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Why Go to Confession?

What is Confession? Why is sin so harmful? What's needed for a good Confession, and why do we ask for forgiveness from a man and not directly from God?

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“Forgiveness is asked for, is asked of another, and in Confession we ask for forgiveness from Jesus.

Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with the wellspring of mercy and of

grace that flows unceasingly from the open heart of the Crucified and Risen Christ.” (Pope Francis, Audience, 19 February 2014)

1. Why go to Confession?

2. What is sin?

3. What is necessary for a good Confession?

4. Why ask forgiveness from a man and not directly from God?

5. How often do we have to go to Confession?

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1. Why go to Confession?

Confession is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ to forgive sins, when he said to his apostles: "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; whose

sins you retain, they are retained" (Jn 20:23).

We go to confession because the new life given to us by God in baptism can be weakened and lost through sin. This is why Christ wanted the Church to continue his work of healing and salvation through this sacrament.

Through the sacramental absolution of the priest, who acts in the name of Christ, God grants the penitent forgiveness and peace, restores the grace by which we live as a child of God and can reach heaven, eternal happiness. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1420-1421; 1426; 1446)

Meditate with Saint Josemaria

- As we fight this battle, which will last until the day we die, we cannot exclude the possibility that enemies both within and without may attack with violent force. And, as if this burden

were not enough, you may at times be assailed by the memory of your own past errors, which may have been very many. I tell you now, in God's name: don't despair. Should this happen (it need not happen; nor will it usually happen) then turn it into another motive for uniting yourself more closely to Our Lord, for he has chosen you as his child and he will not abandon you. He has allowed that trial to befall you so that you may love him the more and may discover even more clearly his constant protection and Love. Take heart, I insist, because Christ, who pardoned us on the Cross, is still offering us his pardon through the Sacrament of Penance. We always 'have an advocate to plead our cause before the Father: the Just One, Jesus

Christ. He, in his own person, is the atonement made for our sins, and not only for ours, but for the sins of the whole world,' so that we may win the Victory. (*Friends of God*, 214)

2. What is sin?

Sin is failure in genuine love for God and neighbour caused by a disordered attachment to certain goods. It wounds human nature and injures human solidarity.

St Augustine calls it “love of oneself even to contempt of God.” In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation (cf. Phil 2:6-9).

Sins are evaluated according to their gravity; the Church distinguishes

between mortal and venial sin. Mortal sin destroys charity in a person's heart by a grave violation of God's law; it turns one away from God, who is our ultimate end and beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to Him. Venial sin doesn't destroy charity in the soul, even though it weakens and wounds it.

For a sin to be mortal, three conditions are required: an action that has as its object a grave matter, committed with full knowledge (full awareness) and deliberate consent.

Sin is specified by the Ten Commandments according to Jesus' answer to the rich young man: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not be unjust, honor your father and mother" (Mk 10:19). The gravity of sins is greater or lesser: a murder is more serious than a theft. The quality of the injured persons also counts:

violence exercised against parents is more serious than that exercised against a stranger.

A venial sin is committed when one does not observe in a minor matter the measure prescribed by the moral law, or when one disobeys the moral law in a serious matter, but without full knowledge or without full consent. Venial sin weakens charity; it involves a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the progress of the soul in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of moral good; it merits temporal penalties. Venial sin that is deliberate and remains unrepented disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1849–1864)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- These difficulties shouldn't surprise us. As a consequence of our fallen nature, we carry within us a principle of

opposition, of resistance to grace. It comes from the wounds inflicted by original sin, and is aggravated by our own personal sins. Therefore we have to strive ever upwards, by means of our everyday tasks, which are both divine and human and always lead to the love of God. In this we must be humble and contrite of heart and we must trust in God's help, while at the same time devoting our best efforts to those tasks as if everything depended on us.

(Friends of God, 214)

- Now you realize how much you have made Jesus suffer, and you are filled with sorrow. How easy it is to ask his pardon and weep for your past betrayals! Such is your longing for atonement that you cannot contain it in your breast! Fine. But don't forget that the spirit of penance consists mainly in the

fulfilment of the duty of each moment, however costly it may be. (*The Way of the Cross*, no. 5)

3. What is necessary for a good Confession?

The following are necessary for a good Confession: a diligent examination of conscience on sins committed since our last Confession; contrition, or repentance; confession, or the accusation of our sins before a priest; and the satisfaction, or penance, given by the confessor to the penitent to atone for the harm caused by our sins.

To examine our conscience, it helps to review the sins we have committed since our last confession in the light of the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the

Mount, and the teachings of the Apostles.

Contrition consists of sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, because it offends God and other people; together with the resolution not to sin again.

Through the confession (or disclosure) of sins, man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church. All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret ... for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly.

Confession of all the sins we have committed shows true contrition and our desire for God's mercy. It is like a

sick person showing his wound to the doctor so he can be healed.

Satisfaction or penance. Many sins wrong our neighbour. We must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbour. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must “make satisfaction for” or “expiate” his sins as instructed by the confessor. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1451, 1455, 1456, 1459)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- “Father, how can you listen to such filth?” you asked me, after a contrite confession. I said nothing, and thought that if your humility makes you feel like that, — filth: a heap of filth! — we may yet turn all your weakness into something really great. (*The Way*, 605)
 - Sincerity is indispensable if we are to achieve greater union with God. If you have an ugly “toad” inside you, my son, let it out! As I have always advised you, the first thing you must mention is what you wouldn’t like anybody to know. Once the “toad” has been let out in Confession — how well one feels! (*The Forge*, 193)
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4. Why ask for forgiveness from a man and not from God directly?

Only God can forgive sins (Mk 2:7). Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, “The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mk 2:10), and exercises this divine power: “Your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5; Lk 7:48).

Further, by virtue of his divine authority he confers this power on the Apostles (cf. Jn 20:21-23) and their successors to exercise in his name. Christ has willed that his Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry. Therefore the priest hearing Confessions acts “in the name of Christ” and “it is God himself” who, through the priest, tells us: “Be reconciled with God” (cf. 2 Cor

5:20). (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1441-1442)

Meditate with St. Josemaria

- You wrote to tell me that you have at last gone to confession and that you experienced the humiliation of having to open the sewer – that is what you say – of your life to “a man”. When will you get rid of that feeling of vain self-esteem? You will then go to confession extremely happy to show yourself as you are to “that man”, who, being anointed, is a Christ – Christ himself – and gives you absolution, God’s forgiveness. (Furrow, 45)
- If ever you fall, my son, go quickly to Confession and seek spiritual guidance. Show your wound! – so that it gets properly healed and all possibility of infection is removed, even if

doing this hurts you as much as having an operation. (The Forge, 192)

5. How often should we go to Confession?

After having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year. Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution. The Church strongly recommends the habitual confession of venial sins, as this helps the faithful form their conscience, fight against evil inclinations, welcome Christ's healing, and make progress in the life of the Spirit. Children must go to the

sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.

Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This ... is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal" (Lumen Gentium, 8). This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first (cf. Ps 51:19; Jn 6:44; Jn 12:32; and 1 Jn 4:10).

The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the centre of which is the merciful father (Lk 15:11-24). The fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery

in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy – all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life – pure worthy, and joyful – of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart of Christ who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1428, 1439, 1457)

Contemplating the mystery

- Forward, no matter what happens! Cling tightly to Our Lord's hand and remember that God does not lose battles. If you should stray from him for any reason, react with the humility that will lead you to begin again and again; to play the role of the prodigal son every day, and even repeatedly during the twenty-four hours of the same day; to correct your contrite heart in Confession, which is a real miracle of God's Love. In this wonderful Sacrament Our Lord cleanses your soul and fills you with joy and strength to prevent you from giving up the fight, and to help you keep returning to God unwearied, when everything seems black. In addition, the Mother of God, who is also our Mother, watches over you with motherly care,

guiding your every step.

(Friends of God, 214)

- “Blessed be God!” you said to yourself after having finished your sacramental Confession. And you thought: it is as if I had just been born again. You then continued calmly: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” And you yourself came up with the reply: “With the help of your grace I will let nothing and no one come between me and the fulfilment of your most Holy Will. I will serve you unconditionally!” *(The Forge, 238)*

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