THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE RESTORATION TO LIFE – PART II

Before I begin on the Sacrament of Penance, I would like to make a personal statement. Today, August 5, 2012, I will renew my consecration as a Marian Catechist. It was a group begun by the late Fr. John Hardon, S.J. and is now under the direction of Cardinal Raymond Burke. The Marian Catechist Apostolate, first and foremost, responds directly to the call for the New Evangelization b forming its members in Christ through prayer. Members of the Apostolate seek to belong completely to Christ that He might purify and guide us in everything we think, say and do. Members of the Apostolate undertake the full "program" for the accomplishment of the New Evangelization by being grounded in sound spiritual practices and ongoing personal study of the Faith and by diligently handing on the Catholic Faith to other. A consecrated Marian Catechist renews his promises every year, and this is what I will be doing today, at Mass, right after the Homily. Please pray for me.

The Catholic Church both claims and exercises the power of forgiving sins. Other churches which neither claim nor exercise this power are not in such a happy position. Christ clearly left the power of forgiveness to His Church; the Church should therefore possess it. The real difficulty is to understand how a person can be satisfied without this Sacrament! It certainly helped the great G.K. Chesterton to convert to the Catholic Church.

The complaints against Confession have a curious complexion. They overlook, for instance, our very real need for the forgiveness of God. The Sacrament of Penance meets this need head on. It is backed by the guarantee of Christ. Just as Christ forgave the good thief on the Cross, so His priests in the Confessional forgive repentant sinners who seek God's mercy. Our Lord's parable of the Prodigal Son comes to life in the Sacrament of Penance. The foolish and sinful son was wise enough to return and seek the forgiveness of his father after years of folly. The sinner does likewise when he enters the confessional and asks for absolution.

Penance solves the problem of sin, just as it answers our need for forgiveness. And the solution was devised by Christ, not by man! Christ gave His power of absolution to the Apostles without reservation and without limitation. He gave them a blanket grant of power sufficient to cover the full range of iniquity. In this Sacrament the words of the prophet are verified: "If your sins be as scarlet, they will be made whiter than snow." (Isaiah. 1:18). We should, therefore, love this Sacrament. This Sacrament of hope extends to us and reconciles us. It strengthens us in the battle of life. If gives us peace. It is not a burden. It should be a joy, for it restores the sinner to God's favor and gives us the necessary graces which will help us avoid future sin. The sinner finds a new start in his journey to God: he hears again the words of Christ: "Be of good heart, son, your sins are forgiven you!" Christ knew that His children would need the Sacrament of forgiveness that is why He instituted it. Those who understand this Sacrament of mercy rejoice in the goodness and compassion of Christ.

There is much misunderstanding about this Sacrament more and more from Catholics themselves who have not been instructed properly in the Sacrament. If this Sacrament is looked upon as a merely human invention instead of it being given to us by Christ, then it must appear to some to look ridiculous. Confession will never be understood by people who ignore its Sacramental nature. Far too many people consider only the man – the priest – on the other side of the grill (or face to face) and they ignore Christ Who instituted the Sacrament and placed that man there! If Christ had not instituted this Sacrament, there would have been no Confessional; but, since Christ did institute it, there will always be a confessional.

It is quite true that Catholics confess their sins to a priest but the confessor acts as a representative of Christ – he does not act in his own name. He uses a power which comes from Christ. The confessor's power is given to him by Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It is a trust which the priest is given, not some arrogant and fraudulent claim which he makes. The basic error is concentrating on the priest and ignoring Christ.

Another error is to be found in the tendency to falsely emphasize the difficulty of confessing sins and to ignore the joy and relief which comes from the assurance of God's forgiveness. It is absurd to stress the difficulty of confessing sins and to ignore the joy of benefitting from Christ's mercy. At times, Confession may seem difficult, but it is not more difficult than shouldering a load of unforgiven sin. I will finish next week with our obligations to confess at least once a year and some more objections answered. When's the last time you have been to Confession?