



Reconciliation : The Forgotten Sacrament

Nobody asks the question “How often should I bathe?”. We bathe regularly, plus any time we do something to get extra dirty. Nobody would think of bathing only once a year. This is not the case when it comes to bathing the soul. A survey of Catholics showed 33% never go to Reconciliation, 23% go less than once a year and 21% go only once a year. Imagine a world where 80% of the population bathed once a year or less.

I am a good person. Good people still sin. “*The new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature*” (Catechism, 1426). “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8). All sin stains the soul, “*your sins have stained you like the color red*” (Isaiah 1:18).

My sins are not that bad. If we can agree the just man sins seven times a day and his sins are not bad, then imagine this...Seven times a day, take a teaspoon of dirt and pour it on your body. Do this for one year without bathing. If you can imagine what your body would look like, then imagine your soul. “*Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life...every sin, even venial...must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory.*” (Catechism, 1472).

I confess directly to God. After His resurrection, Jesus gave the authority to forgive sins to His Apostles, “*Whoever's sins you forgive, they are forgiven*” (John 20:23). James also wrote “*confess your sins to one another*” (James 5:16). God already knows our sins. It is not enough to confess to Him and say we are sorry. God requires repayment or restoration, also known as penance. Those who confess sins to God cannot assign a penance satisfactory to God. Confessing only to God also takes away the benefit of receiving helpful instruction or advice about sin.

Jesus washed away all my sins. Jesus did not give Christians a “Get out of jail free” card when it comes to sin. To look at sin with such a careless attitude is to abuse His gift of salvation. Jesus said “*Go and sin no more*”. Paul wrote “*Shall we persist in sin that grace may abound? Of course not! How can we who died to sin yet live in it?*” (Romans 6:1-2). The death of Jesus on the cross took away the eternal punishment of sin; but Christians must respond to this grace by resisting sin, repenting and doing penance.

Hesitation. Some hesitate to confess their sins because it has been a long time and they do not know where to begin. Priests can guide us with our examination of conscience. Some are afraid of being embarrassed. Never fear confession. Priests sit “in the person of Christ”. Jesus said “*neither do I judge you*”, nor will the priest. If time is a concern, priests will make a personal appointment to hear confessions. We should not hesitate to clean our soul.

Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation often. The Church may require the Sacrament of Reconciliation once a year; but receiving Reconciliation is like giving the soul a bath and should be considered often. “*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. Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament*” (Catechism 1468).

How important is the Sacrament of Reconciliation? It was not Pilate who crucified Jesus. Our sins crucified Jesus. When we sin, we hammer a nail into his hands and feet. St. John Vianney, who often heard confessions 16 hours a day, said “*When you confess your sins, you take the nails out of Jesus.*” Think about it...

As often as we can, Catholics should long to hear these powerful words! “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and 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.” AMEN!

Meditation:

- What my attitude about sin, venial and mortal? Does my attitude about sin please Jesus?
- If I could see my soul, what would it look like? If Jesus returned today, am I ready or do I need cleaned up?
- How can the Sacrament of Reconciliation strengthen me and give me graces to resist sin?
- What is keeping me from regularly receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Can I go more often?