

Cardinal Newman Catechist Consultants - 24th August, 2018 - HANDOUTS n. 172

"Clear, brief and easily assimilated by all"

Part 3. Confession

SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION is for the healing we can't give ourselves

This sacrament of Penance is necessary for salvation for those who have fallen after Baptism, just as Baptism is necessary for salvation for those who have not yet been reborn. (CCC n. 980)

Priests have received from God a power that he has given neither to angels nor to archangels...

God above confirms what priests do here below.

(CCC n. 983)

NAMES OF THE SACRAMENT: Is it Penance, Reconciliation or Confession?

Penance is penitence (Mark 1:15) i.e. conversion (CCC nn. 1423, 1424). Many think of "penance" as "doing their penance", the Act of Satisfaction, because their penance is *sacramentalized* in this Sacrament of Forgiveness.

Pope St John Paul II popularized the name "Sacrament of Reconciliation", and the CCC uses it extensively, though by no means exclusively. However, he also insisted that:

All seven sacraments are reconciliation...

The old name, Sacrament of Confession, still stands.

(*Reconciliatio et Penitentia* §27 of 1984).

Canon Law, too, uses the expression "hearing confessions" 22 times (in CCL nn. 961 §1 °1 to 986 °2; also in 566 °1, 630 °4), so better to say, "This is my First Confession", because First Reconciliation was Baptism.

CALL TO HOLINESS — continuous conversion: "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15)

All the faithful are called to holiness (*Lumen Gentium* chapter 5; "Be holy for I am holy (1 Peter 1:16; cf. Matthew 5:48)) and therefore go to Confession regularly. The Introduction to the *Rite of Penance* says:

The members of the Church are exposed to temptation and unfortunately often fall into sin (*Rite of Penance* n. 3).

Frequent confession of venial sins is like washing hands before meals, a mid-course correction:

In the sacrament of penance the faithful obtain from the mercy of God pardon for their sins against Him; at the same time they are reconciled with the Church ... which works for their conversion by charity, example and prayer (ibid. n. 4).

The healing which penance provides is varied. Those in grave sin ... are called back ... to the life they have lost. Those with venial sins ... gain the full freedom of the children of God (ibid. n. 7).

The faithful must confess to a priest each and every grave sin which they remember upon examination of their conscience. Moreover, frequent and careful celebration of this sacrament is also very useful as a remedy for venial sins. This is not a mere ritual repetition or psychological exercise, but a serious striving to perfect the grace of baptism ... to conform more closely to Christ and to follow the voice of the Spirit more attentively (ibid. n. 7).

Mortal sin is a ticket to Hell. The Sacrament of Penance is "a second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace" (CCC n. 1446) and CCC n. 1447 gives its historical development. It implies God (1) is merciful; (2) justice has moral absolutes, "Maker's instructions", Ten Commandments.

If morality is taught in black and white, our conduct will rise at least to various shades of grey. However, if morality is taught as shades of grey, the conduct will be very black indeed.

GENERAL ABSOLUTION

The Third Rite of the Sacrament of Penance is for emergencies, never normative, and not for a large group of penitents who have left it too late for normal confession (the First Rite) before a big feast day. (CCC nn. 1483-1484; CCL nn. 961-963). The lure of an easy option kills any zeal for holiness.

We need a challenge, not a soft option: the easy is cheap and not valued. Think of the Syrian leper, Namaan, angry at the casualness of Elisha the Prophet, who wouldn't even come to the door, but sent a servant to tell him to wash seven times in the Jordan. Namaan was insulted and turned away in a towering rage. He was being taught humility, and repented after his own servants chided him:

If the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? (2 Kings 5:8-14)

Bringing out the best in a man requires him to do something especially difficult:

Tom had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing it, namely, that, in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make it difficult.

Mark Twain: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, on whitewashing the fence.

Significantly, this is quoted in *The Book of Virtues*, as also is Sir Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922), who was flooded with applicants after his advertisement for volunteers for an antarctic expedition:-

MEN WANTED FOR HAZARDOUS JOURNEY. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success.

Making-it-more-noble is even more important than "making-it-difficult": a motto for the Christian life must be "Excelsior", "Friend, go up higher" (Luke 14:10), "Be perfect", "be holy" (Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15,16).

WHAT'S TO BE DONE? and urgently, since the Church exists to turn sinners into saints

Reminders are needed: **sacramental Confession is required** (except for newly baptized) for:

- those in mortal sin (CCL n. 916; "Let a man examine himself," 1 Corinthians 11:28);
- receiving first Holy Communion ("Let the children come to Me, Matthew 19:14; and CCL c. 914);
- receiving Confirmation when separated from Baptism (CCC n. 1310; cf. n. 1319).

The sequence of these sacraments need not be exactly the same for children baptized in infancy as for adult catechumens and converts (see *Handouts* n. 11, The 3 C's, Confession, Communion, Confirmation: What order?):-

In a special way, the parish priest is to ensure... children are properly prepared for **first confession and first communion**, and for the **sacrament of confirmation**, [NOTE THE ORDER!] by means of catechetical formation over an appropriate period of time... (CCL c. 777 2°).

Counselling is a secondary aspect of the Sacrament of Penance. Yet when *The Rite of Penance* was renewed in 1976, other changes were slipped in *as if* they were parts of the new rite.

These involved extensive and expensive reconstruction of confessionals as "confessional rooms", with a chair for the penitent to sit face to face with the priest and **without the grill between them**.

With a penitent no longer kneeling, but simply sitting, it seemed more like a therapy session and, in some places, the penitent was persuaded to forgive himself, psycho-style... Further, some priests *insisted* on 'face to face' — that or nothing. It was very **insensitive towards those confessing embarrassing sins**. And CCL of 1983 in c. 964 was somewhat imprecise in a more-or-less insistence on a fixed grill between priest and penitent. But sitting is **the wrong body language**. The previous supernatural symbolism of kneeling was gone. Besides, in the Bible, kneeling is for humility and adoration and an appeal for forgiveness (Matthew 18:29; Luke 5:8). Make it the default option.

Restoration of a three hour fast for Holy Communion would reduce embarrassment for those in need of Confession to **avoid unworthy reception out of human respect**. The present canon law is:

Whoever is to receive the Blessed Eucharist is to abstain for **at least one hour** before Holy Communion from all food and drink with the sole exception of water and medicine. (CCL c. 919 §1)

After suitable intense preaching, it could be changed from "At least one hour" to "three hours", and dispensable by confessors in the internal forums of Confession or confidential counselling.

Indiscriminate Holy Communion at school Masses, weddings and funerals must cease, and the ignorance of non-Catholics and even practising Catholics, can be **cured by kindly instruction**.

School Masses for lapsed Catholics and non-believers might better be replaced by **Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament**. The Real Presence and the Sense of Sacredness needs to be preached (see p. 6). It would help lax 'pray-ers' to adore God, and also children preparing for First Communion.

"Confession" of the Faith, the faith which is the truth about God

This is the usage in a majority of Bible texts on "confession"; confession of sins is in fewer texts.

Our chief pastoral need, as always, is to Proclaim the Good News. The Good News is:-

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection,
and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death...

(Philippians 3:10)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel.

(Mark 1:15)

Thus the Good News is to rejoice in Christ's Resurrection and to take up His Cross.

WHAT'S TO BE DONE to love and serve the Lord?

Face the facts: some **falsehoods** abound:-

- Christianity without the Cross; capitulation to worldliness; "politically correct" alien paradigms.
- Morals without reality or revelation or any sound reasoning, left only with self-contradictory relativism.
- Miracles in Scripture demythologized by an absurd hermeneutics of their 'scientific' impossibility.
- Doctrine without Scripture, Tradition or Magisterium to suit "cafeteria pick-&-choose Christians".
- Catechetics without content and Catholic schools without Catholicism in many cases.
- Three generations without prayer, faith, piety, Sunday Mass, Friday Penance, or any Confession.
- Liturgy without The Sense of the Sacred and over-emphasis on intelligibility often reduced to banality.
- Holy Communion without sacramental Confession of grave sins (or any sin) — abolition of a sacrament!
- Ignorant insensitive priests making public their generalizations about confessions they have heard.
- Ignorant judges, lawyers and politicians who think the seal of Confession is dispensable.
- Character without the courage to renounce the Devil's modern temptations: it's a devolution into vice.
- The addiction of churchmen to 'experts', gurus, fashions and "to hear something new" (Acts 17:21).