



From the Pastor's Desk:

Beginning this weekend and for the following weekends of Lent I want to share with you some good information about the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the hopes that those who have not gone (you or someone you know) might be inspired during Lent to see Confession of Sins as an act of Love. You loving God so much to say you're sorry and God loving you so much to say, "I absolve and forgive you...."

Returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation: A Guide for Four Sets of Circumstances – PART 1

Celebrating and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation can be among the most blessed of human experiences. Yet, there are a number of reasons why we don't take advantage of this Sacrament or we don't celebrate it well. Fear, shame, bad experiences of the past, a long time since the last reception of the Sacrament or bad habits in celebrating it now are all possible reasons for struggles with this Sacrament. The solution is so simple. A simple understanding of the Sacrament and a small encouragement to give it a new try, with a new expectation, can literally change our lives and will certainly renew our faith.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is God's gift to us. In the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tries to tell us that God is simply waiting for us to "come home." In the story, the father is not only waiting, he is out by the road longing for the wayward son to return. And when the son begins to give his practiced speech of repentance, the father interrupts him and shouts orders to begin the celebration. Jesus is telling us that this is how God feels about our reconciliation. It isn't about our having to shame ourselves or face being scolded. It is all about letting ourselves receive the merciful and healing love and peace that only God's love can give us.

What does serious sin look like? How do I examine my conscience?

First of all, let's consider what serious sin is. According to the teaching that many of us learned in our catechisms or religious education, there are serious sins and less serious sins. A serious sin is called a "mortal" sin because it mortally wounds our relationship with God. To say it another way, when we see what a mortal sin is, it will become clear to us that it is a choice which involves turning my back on my relationship with God, freely and deliberately. Less serious sins, called "venial sins," involve weakness and patterns of sin in our lives. They are sins, for sure, and involve "missing the mark" of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, but, as we will see clearly, they don't involve a free and deliberate choice to turn our backs completely on our relationship with God.

For something to be a mortal sin, **three things are required**. All three of them are necessary. It must be something quite seriously wrong. It must be something I do, knowing its seriousness and knowing that it is wrong. And, it must be something I do deliberately, that is, freely. So, for something to be a mortal sin, I have to understand that something is serious enough to ruin my relationship with God and freely choose to do it anyway.

When we examine our consciences, we are looking primarily for things like that. And, we are looking for them in two areas: in what I've done and in what I've failed to do. For example, I might never have abused my children, verbally or physically, but I might examine my conscience and recognize that I failed in my responsibility to raise them in the faith - the commitment I made at the time of my marriage and at their baptisms. However, I might judge that, though it is a serious matter, I didn't do it deliberately and intentionally. In that case, I might examine this situation in terms of my overall selfishness or failure to live my commitments - perhaps venial sins in the area of what I've failed to do, but for which I can ask for forgiveness and healing so I can do this better in the future, or receive our Lord's peace, even if I can't fix the past. [Continued next week]

May God +bless you, and yours, now and forever.

Father Anthony