hate and avoid sin.

A. We should hate and avoid sin as one hates and avoids a poison that almost caused his death. We may not grieve over the death of our soul as we do over the death of a friend, and yet our sorrow may be true; because the sorrow for sin comes more from our reason than from our feelings.

Q. 755. What kind of sorrow should we have for our sins?

A. The sorrow we should have for our sins should be interior, supernatural, universal, and sovereign.

Q. 756. What do you mean by saying that our sorrow should be interior?

A. When I say that our sorrow should be interior, I mean that it should come from the heart, and not merely from the lips.

Q. 757. What do you mean by saying that our sorrow should be supernatural?

A. When I say that our sorrow should be supernatural, I mean that it should be prompted by the grace of God, and excited by motives which spring from faith, and not by merely natural motives.

Q. 758. What do we mean by "motives that spring from faith" and by "merely natural motives" with regard to sorrow for sin?

A. By sorrow for sin from "motives that spring from faith," we mean sorrow for reasons that God has made known to us, such as the loss of heaven, the fear of hell or purgatory, or the dread of afflictions that come from God in punishment for sin. By "merely natural motives" we mean sorrow for reasons made known to us by our own experience or by the experience of others, such as loss of character, goods or health. A motive is whatever moves our will to do or avoid anything.

Q. 759. What do you mean by saying that our sorrow should be universal?

A. When I say that our sorrow should be universal, I mean that we should be sorry for all our mortal sins without exception.

Q. 760. Why cannot some of our mortal sins be forgiven while the rest remain on our souls?

A. It is impossible for any of our mortal sins to be forgiven unless they are all forgiven, because as light and darkness cannot be together in the same place, so sanctifying grace and mortal sin cannot dwell together. If there be grace in the soul, there can be no mortal sin, and if there be mortal sin, there can be no grace, for one mortal sin expels all grace.

Q. 761. What do you mean when you say that our sorrow should be sovereign?

A. When I say that our sorrow should be sovereign, I mean that we should grieve more for having offended God than for any other evil that can befall us.

Q. 762. Why should we be sorry for our sins?

A. We should be sorry for our sins because sin is the greatest of evils and an offense against God our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, and because it shuts us out of heaven and condemns us to the eternal pains of hell.

Q. 763. How do we show that sin is the greatest of all evils?

A. We show that sin is the greatest of evils because its effects last the longest and have the most terrible consequences. All the misfortunes of this world can last only for a time, and we escape them at death, whereas the evils caused by sin keep with us for all eternity and are only increased at death.

Q. 764. How many kinds of contrition are there?

A. There are two kinds of contrition; perfect contrition and imperfect contrition.

Q. 765. What is perfect contrition?

A. Perfect contrition is that which fills us with sorrow and hatred for sin, because it offends God, who is infinitely good in Himself and worthy of all love.

Q. 766. When will perfect contrition obtain pardon for mortal sin without the Sacrament of Penance?

A. Perfect contrition will obtain pardon for mortal sin without the Sacrament of Penance when we cannot go to confession, but with the perfect contrition we must have the intention of going to confession as soon as possible, if we again have the opportunity.

Q. 767. What is imperfect contrition?

A. Imperfect contrition is that by which we hate what offends God because by it we lose heaven and deserve hell; or because sin is so hateful in itself.

Q. 768. What other name is given to imperfect contrition and why is it called imperfect?

A. Imperfect contrition is called attrition. It is called imperfect only because it is less perfect than the highest grade of contrition by which we are sorry for sin out of pure love of God's own goodness and without any consideration of what befalls ourselves.

Q. 769. Is imperfect contrition sufficient for a worthy confession?

A. Imperfect contrition is sufficient for a worthy confession, but we should endeavor to have perfect contrition.

Q. 770. What do you mean by a firm purpose of sinning no more?

A. By a firm purpose of sinning no more I mean a fixed resolve not only to avoid all mortal sin, but also its near occasions.

Q. 771. What do you mean by the near occasions of sin?

A. By the near occasions of sin I mean all the persons, places and things that may easily lead us into sin.

Q. 772. Why are we bound to avoid occasions of sin?

A. We are bound to avoid occasions of sin because Our Lord has said: "He who loves the danger will perish in it"; and as we are bound to avoid the loss of our souls, so we are bound to avoid the danger of their loss. The occasion is the cause of sin, and you cannot take away the evil without removing its cause.

Q. 773. Is a person who is determined to avoid the sin, but who is unwilling to give up its near occasion when it is possible to do so, rightly disposed for confession?

A. A person who is determined to avoid the sin, but who is unwilling to give up its near occasion when it is possible to do so, is not rightly disposed for confession, and he will not be absolved if he makes known to the priest the true state of his conscience.

Q. 774. How many kinds of occasions of sin are there?

A. There are four kinds of occasions of sin:

1. Near occasions, through which we always fall;
2. Remote occasions, through which we sometimes fall;
3. Voluntary occasions or those we can avoid; and
4. Involuntary occasions or those we cannot avoid. A person who lives in a near and voluntary occasion of sin need not expect forgiveness while he continues in that state.

Q. 775. What persons, places and things are usually occasions of sin?

A.

1. The persons who are occasions of sin are all those in whose company we sin, whether they be bad of themselves or bad only while in our company, in which case we also become occasions of sin for them;
2. The places are usually liquor saloons, low theaters, indecent dances, entertainments, amusements, exhibitions, and all immoral resorts of any kind, whether we sin in them or not;
3. The things are all bad books, indecent pictures, songs, jokes and the like, even when they are tolerated by public opinion and found in public places.

LESSON 19 - ON CONFESSION

Q. 776. What is Confession?

A. Confession is the telling of our sins to a duly authorized priest, for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness.

Q. 777. Who is a duly authorized priest?

A. A duly authorized priest is one sent to hear confessions by the lawful bishop of the diocese in which we are at the time of our confession.

Q. 778. Is it ever allowed to write our sins and read them to the priest in the confessional or give them to him to read?

A. It is allowed, when necessary, to write our sins and read them to the priest, as persons do who have almost entirely lost their memory. It is also allowed to give the paper to the priest, as persons do who have lost the use of their speech. In such cases the paper must, after the confession, be carefully destroyed either by the priest or the penitent.

Q. 779. What is to be done when persons must make their confession and cannot find a priest who understands their language?

A. Persons who must make their confession and who cannot find a priest who understands their language, must confess as best they can by some signs, showing what sins they wish to confess and how they are sorry for them.

Q. 780. What sins are we bound to confess?

A. We are bound to confess all our mortal sins, but it is well also to confess our venial sins.

Q. 781. Why is it well to confess also the venial sins we remember?

A. It is well to confess also the venial sins we remember: (1) Because it shows our hatred of all sin, and (2) Because it is sometimes difficult to determine just when a sin is venial and when mortal.

Q. 782. What should one do who has only venial sins to confess?

A. One who has only venial sins to confess should tell also some sin already confessed in his past life for which he knows he is truly sorry; because it is not easy to be truly sorry for slight sins and imperfections, and yet we must be sorry for the sins confessed that our confession may be valid -- hence we add some past sin for which we are truly sorry to those for which we may not be sufficiently sorry.

Q. 783. Should a person stay from confession because he thinks he has no sin to confess ?

A. A person should not stay from confession because he thinks he has no sin to confess, for the Sacrament of Penance, besides forgiving sin, gives an increase of sanctifying grace, and of this we have always need, especially to resist temptation. The Saints, who were almost without imperfection, went to confession frequently.

Q. 784. Should a person go to Communion after confession even when the confessor does not bid him go?

A. A person should go to Communion after confession even when the confessor does not bid him go, because the confessor so intends unless he positively forbids his penitent to receive Communion. However, one who has not yet received his first Communion should not go to Communion after confession, even if the confessor by mistake should bid him go.

Q. 785. Which are the chief qualities of a good Confession?

A. The chief qualities of a good Confession are three: it must be humble, sincere, and entire.

Q. 786. When is our Confession humble?

A. Our Confession is humble when we accuse ourselves of our sins, with a deep sense of shame and sorrow for having offended God.

Q. 787. When is our Confession sincere?

A. Our Confession is sincere when we tell our sins honestly and truthfully, neither exaggerating nor excusing them.

Q. 788. Why is it wrong to accuse ourselves of sins we have not committed?

A. It is wrong to accuse ourselves of sins we have not committed, because, by our so doing, the priest cannot know the true state of our souls, as he must do before giving us absolution.

Q. 789. When is our Confession entire?

A. Our Confession is entire when we tell the number and kinds of our sins and the circumstances which change their nature.

Q. 790. What do you mean by the "kinds of sin?"

A. By the "kinds of sin," we mean the particular division or class to which the sins belong; that is, whether they be sins of blasphemy, disobedience, anger, impurity, dishonesty, etc. We can determine the kind of sin by discovering the commandment or precept of the Church we have broken or the virtue against which we have acted.

Q. 791. What do we mean by "circumstances which change the nature of sins?"

A. By "circumstances which change the nature of sins" we mean anything that makes it another kind of sin. Thus to steal is a sin, but to steal from the Church makes our theft sacrilegious. Again, impure actions are sins, but a person must say whether they were committed alone or with others, with relatives or strangers, with persons married or single, etc., because these circumstances change them from one kind of impurity to another.

Q. 792. What should we do if we cannot remember the number of our sins?

A. If we cannot remember the number of our sins, we should tell the number as nearly as possible, and say how often we may have sinned in a day, a week, or a month, and how long the habit or practice has lasted.

Q. 793. Is our Confession worthy if, without our fault, we forget to confess a mortal sin?

A. If without our fault we forget to confess a mortal sin, our Confession is worthy, and the sin is forgiven; but it must be told in Confession if it again comes to our mind.

Q. 794. May a person who has forgotten to tell a mortal sin in confession go to Holy Communion before going again to confession?

A. A person who has forgotten to tell a mortal sin in confession may go to communion before again going to confession, because the forgotten sin was forgiven with those confessed, and the confession was good and worthy.

Q. 795. Is it a grievous offense willfully to conceal a mortal sin in Confession?

A. It is a grievous offense willfully to conceal a mortal sin in Confession, because we thereby tell a lie to the Holy Ghost, and make our Confession worthless.

Q. 796. How is concealing a sin telling a lie to the Holy Ghost?

A. Concealing a sin is telling a lie to the Holy Ghost, because he who conceals the sin declares in confession to God and the priest that he committed no sins but what he has confessed, while the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth, saw him committing the sin he now conceals and still sees it in his soul while he denies it.

Q. 797. Why is it foolish to conceal sins in confession?

A. It is foolish to conceal sins in confession:

1. Because we thereby make our spiritual condition worse;

2. We must tell the sin sometime if we ever hope to be saved;

3. It will be made known on the day of judgment, before the world, whether we conceal it now or confess it.

Q. 798. What must he do who has willfully concealed a mortal sin in Confession?

A. He who has willfully concealed a mortal sin in Confession must not only confess it, but must also repeat all the sins he has committed since his last worthy Confession.

Q. 799. Must one who has willfully concealed a mortal sin in confession do more than repeat the sins committed since his last worthy confession?

A. One who has willfully concealed a mortal sin in confession must, besides repeating all the sins he has committed since his last worthy confession, tell also how often he has unworthily received absolution and Holy Communion during the same time.

Q. 800. Why does the priest give us a penance after Confession?

A. The priest gives us a penance after Confession, that we may satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to our sins.

Q. 801. Why should we have to satisfy for our sins if Christ has fully satisfied for them?

A. Christ has fully satisfied for our sins and after our baptism we were free from all guilt and had no satisfaction to make. But when we willfully sinned after baptism, it is but just that we should be obliged to make some satisfaction.

Q. 802. Is the slight penance the priest gives us sufficient to satisfy for all the sins confessed?

A. The slight penance the priest gives us is not sufficient to satisfy for all the sins confessed:

1. Because there is no real equality between the slight penance given and the punishment deserved for sin;

2. Because we are all obliged to do penance for sins committed, and this would not be necessary if the penance given in confession satisfied for all. The penance is given and accepted in confession chiefly to show our willingness to do penance and make amends for our sins.

Q. 803. Does not the Sacrament of Penance remit all punishment due to sin?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits the eternal punishment due to sin, but it does not always remit the temporal punishment which God requires as satisfaction for our sins.

Q. 804. Why does God require a temporal punishment as a satisfaction for sin?

A. God requires a temporal punishment as a satisfaction for sin to teach us the great evil of sin and to prevent us from falling again.

Q. 805. Which are the chief means by which we satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to sin?

A. The chief means by which we satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to sin are: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving; all spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and the patient suffering of the ills of life.

Q. 806. What fasting has the greatest merit?

A. The fasting imposed by the Church on certain days of the year, and particularly during Lent, has the greatest merit.

Q. 807. What is Lent?

A. Lent is the forty days before Easter Sunday, during which we do penance, fast and pray to prepare ourselves for the resurrection of Our Lord; and also to remind us of His own fast of forty days before His Passion.

Q. 808. What do we mean by "almsgiving"?

A. By almsgiving we mean money, goods, or assistance given to the poor or to charitable purposes. The law of God requires all persons to give alms in proportion to their means.

Q. 809. What "ills of life" help to satisfy God for sin?

A. The ills of life that help to satisfy God for sin are sickness, poverty, misfortune, trial, affliction, etc., especially, when we have not brought them upon ourselves by sin.

Q. 810. How did the Christians in the first ages of the Church do Penance?

A. The Christians in the first ages of the Church did public penance, especially for the sins of which they were publicly known to be guilty. Penitents were excluded for a certain time from Mass or the Sacrament, and some were obliged to stand at the door of the Church begging the prayers of those who entered.

Q. 811. What were these severe Penances of the First Ages of the Church called?

A. These severe penances of the first ages of the Church were called canonical penances, because their kind and duration were regulated by the Canons or laws of the Church.

Q. 812. How can we know spiritual from corporal works of mercy?

A. We can know spiritual from corporal works of mercy, for whatever we do for the soul is a spiritual work, and whatever we do for the body is a corporal work.

Q. 813. Which are the chief spiritual works of mercy?

A. The chief spiritual works of mercy are seven: To admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead.

Q. 814. When are we bound to admonish the sinner?

A. We are bound to admonish the sinner when the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. When his fault is a mortal sin;

2. When we have authority or influence over him, and

3. When there is reason to believe that our warning will not make him worse instead of better.

Q. 815. Who are meant by the "ignorant" we are to instruct, and the "doubtful" we are to counsel?

A. By the ignorant we are to instruct and the doubtful we are to counsel, are meant those particularly who are ignorant of the truths of religion and those who are in doubt about matters of faith. We must aid such persons as far as we can to know and believe the truths necessary for salvation.

Q. 816. Why are we advised to bear wrong patiently and to forgive all injuries?

A. We are advised to bear wrongs patiently and to forgive all injuries, because, being Christians, we should imitate the example of Our Divine Lord, who endured wrongs patiently and who not only pardoned but prayed for those who injured Him.

Q. 817. If, then, it be a Christian virtue to forgive all injuries, why do Christians establish courts and prisons to punish wrongdoers?

A. Christians establish courts and prisons to punish wrongdoers, because the preservation of lawful authority, good order in society, the protection of others, and sometimes even the good of the guilty one himself, require that crimes be justly punished. As God Himself punishes crime and as lawful authority comes from Him, such authority has the right to punish, though individuals should forgive the injuries done to themselves personally.

Q. 818. Why is it a work of mercy to pray for the living and the dead?

A. It is a work of mercy to aid those who are unable to aid themselves. The living are exposed to temptations, and while in mortal sin they are deprived of the merit of their good works and need our prayers. The dead can in no way help themselves and depend on us for assistance.

Q. 819. Which are the chief corporal works of mercy?

A. The chief corporal works of mercy are seven: 1. To feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.

Q. 820. How may we briefly state the corporal works of mercy?

A. We may briefly state the corporal works of mercy by saying that we are obliged to help the poor in all their forms of want.

Q. 821. How are Christians aided in the performance of works of mercy?

A. Christians are aided in the performance of works of mercy through the establishment of charitable institutions where religious communities of holy men or women perform these duties for us, provided we supply the necessary means by our almsgiving and good works.

Q. 822. Who are religious?

A. Religious are self-sacrificing men and women who, wishing to follow more closely the teachings of Our Lord, dedicate their lives to the service of God and religion. They live together in societies approved by the Church, under a rule and guidance of a superior. They keep the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, and divide their time between prayer and good works. The houses in which they dwell are called convents or monasteries, and the societies in which they live are called religious orders, communities or congregations.

Q. 823. Are there any religious communities of priests?

A. There are many religious communities of priests, who, besides living according to the general laws of the Church, as all priests do, follow certain rules laid down for their community. Such priests are called the regular clergy, because living by rules to distinguish them from the secular clergy who live in their parishes under no special rule. The chief work of the regular clergy is to teach in colleges and give missions and retreats.

Q. 824. Why are there so many different religious communities?

A. There are many different religious communities:

1. Because all religious are not fitted for the same work, and
2. Because they desire to imitate Our Lord's life on earth as perfectly as possible; and when each community takes one of Christ's works and seeks to become perfect in it, the union of all their works continues as perfectly as we can the works He began upon earth.

LESSON 20 - ON THE MANNER OF MAKING A GOOD CONFESSION

Q. 825. What should we do on entering the confessional?

A. On entering the confessional we should kneel, make the sign of the Cross, and say to the priest, "Bless me, father"; then add, "I confess to Almighty God and to you, father, that I have sinned."

Q. 826. Which are the first things we should tell the priest in Confession?

A. The first things we should tell the priest in Confession are the time of our last Confession, and whether we said the penance and went to Holy Communion.

Q. 827. Should we tell anything else in connection with our last confession?

A. In connection with our last confession we should tell also what restrictions -- if any -- were placed upon us with regard to our occasions of sin, and what obligations with regard to the payment of debts, restitution, injuries done to others and the like, we were commanded to fulfill.

Q. 828. After telling the time of our last Confession and Communion what should we do?

A. After telling the time of our last Confession and Communion we should confess all the mortal sins we have since committed, and all the venial sins we may wish to mention.

Q. 829. What is a general confession?

A. A general confession is the telling of the sins of our whole life or a great part of it. It is made in the same manner as an ordinary confession, except that it requires more time and longer preparation.

Q. 830. When should a General Confession be made?

A. A general confession:

1. Is necessary when we are certain that our past confessions were bad;

2. It is useful on special occasions in our lives when some change in our way of living is about to take place;

3. It is hurtful and must not be made when persons are scrupulous.

Q. 831. What are the signs of scruples and the remedy against them?

A. The signs of scruples are chiefly:

1. To be always dissatisfied with our confessions;

2. To be self-willed in deciding what is sinful and what is not. The chief remedy against them is to follow exactly the advice of the confessor without questioning the reason or utility of his advice.

Q. 832. What must we do when the confessor asks us questions?

A. When the confessor asks us questions we must answer them truthfully and clearly.

Q. 833. What should we do after telling our sins?

A. After telling our sins we should listen with attention to the advice which the confessor may think proper to give.

Q. 834. What duties does the priest perform in the confessional?

A. In the confessional the priest performs the duties:

1. Of a judge, by listening to our self-accusations and passing sentence upon our guilt or innocence;

2. Of a father, by the good advice and encouragement he gives us;

3. Of a teacher, by his instructions, and

4. Of a physician, by discovering the afflictions of our soul and giving us the remedies to restore it to spiritual health.

Q. 835. Why is it beneficial to go always if possible to the same confessor?

A. It is beneficial to go always, if possible, to the same confessor, because our continued confessions enable him to see more clearly the true state of our soul and to understand better our occasions of sin.

Q. 836. Should we remain away from confession because we cannot go to our usual confessor?

A. We should not remain away from confession because we cannot go to our usual confessor, for though it is well to confess to the same priest, it is not necessary to do so. One should never become so attached to a confessor that his absence or the great inconvenience of going to him would become an excuse for neglecting the Sacraments.

Q. 837. How should we end our Confession?

A. We should end our Confession by saying, "I also accuse myself of all the sins of my past life," telling, if we choose, one or several of our past sins.

Q. 838. What should we do while the priest is giving us absolution?

A. While the priest is giving us absolution we should from our heart renew the Act of Contrition.