



Archbishop Fulton Sheen once noticed that the lines for Holy Communion were growing longer and the lines for Confession were growing shorter. He then said, “It is not particularly difficult to find thousands who will spend two or three hours a day in exercising, but if you ask them to bend their knees to God in five minutes of prayer or take the time to make a good Confession, they protest that it is too long.” He called Confession the “nudity of the soul.”

The Sacrament of Penance is commonly called “Confession” because Catholics confess their sins to a priest in order to receive it. It seems like that whenever Catholicism is discussed, the subject of Confession is almost certain to be raised. For some strange reason, many people simply cannot understand why Catholics confess their sins to a priest. I have even heard statements like, “I would be a Catholic if it were not for Confession-but Confession-no, that’s not for me.”

You have probably heard many of the objections which are made against Confession. Perhaps you have entertained certain doubts and reservations toward it yourself. If so, now is the time to clear up the doubts and to answer difficulties. We will take a look at some of these objections and try to answer them.

If we are to understand this great Sacrament, we must begin with Christ, the Divine Physician of the souls of us all. He cured spiritual maladies as well as physical ills. He came to earth to forgive sins. During His earthly ministry Christ often forgave sins. His enemies protested against His claim to this power, and He, in turn, forcefully answered their objections and vindicated His right to forgive sins.

Christ instituted a Church to continue His work through time. Since the forgiveness of sin was so important a part of His ministry, it should also be a most important part of the Church’s ministry.

Christ clearly gave the power of forgiveness which He exercised, to His Apostles, and He commanded them to use it. Attend to His words: “As the Father has sent me so I send you. When He said this, He breathed on them and He said to them: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” (John 20:21)

Carefully observe these words of Christ. They prove beyond doubt that He gave the Apostles His own power of forgiving sins. Christ declares that the Apostles are being sent into the world for the same reason that He had been sent: “As the Father has sent me so I send you.” This reason is not left in doubt for an instant. He is sending them to forgive sin: “Whose sins you forgive they are forgiven them...” Before granting this power, and to double-emphasize it, Christ performed a ceremony: “He breathed upon them,” as the Gospel states. He was not speaking idly. He was giving a very definite, real, and important power to these men as His ceremony proved. Christ plainly pointed to the source of this power: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The power of forgiveness comes from the Holy Spirit, not from their themselves. Therefore, in using the power of forgiveness, the priests of Christ, the Apostles, would be using a power of God. So the words are crystal clear! He not only forgave sins Himself; He also gave this power to His Apostles. He wished them to do as He had done – to forgive sins. In handing this great power over to the Apostles, He made them living instruments of His loving mercy.

Since Christ left this power of forgiveness in His Church, the Church of Christ should possess that power today. If a Church claims to be the Church of Christ, and does not both claim and exercise this power, we have to ask: what has happened to this power of forgiveness which Christ left His Church in the hands of the Apostles? Has it been lost? If so, then one of the most necessary gifts of Christ has been lost, and the Church in question does not do all that Christ did! Has it been discarded? Then, who has had the effrontery to discard such a precious, Christ-given power? On what authority has it been discarded? Who has dared to discard one of the treasures of Christ? Obviously, a Church which claims to be the Church of Christ must either claim and exercise this power of forgiveness, or it must confess itself guilty either of abandoning or of losing one of the most necessary and characteristic of the gifts entrusted to it by Christ. The Catholic Church is not open to this charge. More to come next week.....along with an explanation of the Marian Catechists to which I belong. God bless.