



Forgiveness of Sin

You often hear it said that “I don’t want to confess my sins to someone else,” or “Catholic priests cannot forgive sins,” and even “I can just go into my backyard, look up, and ask God to forgive me, I don’t need to confess my sins to man.” These statements are all out there. Since Lent is coming closer then let’s spend a couple of weeks discussing the forgiveness of sins and why the Sacrament of Penance is the means that Our Lord Jesus Christ gave us to have sins forgiven.

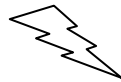
Let’s start with the Gospels, in particular the Gospel of St. John. “Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” **(John 20: 21-23)** How did the Father send Jesus? He sent Him with authority. How does Jesus send out the Apostles? He sends them with authority. Jesus breathed on the Apostles. The only other time God breathed on someone was when He breathed life into Adam. Jesus breathed life into the Apostles and gave them the authority that the Father had given to Him. In order to know which sins were to be forgiven and which were to be retained, the Apostles must have heard confessions.

Let’s take a look at a verse in St. Matthew’s Gospel. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose upon earth shall be loosed in heaven.” **(Matt. 18:18)** Jesus had already given St. Peter the power to bind and loose, now He gives it to all the Apostles. Whatever the Apostles declare on earth, it will be in Heaven. Why? Because they are in the person of Christ Himself. If they bind a sin, it is bound in Heaven which means God will recognize the authority He gave them. If God will recognize the authority He has given to His priests, why shouldn’t we also? As Catholics, we do!

Let’s close our look at the Gospels with **Luke 17:3-4**. “Take heed to yourselves; if your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

Only God can forgive sins? Here Jesus is talking to the disciples and telling them they are to forgive their brother of their sins (Matt 6:14-15). But the argument says that only God can forgive sins. We as lay people have the power to forgive sins but we do not have the same power that priests do. The priest is an instrument of God who forgives our sins on God’s behalf. However, we are still called to forgive one another as specified in the “Our Father.” ...**cont’d next week.**

Phillip Bellini, DRE.



FORGIVENESS OF SINS – PART 2

We need to continue on last week’s topic on the forgiveness of sins. It is very important to understand this subject and the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation.

It is leveled at the Church that Catholic priests cannot forgive sins. However, if we look at Sacred Scripture, we understand the contrary. St. Matthew’s Gospel has another verse that applies to those of last week. In Matthew 9:6-8 we read, **“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to me.**” This verse says that not only was authority to heal given to men, but also the authority to forgive sins. “Men” is used in the plural. If this referred only to Jesus, it would have read, “who had given such authority to a Man” (used in the singular). The people of the New Testament understood that Jesus gave authority to forgive to men. They were afraid of this authority as many today are. However, this is a loving ministerial authority guided by the Holy Spirit not a man made authority seeking power.

Let’s take a look at what St. Paul has to say. **It’s in 2 Corinthians 2:10. “Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,”** St. Paul says that he has forgiven in the presence of Christ. Paul and all the successors of the Apostles are in the presence of Christ when they hear Confessions. We follow the command of Christ to confess our sins and we do this through His priests and the power that Our Lord gave to them and passed on through apostolic succession. Some may say they go straight to God with their sins. But how do they know their sins are forgiven? As Catholics we go to Christ who is represented by the priest. The Apostles and their successors were given the ministry of reconciliation not only to preach the Word, but to heal the body and soul of the people. Healing the soul is done through the ministry of reconciliation, which unites us with the Body of Christ. **(2 Cor. 5:18 as a reference).** We close with James 5:15-16. **“and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess yours sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed...”**

Who is James talking about in these verses? He is talking about the presbyters (priests) of the Church who can heal your body and your soul. It is the presbyters (priests) who are to be summoned, not the lay person. God does forgive our sins through the priest!

God Bless you. Phillip Bellini, DRE