

WHY DO I NEED TO GO FOR CONFESSION ?

Jesus has come to 'give us abundant life' (Jn 10,10). And this abundant life is for our body, mind and spirit. St. Paul says: "May your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess.5,19).

Very often we find ourselves not being able to experience this abundant life which Jesus has come to give us. In the book of Psalm we read: "Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Their hearts were bowed down with hard labour; they fell down with no one to help....Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death". (107,10-11;17-18).

But after being 'feasted with the food of the swine' (cfr Lk, 15-16), if we are ready to come back to our senses and decide to go back to our Father's house, we can experience the forgiving love and mercy of the Lord.

The Psalmist is sharing his own experience: "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long...my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord" and you forgave the guilt of my sin". (Ps. 32, 3-5).

The purpose of the Sacrament of confession is stated by the Church thus: **"The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our soul and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health (cfr. Healing of the Paralytic- Mk. 2,1-12), has willed that his Church continues, in the power of the Holy**

Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members” (CCC 1421). So when on the first day of the week, when the Risen Lord appeared to the apostles in the locked room, he said to them: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”. Then he breathed on them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20, 21-23).

St. Paul was added to the Apostles after getting the vision of Jesus entrusting him with a unique mission, to which he wholeheartedly responded. He was well aware of the significance of this sacrament. “He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. **In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors of Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God”** (2 Cor. 5, 18-20). Hence this Sacrament is also called ‘the Sacrament of Reconciliation’.

Realising our human nature that ‘we all sin’ (Rom. 3,23; 1 Jn. 1, 8), the Lord has instituted this sacrament of His mercy and grace. But what can happen is that we lose the sense of sin. As our Bl. Pope John Paul II has pointed out: “Insensitivity to sin is the greatest curse of this present generation. Through Prophet Isaiah the Lord says: “Woe to you who call evil good and good evil...” (5,20). Suppose we keep poison in a bottle and attach to it a label saying ‘Poison’. If somebody takes off this label and replaces it with a label with ‘Honey’ on it, the poison still remains poison. So likely, whether we admit sin to be a sin or not, sin remains sin.

If we think we can directly make our confession to God, without an intermediary of a priest, the danger of human mind ‘diluting or compromising the sin’ persists. Jesus commanded “Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven, whose sins you bind they are bound. ”If we do not follow the way Jesus commanded, then we take responsibility for seeking forgiveness

the way WE WANT, NOT THE WAY Jesus wanted it.

Is it not a temptation for the modern man not to seek and get forgiveness and be lost in his own stubbornness and sin, even though God gave His means to obtain forgiveness ?

It is human nature to apologise when we make mistakes. And it soothes our heart when we come to know that we are forgiven. When we hear the words of Absolution at the confessional we are doubly sure that our sins are forgiven by the Lord because it is Jesus who gave that authority to the Apostles and to their successors (Jn. 20,23; 2 Cor. 5,19-20).

Jesus not only forgives our sins but forgets our sins, so that we need not live in guilt of our past sins.

“If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jn. 1,9). “I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more” (Heb. 8,12). “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8,1).

For a valid confession the church teaches that we are to be faithful to the five steps. **The validity of the confession depends not on the Confessor, but on the penitent following these steps:**

1. Examine your conscience in the light of the Word of God—especially with regard to the Ten commandments (Ex.20. 2-17; CCC. 2084-2557), the five Precepts of the Church (CCC 2041-2043), ...Frequenting the sacrament of confession with examination of conscience increases our self awareness of sin which will lead us to the second step.

2. Repent your sins-Repentance has been the central teaching of Jesus. At the very outset of his proclamation he said: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk. 1,15). Without sincerely repenting for our sins, we cannot have the kingdom

experience. After his resurrection, he reminded the disciples of what was written in the Scriptures: “.....Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations....” (Lk. 24,47). Hearing Peter’s first preaching after Pentecost, the listeners were “cut to the heart and said to Peter and other Apostles: ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them; ‘Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven...”(Acts 2,37-38). Later in his speech in Solomon’s Portico Peter again exhorted: “Repent, and turn to God that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3, 19-20).

3. Resolve not to commit the sin again. The Scriptures as well as the Church is clear in teaching that confession is not a ‘license to sin again’. “Have you sinned, my child? Do so no more, but ask forgiveness for your past sins. Flee from sin as from a snake; for if you approach sin, it will bite you. Its teeth are lion’s teeth, and can destroy human lives” (Sirach 21, 1-2). Jesus told the woman caught in adultery: “I do not condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn. 8,11)

“Among the penitents, acts of contrition occupy the first place. Contrition is “sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again” (CCC 1451).

4. Confess your sins to a priest. The Church teaches that ‘confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance’(CCC 1456)

5. Do the penance the priest gives. “Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. 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 sin. This satisfaction is called “penance”(CCC1459).

Every Sacrament is a visible sign through which the invisible grace of Jesus is poured into our lives. "His grace restores what sin has damaged in us" (CCC 1708). As St. Augustine has said: "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".

"Reconciliation with God is the purpose and effect of this sacrament. Those who receive this Sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation. 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" (CCC 1468).

Mary Pereira