

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C-2025

In our Gospel reading Jesus proclaims: “Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.” One possession that Jesus calls us to daily renounce, but we often hold onto for dear life, is our sinfulness. Jesus has not left us orphan in this daily battle for our eternal souls. He has blessed His church with the sacrament of Reconciliation, affectionately known as Confession. If I had a dollar for every time I heard Catholics state that they will not confess their sins to a priest, or that they find it unnecessary or unnatural, I would be independently wealthy. Contrary to popular opinion, confession is not an unnatural or uncommon experience. In fact, a significant number of people habitually confess their sins to trusted family members and friends, hair stylists, bartenders, and psychologists. It happens all the time. This is a good and healthy thing, but it is incomplete. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, we get the full deal: getting something burdensome off of

our conscience; personal and spiritual counsel(if desired); the loving mercy of Jesus Christ; special graces or divine assistance from God; full assurance of confidentiality under the seal of Confession; and the verbal assurance of Christ's forgiveness and unwavering love through the prayer of absolution.

As we wrestle with the confession of our sins to a priest, please keep in mind it was Jesus Christ Himself who instituted this sacrament. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Peter and the rest of the Apostles and proclaimed: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."(John 20:22-23) From the beginning of Christianity, it was always believed that this authority was given to the Apostles and their successors who are the Pope, Bishops, and through the ministry of Bishops, the priests of the church, until Jesus Christ comes again in His glory.

Even though Jesus is the origin of the sacrament of Reconciliation, He gave the leadership of the church the authority to determine how the sacrament was to be understood and celebrated. This authority is

captured in His special promise to St. Peter: “You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church. 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 will be loosed in heaven.” It would be helpful to ask ourselves, “Why would Jesus Christ give the Apostles and their successors this amazing authority if He didn’t expect people to confess their sins?”

With this God given authority, the practice and discipline of Confession has evolved over time. The church exercises this authority through the requirement that every time we commit mortal sin, which is serious sin, we are required to go to Confession. It has been this way from the beginning of Christianity. The primary focus of the sacrament of Reconciliation is the forgiveness of mortal sin, because whenever we choose to do it knowingly and freely, we separate ourselves from Jesus in this life and run the serious risk of losing our eternal salvation, unless we are truly sorry and repent and confess our sins. This belief in mortal sin flows from divine

revelation through the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, the moral litanies of St. Paul, and the first letter of John. In first John, a distinction is made between sin that brings about spiritual death and sin that does not.

The moral section of the Catholic Catechism provides us with a thorough reflection on various examples of mortal sin. This is often an unknown and murky area for Catholics, so I invite you to check it out. You will find it equally enlightening and challenging. In my own imperfect humanity and sinfulness, one of my responsibilities as a priest is to make you aware of those choices that can separate us from Jesus Christ in this life and for all eternity. If I did not tell you, I would be negligent just like a doctor who did not inform you of good physical health practices or did not tell you that you had a serious disease or terminal illness. In a spirit of loving concern for your earthly and eternal well-being, I would like to provide a litany on some of the more common mortal sins that can bring about spiritual death. Remember though, we can move from spiritual death to spiritual life or re-

birth, every time we confess our sins and seek to be faithful to Christ, for “the Lord is kind and merciful.”

The litany of mortal sins includes:

- *no prayer life or infrequently connecting with the Lord
- *deliberately missing Mass on Sunday’s and Holy Days of Obligation
- *placing our will above the will of God on serious issues of faith, morality, and how we approach life.
- *prejudice and discrimination
- *seeking to severely damage or destroy a person’s reputation through lies or passing on serious information about their transgressions unless absolutely necessary for the protection and welfare of other people
- *serious and habitual neglect of responsibilities toward spouse, children, and parents

- *serious and habitual neglect of career and vocational responsibilities
- *living together outside of marriage
- *viewing pornography and other sexual sins
- *emotional and physical adultery
- *abortion and encouraging or forcing someone to have one
- *drunkenness, the use of illegal drugs, and the abuse of prescription drugs
- *verbal, mental, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse
- *any form of financial dishonesty or stealing
- *lack of forgiveness, especially if it involves hatred, a spirit of revenge, and wishing evil on someone
- *serious and habitual parental neglect concerning the personal, religious, and moral formation of their children

*actively promoting, assisting, or supporting someone in their mortal sin, or forcing them into it.

It is important to remember that Jesus Christ continues to love us and reach out to us in the midst of our mortal sin. We are invited to seek His face: His love, grace and mercy. We are to lean into Him instead of hiding our hearts from Him.

Since Reconciliation was established primarily for serious sin that brings about spiritual death, to intentionally avoid confessing all of our mortal sins, prevents us from being forgiven by Jesus Christ even though we received the absolution of the church. Jesus knows. The same is true if we confess our mortal sins but have absolutely zero intention of doing anything to try to change our lives, with the help of God and others. If you find yourself wanting to rebel against this teaching, remember the words of Jesus to Peter: “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Even though the sacrament of Reconciliation is primarily geared towards mortal sin, we are also encouraged to bring our deep rooted and habitual venial or less serious sins to Confession. A spiritual practice that is highly encouraged within the life of the church, is to go during Advent to spiritually prepare for the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas, and during Lent to prepare for His resurrection at Easter. Other common practices are to go monthly or quarterly for ongoing graces and transparency that promote spiritual transformation and growing accountability. It is also highly recommended to celebrate the sacrament when we feel spiritually and morally stuck, we are feeling the need, or we feel led and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Contrary to popular opinion, venial or less serious sin can be forgiven through personal prayer and our participation in the Penitential Rite at Mass. At the same time, habitually going to confession with deep rooted venial sins still possess great value as it can help us go to the next spiritual or moral level. In fact, those officially designated in the church as exorcists

state that the regular practice of Confession is a very powerful form of basic exorcism. It helps us to experience growing deliverance and freedom from our strong bondage to deep rooted habits of mortal and venial sin. As we are gradually and progressively delivered from bondage to our sins, we will personally experience a renewed hunger and thirst for Jesus Christ and grow in our commitment and capacity to do His will. Do you realize that through our participation in the sacrament of reconciliation, we renew our baptismal covenant and personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

Jesus is the ultimate Soul Doctor and Psychologist. He knows that as human beings, body and soul, and as relational beings, there are personal, spiritual, and moral benefits to confessing our sins to a priest. In his role as Confessor, the priest represents both the merciful Jesus and merciful church in bodily or sacramental form. Through confessing our sins to Jesus Christ through the priest we receive verbal assurance and affirmation of the loving mercy of Jesus Christ and experience a form of accountability for our

actions and their consequences in our relationship with Jesus Christ, other people, ourselves, and God's creation. Finally, there is a liberating and healing spiritual power that we experience by bringing our sins out from the darkness of our souls into the light of Christ's merciful love.

Like the tax collector in the temple, may we humbly renounce our sins before Jesus Christ in the sacrament of reconciliation, and with a living faith and trust proclaim: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner." Our act of humility draws down the mercy of God upon us in abundance and we are justified and made right in his sight. As Jesus Christ revealed to St. Faustina: "Even if a person's sins were as dark as night, God's mercy is stronger than our misery." Now these are some words we can put our trust in.