

Family Light

EDITORIAL

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

I remember what a priest psychologist had to say regarding confession. His mother once told him: "You know, what people need today is not hours of counseling alone, but they need to make a good confession." There is a meaning in what she was saying. The sacrament of Reconciliation provides us with a powerful healing experience. In the story of the prodigal son, we realize the love of the Father who is ready to embrace us when we return to Him. In this issue of *Family Light* we are focusing on the sacrament of Reconciliation. Realizing the importance of this healing sacrament during this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we hope your reading this newsletter may create a desire in you to participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation several times during the Year of Mercy.

Pope Francis says: "Every confessor must welcome the faithful as the father in the parable of the prodigal son: a father who runs out to meet his son despite the fact that he has squandered away his inheritance. Confessors are called to embrace the repentant son who comes back home and to express the joy of having him back again. Let us never tire of also going out to the other son who stands outside, incapable of rejoicing, in order to explain to him that his judgment is severe and unjust and meaningless in light of the father's boundless mercy." (*Misericordiae Vultus*, no. 17) The Holy Father is reminding the families to go to priests who would receive them as Christ would do.

On Ash Wednesday, the Pope addressed the priests named the 'Missionaries of Mercy': "As we enter the confessional, we should always remember that it is Christ who welcomes, it is Christ who listens, it is Christ who forgives, and it is Christ who gives peace." (*Zenith news*, Feb. 11) Fr. Emmanuel shares with us some of the benefits of going to confession. Confession helps us to bring a radical change in us and this requires self-awareness. Confession is a grace that you receive to return to Jesus. Confession helps us to grow in consciousness that we are beloved children of God.

The testimony of Fr. Mike Schmitz helps us to understand what Pope Francis is asking priests to be at the confessional. They are called to be merciful and loving pastors. He says: "going to confession is a sign that you haven't given up on Jesus". Fr. Morissette answers the frequently asked question: "Why confess our sins to a priest?" He points out nine reasons why people don't like to go to confession. To mention some of the common ones: "I always confess the same sins... I don't feel the need of confession... I find it humiliating... I prefer community celebrations of the sacrament... and I prefer to confess my sins directly to God." We can pick up a few guidelines from James Socias on how we can make a good confession. It is very essential that we familiarize ourselves with these guidelines and learn to celebrate the sacrament meaningfully. During this jubilee year of mercy we are urged by Pope Francis to make a good confession and experience the love of God. Fr. Nicholas Machado tells us that, when we confess our sins to a priest, we are no more alone. We enter a new relationship with God and with others. If guilt feelings are very depressing, the confession of our sins is often at the origin of real growth in the faith. Christian families are in a privileged position to resolve conflicts that arise in the family. Confession helps the family to forgive and reconcile with one another.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is a significant means to grow in relationships and experience healing when things go wrong in the family or in our significant relationships. The family is transformed and is able to live in peace and joy. Confession provides a better opportunity for the family to work together with God who wants you to be the family that God wants you to be. As families we need to enter through the holy door and experience the Lord who is rich in mercy. On Ash Wednesday, when ashes were placed on us we heard the priest say: "Repent and believe in the Gospel." The season of Lent provides us with this golden opportunity "to turn back to God". When we are at his side, we become better persons.

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"FAMILY LIFE: A PILGRIMAGE FOR EXPERIENCING THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS"

Vatican City, 27 December 2015 (VIS) At 10:00 this morning, on the Feast of the Holy Family, Pope Francis celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. During the celebration, attended by Roman and pilgrim families for the Jubilee of Family, he gave the following homily:

"The biblical readings which we just heard presented us with the image of two families on pilgrimage to the house of God. Elkanah and Hannah bring their son Samuel to the Temple of Shiloh and consecrate him to the Lord. In the same way, Joseph and Mary, in the company of Jesus, go as pilgrims to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover."



"We often see pilgrims journeying to shrines and places dear to popular piety. These days, many of them are making their way to the Holy Door opened in all the cathedrals of the world and in many shrines. But the most beautiful thing which emerges from the Word of God today is that the whole family goes on pilgrimage. Fathers, mothers and children together go to the house of the Lord, in order to sanctify the holy day with prayer. It is an important teaching, which is meant for our own families as well. Indeed, we could say that family life is a series of pilgrimages, both small and big."

"For example, how comforting it is for us to reflect on Mary and Joseph teaching Jesus how to pray! This is a sort of pilgrimage, the pilgrimage of education in prayer. And it is comforting also to know that throughout the day they would pray together, and then go each Sabbath to the synagogue to listen to readings from the Law and the Prophets, and to praise the Lord with the assembly. Certainly, during their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, they prayed by singing the Psalm: 'I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!' Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!'"

"How important it is for our families to journey together towards a single goal! We know that we have a road to travel together; a road along which we encounter difficulties but also enjoy moments of joy and consolation. And on this pilgrimage of life we also

share in moments of prayer. What can be more beautiful than for a father and mother to bless their children at the beginning and end of each day, to trace on their forehead the sign of the cross, as they did on the day of their baptism? Is this not the simplest prayer which parents can offer for their children? To bless them, that is, to entrust them to the Lord, just like Elkanah and Anna, Joseph and Mary, so that he can be their protection and support throughout the day. In the same way, it is important for families to join in a brief prayer before meals, in order to thank the Lord for these gifts and to learn how to share what we have received with those in greater need. These are all little gestures, yet they point to the great formative role played by the family in the pilgrimage of everyday life."

"At the end of that pilgrimage, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was obedient to his parents. This image also contains a beautiful teaching about our families. A pilgrimage does not end when we arrive at our destination, but when we return home and resume our everyday lives, putting into practice the spiritual fruits of our experience. We know what Jesus did on that occasion. Instead of returning home with his family, he stayed in Jerusalem, in the Temple, causing great distress to Mary and Joseph who were unable to find him. For this little "escapade", Jesus probably had to beg forgiveness of his parents. The Gospel doesn't say this, but I believe that we can presume it. Mary's question, moreover, contains a certain reproach, revealing the concern and anguish which she and Joseph felt. Returning home, Jesus surely remained close to them, as a sign of his complete affection and obedience. Moments like these become part of the pilgrimage of each family; the Lord transforms the moments into opportunities to grow, to ask for and to receive forgiveness, to show love and obedience."

"In the Year of Mercy, every Christian family can become a privileged place on this pilgrimage for experiencing the joy of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the essence of the love which can understand mistakes and mend them. How miserable we would be if God did not forgive us! Within the family we learn how to forgive, because we are certain that we are understood and supported, whatever the mistakes we make."

"Let us not lose confidence in the family! It is beautiful when we can always open our hearts to one another, and hide nothing. Where there is love, there is also understanding and forgiveness. To all of you, dear families, I entrust this most important mission 'the domestic pilgrimage of daily family life' which the world and the Church need, now more than ever."

Inside the Confessional: What Is It Like for a Priest?

A college chaplain talks about "the most joyful, humbling and inspiring place in the world"

Testimony of Fr. Mike Schmitz

I was once riding on a shuttle-bus with a number of older folks on the way from an airport. They noticed I was a priest and started asking questions.

"Do you do all of the priest stuff?"

"Yep."

"Even the confession thing?"

"Yeah. All the time."

One older lady gasped. "Well, I think that would be the worst. It would be so depressing hearing all about people's sins."

I told them it was the opposite. There is almost no greater place to be than with someone when he or she is coming back to God. I said, "It would be depressing if I had to watch people leave God; I get to be with them when they come back to him."

The confessional is a place where people let God's love win. The confessional is the most joyful, humbling and inspiring place in the world.

What do I see during confession?

I think there are three things.

First, I see the costly mercy of God in action. I get to regularly come face to face with the overwhelming, life-transforming power of God's love. I get to see God's love up-close, and it reminds me of how good God is. Not many folks get to see the way in which God's sacrifice on the cross is constantly breaking into people's lives and melting the hardest hearts. Jesus consoles those who are grieving their sins ... and strengthens those who find themselves wanting to give up on God or on life. As a priest, I get to see this thing happen every day.

I see a saint in the making.

The second thing I see is a person who is still trying — a saint in the making. I don't care if this is the person's third confession this week; if he or she is seeking the sacrament of reconciliation, it means the person is trying. That's all I care about. This thought is worth considering: going to confession is a sign that you haven't given up on Jesus. This is one of the reasons why pride is so deadly. I have talked with people who tell me they don't want to go to confession because their priest really likes them and "thinks I'm a good kid."

I have two things to say to this.

1. He will not be disappointed! What your priest will see is a person who is trying! I dare you to find a saint who didn't need God's mercy! (Even Mary needed God's mercy; she received the mercy of God in a dramatic and powerful way at her conception. Boom. Lawyered.)

2. So what if the priest is disappointed? We try to be so impressive with so much of our lives Confession is a place where we don't get to be impressive. Confession is a place where the desire to impress goes to die.

Think about it: all other sins have the potential to cause us to race to the confessional, but pride is the one that causes us to hide from the God who could heal us.



Do I remember your sins? No!

So often, people will ask if I remember people's sin from confession. As a priest, I rarely, if ever, remember sins from the confessional. That might seem impossible, but the truth is, sins aren't all that impressive. They aren't like memorable sunsets or meteor showers or super-intriguing movie — they are more like the garbage. And if sins are like garbage, then the priest is like God's garbage man. If you ask a garbage man about the grossest thing he's ever had to haul to the dump, maybe he could remember it. But the fact is, once you get used to taking out the trash, it ceases to be noteworthy; it ceases to stand out.

Honestly, once you realize the sacrament of reconciliation is less about the sin and more about Christ's death and resurrection having victory in a person's life, the sins lose all their luster, and Jesus' victory takes center stage.

In confession, we meet the life-transforming, costly love of God ... freely given to us every time we ask for it. We meet Jesus, who reminds us, "You are worth dying for ... even in your sins, you are worth dying for." Whenever someone comes to confession, I see a person who is deeply loved by God and who is saying he or she loves him back. That's it, and that's all.

From: *Aleteia* (27-12-15)

During the season of Lent, we will be invited to go and confess our sins to a priest in order to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ at Easter. So, we may ask ourselves: "Why to a priest? Why not directly to God?" Before I try to answer this question, I would like to review the main objections that most people have to the practice of sacramental confession. Then we may be in a better position to understand the reasons why the Church invites us to confess our sins to a priest.

We cannot say that the men and women of today are more hypocritical than those of the previous generations. We would be mistaken to think that the fear of acknowledging our own weaknesses is the main reason why we don't like to confess our sins. There are deeper reasons. Here are some of them.

1- *I don't feel I'm a sinner*

There are many trends today which seek to persuade us that the notion of sin is outdated, but these trends may exert a relative influence on us. The main reason why some of us are slowly losing the sense of sin is the fact that their relationship with Christ is not very personal. Let's use a comparison. If a neighbour forgets to wish you on your birthday, you may not be much affected by his forgetfulness. But if your best friend, your spouse or your child forgets to do it, you will probably feel hurt. The same is true of our relationship with Christ. If I betray Christ by committing a serious sin and I do not realize the gravity of my offence, it is certainly because my spiritual relationship with him is very impersonal.

To acknowledge that we are sinners we have to remember that we always remain free in whatever conditions we live. Those who confess their sins acknowledge that they acted "through their own fault". We have also to keep in mind that God has given us a few commandments which are not just a matter of choice. They are mandatory. That is why in confessing our sins we admit that we have not always been faithful to the twofold commandment of love of God and love of neighbor.

However, it is not enough to acknowledge our sins in order to be forgiven. We have also to repent. When he returned the thirty pieces of silver to the high priests and the elders, Judas acknowledged his sin. He said: "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Mt 27, 4). But he shut himself up in his guilt. He did not want to remember what he had witnessed during the past three years: the attitude of Jesus towards sinners. He did not want to remember how Jesus looked tenderly at him in the garden of Gethsemani and murmured in his ear: "My friend." After betraying Christ, he betrayed his vocation as a disciple. For every disciple of Christ is

called to confess the mercy of God in reference to his own experience of betrayal. What a wonderful apostle of Jesus' mercy Judas could have become!

2- *I always confess the same sins again and again.*

This difficulty discourages some people and makes them feel that their confessions are useless. But it could also remind us about the importance of taking firm and concrete resolutions to show greater fidelity in the future. In many instances, if our confessions do not bear much fruit, it is probably because we did not have any desire to change our lives.

On the other hand, we should not be surprised that we often fall into the same temptations. God is not expecting us to commit new sins! We can be perfectly sincere in our desire to remain faithful to the Lord, even if we foresee that we will sin again due to our human weaknesses. And, perhaps, it is better like that. If, each time we go to confession, we would slowly get rid of our tendency to sin, we could easily become the best of Pharisees. We would come to the Lord and say: "Lord, I thank you for having helped me to get rid of all my sins. I don't have anything to confess now. I don't need you any more. Thank you, Lord!" All of us will remain sinners till the last day of our lives, but we should not forget that we are forgiven and redeemed sinners.

3- *I don't know what to say*

In the past, Catholics were invited to examine their conscience in reference to the Ten Commandments and the commandments of the Church. Today, many ignore what is sin and what is not sin. They do not know what to confess as sins. Many of us are so busy that we don't have any more time to sit down and review our lives in the light of the Gospel.

Jesus said that he had not come to abolish the Ten Commandments. So, we do well to confess our failures to observe them. Besides this, the Church invites us to review our lives in the light of Jesus' teachings. If we answer this invitation, we may be led to say: "Lord, you tell me not to worry about tomorrow, but I'm often afraid of what will happen to me... You tell me to love my neighbor as myself, but I often pass rash judgments on him... You tell me to pray without ceasing, but I pray so rarely and so badly..."

Saint John Vianney, who used to spend ten hours a day in the confessional, made practical remarks while preaching to his parishioners. He would say, for example, "Avoid all these useless accusations which are a waste of time for the confessor, upset those who wait to make their confession and tamper true devotion. For example, after having fought with her

R SINS TO A PRIEST?

husband and shouted the whole day, a woman accuses herself of having forgotten to say her prayers before and after meals."

If we read the Gospel attentively, we may discover that we have often failed to act on the Word of God, especially when we met people who are oppressed or poor. That is why priests often remind us today of our responsibilities with regard to social justice. However, the collective sins in which we take part should not make us conceal our own personal sins.

4- I don't feel the need of confession

We could also say that we don't always feel the need of certain interventions which are a must in our lives. We have only to recall what we felt the day before we had to undergo a serious surgical operation. In other words, we are truly to be pitied if we lead our Christian lives taking only our feelings into account. Then we run the risk of giving up many other responsibilities like prayer, concern for the poor, social commitments, etc.

The purpose of confession is not just to answer a psychological need to open up and confide our secrets to another person. The priest is first a minister of God's forgiveness before being a confidant. However, we have to acknowledge that the confidential aspect of confession is not to be neglected. The priest often witnesses a wonderful psychological liberation taking place each time that a penitent confesses sins that he found difficult to hide, like a shameful passion, a deep-rooted hatred, a fierce jealousy, a conjugal infidelity, a series of lies, etc. Naturally, knowing that the confessor is bound to keep the secret of confession facilitates very much the confession of sins.

5- I find it too humiliating

It is only an authentic catechesis on the sacrament of Reconciliation which can help us to answer this objection. Confession is not a "penance" or a humiliation that God would impose upon us in order to grant us His pardon. The humiliating aspect of confession disappears when we remember that the priest himself is a sinner. He, too, confesses his sins to another priest. Moreover, he has great admiration for the sincerity with which many penitents confess their sins to him. He is more impressed by that attitude than by the sins themselves.

What we tell the priest in confession is not so much a list of the sins we have committed - even though we have to be humble enough to name our sins - but the unassuming acknowledgement of our sinfulness and our firm desire to experience Christ's merciful love for us. We should not forget also that we always have the

right to confess our sins to a priest with whom we feel more at ease.

6- Why not have a personal dialogue with the priest?

Some people prefer to have a more personal dialogue with the priest, during which they can review their lives in a deeper way and with greater transparency. This practice is spreading more and more in various parishes, and we can rejoice that such spiritual counseling is made available to the faithful, even though a good number of them do not know how to avail of this pastoral ministry.

However, a clear distinction should be made here between spiritual counseling and sacramental confession. When we confess our sins to a priest after having had a dialogue with him, our sins are truly forgiven, because Christ himself is acting through the priest. In spiritual counseling, the priest acts in his own name.

7- Priests have something more important to do

Sometimes, young people think that the priests are wasting their time when they do spiritual counseling or hear confessions: they should rather get involved in social action and in service to the poor. Even though the preferential option for the poor is an integral part of the Gospel message and should be given due consideration especially by the priests, we should not forget that the ministry of reconciliation and spiritual accompaniment is an important part of the priestly ministry. If people are not given the possibility to confess their sins to a priest, they are denied the personal attention that Jesus shows to sinners and which is so manifest in the Gospel. Jesus never performed physical or moral healing without laying his hands on the persons concerned and without enquiring about the depth of their faith.

Some people are surprised to see some priests leaving the priesthood. These are often the same people who never tried to find out what the priests are made for. What incoherent reactions on their part! The priests become unemployed when people do not know how to avail of the services they are commissioned to render.

8- I prefer community celebrations of the sacrament

These community celebrations of the sacrament of Reconciliation have already borne abundant fruit and they will continue to do so. Christians do well to celebrate regularly and in a communitarian way their reconciliation with one another and with God. They can also benefit by taking time to listen to the Word of God together and allow the Word to challenge them. It

is important that they become aware of their collective responsibilities and be capable of forgiving one another. Thus they will be reconciled with God through the sacrament.

The same people are invited to rediscover the benefits of individual confession which can contribute to foster the sense of mission. This individual confession will always remain a privileged means for many of the faithful not only to avail of personal spiritual guidance, but also to experience the personal dimension of the sacrament of Reconciliation.

9- *I prefer to confess my sins directly to God*

Let me use a comparison to answer this objection. Suppose you have a big quarrel with your wife, husband, child or neighbor. Both of you are so angry that you don't talk to each other any more. You don't even look at each other. You are at war. This situation may continue for a few days. After one week, if no reconciliation has taken place, either the fight was a very serious one or you are not a normal human being. Normally, people living under the same roof feel the need of communicating with one another. When you are ready to reconcile, both of you may not even be able to talk to each other on the first day, but a smile will be enough to indicate that you are forgiven by the other. If that smile, which is an external sign, is not seen, how can you imagine that the other has forgiven you. You need that sign.

In the same way, how can we know that our sins are forgiven by God? We need signs from Him and one of these signs is the priest who has been ordained to be a minister of God's forgiveness. We can see him and we can hear him say: "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Most Christians who are approaching the hour of death have a very great desire to see and hear that "sign". Once, I heard a nurse working in a Catholic hospital of Bangalore telling me: "A woman was dying in her room. She asked me to go and call the chaplain, because she wanted to make her last confession. I went all around the hospital, but could not find him. Finally, when I returned to her room, she said to me: 'Tell me that my sins are forgiven.' She wanted to have a sign that she was reconciled with God before departing from this world."

When we go to confession, we should remember that Christ himself wanted his Church to have ministers of reconciliation. In the Gospels, we see him giving his apostles the power to forgive sins (Cf. Mt. 16, 19; 18, 18; Jn. 20, 23). As this sacrament was instituted by Christ himself, the Church will never abandon a practice which bore such abundant fruit from the very beginning of Christianity. The modalities of the

celebration may vary from one place to another, but the sacramental celebration of reconciliation will never be set aside. How many converts can bear witness that the confession of their sins to a priest, far from having alienated them, has liberated them and given them new hope and confidence. They know that in confessing their sins to a priest, they confess them to God Himself.

Hervé Morissette, csc

SHORT GUIDE FOR CONFESSION

The basic for a good Confession is to have the intention of returning to God like the prodigal son and to acknowledge our sins with true sorrow before his representative, the priest. Saint John Paul II said: "To those who have been far away from the sacrament of Reconciliation and forgiving love I make this appeal: come back to this source of grace; do not be afraid! Christ himself is waiting for you. He will heal you, and you will be at peace with God!"

Examination of conscience: *Recall your sins. Calmly ask yourself what you have done with full knowledge and full consent against God's and the Church's Commandments.*

- When was my last Confession? Did I receive Communion in the state of mortal sin? Did I intentionally fail to confess some mortal sin in my previous Confession?
- Did I seriously doubt my faith or put myself in danger of losing it through readings hostile to Catholic teachings or involvement in non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious practices: palm-reading, fortune telling, etc.?
- Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I curse or take a false oath?
- Did I miss Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation through my own fault, without any serious reason? Did I keep fast and abstinence on the prescribed days?
- Did I disobey my parents and lawful superiors in important matters?
- Did I hate or quarrel with anyone, or desire revenge? Did I refuse to forgive? Did I hurt someone? Did I get drunk? Did I take illicit drugs? Did I consent to, recommend, or actively take part in an abortion?
- Did I willfully look at indecent pictures or watch immoral movies? Did I read immoral books or magazines? Did I engage in impure jokes or conversations? Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts or feelings? Did I commit impure acts, alone or with others? Did I take contraceptives or use other artificial means in order to prevent conception?

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BENEFITS OF CONFESSION

On 5 January 1757, King Louis XV of France was stabbed by Robert-François Damiens. As he was lying down bleeding, he, in his mortal fear, called for a confessor and made his confession. He begged pardon from his wife. The motive for making his confession was none but fear of his imminent death and eternal hell thereafter. The story goes that he survived this murderous attempt and continued to live an unrepentant life of debauchery till he was affected by small pox before his death in 1774.

Confession invites us to take a right-about-turn in our life and return to God. Since it goes against our grain, it made people such as Louis XV, Emperor Constantine and even St. Augustine postpone while playing the game of "Yes, but!" This happened during the time when confession was considered indispensable to be good Catholics. However, times have changed drastically! When many have stopped going for confession, some believe their sins are not too great to warrant an immediate confession. Many are in the stage of contemplating change while they lack guts to take the necessary step to approach a confessional as they consider it cumbersome and humiliating to lay bare their hearts to priests. Some travel to pilgrimage centers like Veilanganni as it provides anonymity. Some 'shop' for 'deaf' priests. Most of us are too engrossed in worldly pursuits to have time or mood to think of our spiritual or transcendental needs.

When the world seems to have lost the sense of sin, and when many ask, "What is the need for confession? Isn't it enough to ask pardon in prayer?" why does the Church think that it is still relevant? Responding to Jesus' categorical question, "What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?", the Church's unique spiritual innovation is confession. Confession is meaningful with not one but many benefits. We are, after all, human beings with the same instincts and feelings though they are expressed differently, filtered by cultural sieves. When we're drawn to evil which is gratifying to our senses, when we are sinking in sinfulness, Christ extends his hand through confession – a sacrament – an external sign of inner grace, a sacred conduit of divine mercy which washes away our sins.

Confession is, practically, a brief therapy for which we pay nothing. The fees have already been paid by the generosity of Christ's love. Confession takes the big load of guilt off our spiritual shoulders, and its accompanying negative feelings are drained through a process called 'Catharsis'. One of the benefits of confession is true relief. Have you heard of the story about a Mulla who had borrowed ten gold coins from one of the local Shylocks?

The night before the due date, Mulla panicked as he had no resources to return the gold coins. Noticing that he was restless, his wife nudged him and affectionately asked him what was wrong. Hesitantly did Mulla reveal the reason. The wife, with a rare practical wisdom, told him, "Cease worrying about returning the gold coins. It's past midnight. Leave the problem to me and go to sleep." While the Mulla couldn't understand how anyone in his place could fall asleep, his wife got up from bed, covered herself with a shawl. Without any trace of anxiety, she walked out and stood in front of the neighbour's house and shouted a few times, "Hello, Mister, wake up!" The disturbed neighbour came angrily to the balcony and yelled, "Why on earth are you disturbing me late at night?" Mulla's wife responded, "I'm sorry to wake you up. But I want to warn you that my husband will not be able to pay you tomorrow your gold coins. That's all! Good night!" She returned home and told her husband, "Now, it's time for the neighbour to worry about the gold coins. You go to sleep!" Similar thing happens in confession when the absolving priest tells us to leave the problem to Jesus and not to worry about our debt to Christ.

The reward of making confession is joyful gratitude. It evokes in us the sentiments felt by the wayward son who is received jubilantly by the Prodigal Father who has been awaiting his return. It calls for a celebration in which we are the chief guest. Confession demands we change our negative attitudes, beliefs and ways of life. This radical change requires self-awareness, willingness to acknowledge that we have entertained negative thoughts, wallowed in destructive feelings, kept chasing shadows, relied on false hopes and led double lives. However, though it dawns on us that we've failed as Christians, we, probably, continue to keep our minds comfortable and our conscience dull by applying ointments of justifications and excuses.

Preparing for confession increases our self-awareness regarding where we are on the path of holistic wellbeing. If we have strayed, it creates a Cognitive Dissonance, reminding us to do the needful to come back to Jesus. Confession helps us rediscover God's mercy when we relapse despite frequent confessions. God's grace through confession works like Acamprosate and Naltrexone – drugs to reduce the craving and to help during relapse.

We, the Catholics, must feel truly lucky because confession rewards us both spiritually and psychologically. It fills us with courage to live joyfully, love deeply and grow as God's children, fully human and fully alive.

Emmanuel Arockiam, S.J.

- Did I steal or damage another's property? Have I made reparation for the damages done? Have I been dishonest in my business relations?
- Did I tell lies? Did I sin by calumny or detraction, telling the unknown grace faults of others without necessity, even if they are true? Did I judge others rashly in serious matters? Have I tried to make restitution for the bad reputation I caused?

If you remember other serious sins besides those indicated here, mention them in your Confession.

Before Confession: *Be truly sorry for your sins.* "The essential act of Penance, on the part of the penitent, is contrition, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit it again, out of love one has for God and which is reborn with repentance." (Saint John Paul II)

Act of Contrition: *O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.* *You may now go to Confession.*

During Confession

- *You can begin your confession by making the sign of the cross and greeting the priest: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."* The priest gives you a blessing. *You may mention the time since your last confession: "My last confession was... (how many weeks, months or years approximately?)"*
- *Say the sins that you remember... If you do not know how to confess or feel ashamed, simply ask the priest to assist you. Simply answer his questions without hiding anything. Place your trust in God: he is your merciful Father and wants to forgive you.*
- *If you do not remember any serious sins, be sure to confess at least some of your venial sins, adding at the end: "I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."*
- *The priest will assign you some penance and give you some advice to help you to be a better Christian. Listen to the words of the absolution attentively. At the end, answer: "Amen" Be willing to do the penance as soon as possible.*

After Confession: *Give thanks to God for forgiving you again. If you recall some serious sin you forgot to tell, rest assured that it has been forgiven with the others, but be sure to confess it in your next Confession.*

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FATHER WILLY'S VISIT

Father Willy Raymond, the President of the International Holy Cross Family Ministries from North Easton, USA, visited us in India from 15th to 23rd of January. On 17th he met the executive committee of the HCFM at the Provincial House in Bangalore. During the meeting he shared with us how the international office is renewing the vision and mission statements, and the guiding principles in order to serve 21st century families. They would integrate the values (zeal, exemplar of the Holy Family, trust in the Providence, hospitality, & the cross) of Holy Cross spirituality. He also underlined the importance of our ministries to the family in the light of Pope Francis' statement that "the family is the masterpiece of God."

On 18th, he addressed the two assemblies of our schools in Salem and gave them a captivating message: "With great power comes great responsibility". (Stan Lee) He met with the novices and spoke to them about Father Peyton and the new vision and mission of Holy Cross Family Ministries. His visit to the Vicariate of Tamil Nadu went well with attending two functions, one at the school and the other at the formation house.

Fr. Willy visited Agartala after twenty years. On 21st we met with the CSC parish priests from Tripura area at the Provincial House in Agartala. Bishop Lumen travelled with Father Willy to some of the Centres in the diocese of Agartala. Though the visit was short, it helped us to gain new perspectives to build up the ministry.