



THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE – FINAL PART

5. When I want to be forgiven I'll tell my sins directly to God. I'll go into the privacy of my room, close the door and talk to God alone. Or, when I want to be forgiven, I'll go to a mountain top and ask God to forgive me. I don't need a priest!

Such sentiments would be all very well if Christ had not instituted the Sacrament of Penance. But unfortunately for the objection, Christ decided to use the Apostles as the ordinary instruments of forgiveness. He did not mention the closed room or the mountain top, but He did say to His Apostles: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." The person who by-passes a means of forgiveness instituted by Christ in favor of some means which he has improvised for himself is guilty of presumption. It is dangerous to ignore the means of forgiveness established by Christ in favor of some uncertain way which we may decide upon. This sentiment about the closed room and the mountain top is a good example of religious egotism. Translate the fine sounding phrases, and the following presumption appears: "I prefer my own way of seeking God's forgiveness to the way established by Christ!" That is absurd.

We believe that perfect contrition – sorrow of heart for sin which springs from a love of God – will remit sin without the actual reception of the Sacrament, but it must contain at least implicitly the intention of receiving the Sacrament. Sorrow of heart must always accompany the confession of sin. Confessions without sorrow will not remove sin.

Contrition is part of the Sacrament of Penance, not the whole of it. When possible, confession is also necessary. The necessary sorrow for sin – symbolized by the closed room and the mountain top often mentioned in such objections – is necessary in order to have sins forgiven. When Confession is impossible, contrition suffices as an extraordinary means of forgiveness. When Confession is possible, the way of Christ MUST be used – not our own private and convenient preferences. We may not despise any one of the seven sacramental jewels which Our Lord left in the world.

6. Confession is silly. Catholics commit the same sins over and over again, and they continue to go to Confession. What sense is there in Confession?

The only thing I can say to this type of comment, which I have heard several times is – so what?

People who do not go to Confession also commit the same sins over and over again. Objections of this kind are filled with absurd logic. Sins are committed because of human weakness, not because of Confession. Confession is a means of having sin forgiven and a remedy for it – it is not a stimulant to sin. It is ridiculous to blame the Sacrament of Penance for the sins of weak and fallible human beings. Christ knows our human nature very well. He knew we would need a remedy for sin. His institution of the Sacrament of Penance provided for this need. If He had thought that men would be sinless, He would not have given this Sacrament to His Church. But Christ knew people. He knew that they needed a remedy for their sins. He gave them a Sacrament by which they might obtain forgiveness. This was Christ's plan for salvation. When someone approaches the Sacrament of Penance, he conforms himself to the plan of Our Divine Savior.

If the reasoning behind this objection were applied to other facets in life, we would say, for instance: "I am sick, but I'll be sick again, so why call a doctor?" or, "I'm in the gutter, so I'll stay there. There is no use in getting up and starting over!" The sinner is morally sick. He should use the medicine given him by Christ for recovery. The sinner is in a moral gutter. He should pick himself up and start all over again. There is always hope for the person who has the courage to admit his failure and to begin again; there is little hope for the person who is content with his fall. Such a person is a victim of despair. The Catholic, in going to Confession, at least shows that he is trying to overcome sin. He or she apologizes to Christ and begs His mercy. We demonstrate our good will and our sorrow. We declare that we are ready to make a new start. If we did not have such motives, we would not go to Confession. The very fact that he is willing to go to confess his sins is proof that he loves God, is sorry for his sin, and is willing to take up the battle against sin in the future. Confession discourages sin. We need not worry about the person who has the necessary faith and love that causes him to go to Confession. He is close to the Heart of Christ. There is cause for worry when someone begins to stay away from Confession, for then he shows that he is either growing weary with the battle against sin, or, that he is losing hope in the mercy of Christ.

Finally, the Sacrament of Penance is medicine for the soul. It is a Sacrament! There are three essentials to a Sacrament. It was instituted by Christ, it has a sensible sign, and that sign is capable of producing grace in human souls. This Sacrament is absolutely necessary for those who have the misfortune to fall into mortal sin after Baptism. Every Catholic must know how to make a good Confession. It is not difficult. There are five steps to be followed: 1) An examination of conscience, by which we prepare for Confession (we have pamphlets in our pamphlet rack to help you) 2) True sorrow or contrition of soul for the sins committed 3) A firm purpose of amendment 4) A complete confession of the sins we have committed 5) Proper satisfaction for the sins confessed.

When is the last time you have made a good Confession?

