

DIOCESE OF MADISON LAY INSTITUTE

*February 10, 2007
Saint Scholastica, Virgin*

**Healing Mercy
Outline**

Objective: Through the use of Scripture, the Catechism, the lives and teachings of the saints; to show how the Sacrament of Confession aids in the growth of **Personal Holiness**.

Introduction:

1.) Personal Experience of Confession (Then and Now)

(Then): “You may have heard the story of the little boy who was preparing for his First Confession in preparation for his First Holy Communion. He went into the darkened – phone booth type confessional, where it was dark. The seminarian, who was playing the part of the priest, slid open the screen patrician and said ‘YES?’ That little boy had never moved so fast before or since, when he bolted out of that confessional...and thus began my career in the wonderful, mysterious world of confession.”

Confession is a very mysterious sacrament, yet such a necessary component in our quest for **Personal Holiness**. In my presentation this morning, I hope, through the use of the Scriptures, the Catechism of the Catholic Church as well as the lives of the Saints to present you with the reasons and hopefully some inspiration as to how and why **frequent confession** is absolutely essential to grow in personal holiness.

Personal Holiness: From the lives of the saints, the three common factors to Personal Holiness are...Humility, Willingness to Suffer and Obedience.

Confession is a sacrament that has always existed in both the Western and Eastern churches. Later, I will share with you just a bit of the Eastern theology concerning the Sacrament of Confession.

Scripture: Due to time constraints, I am literally going to do sort of a hit and run survey over these examples.

- 1.) Matthew 16: 18 – F (Jesus said to Peter) “I for my part declare to you, you are ‘Rock,’ and on this rock, I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”** This is one example where the church has always recognized the authority given to the apostles by Jesus – thus the establishment of Sacrament of Confession as taught by the church.

- 2.) **John 20: 21 – 23** (the night of the Resurrection – Jesus said to the Apostles) *“Peace be with you,’ he said again. ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ Then he breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men’s sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound.”*

This reference to Saint John’s Gospel is why the church has always stressed what is called “auricular confession.”

- 3.) **Acts 19: 18 – 19** (not necessarily a sacramental confession) *“Many who had become believers came forward and openly confessed their former practices. A number who had been dealing in magic even collected their books and burned them in public.”*
- 4.) **1 John 1: 9** *“But if we confess our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins.”*

Catechism (Article 4 – The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation – starting at 1422)

From paragraph 1456: (The Council of Trent and Saint Jerome are quoted here)

When Christ’s faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy of pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, (‘for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know.’”) (St. Jerome)

READ ARTICLE 1468 – THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT....PEACE FOLLOWS

Saints

The Saint of the Confessional – SAINT JOHN NEPOMUK - Born in 1340 – Died on March 20, 1393 – Canonized on March 19, 1729 by Pope Benedict XIII

Saint John is considered the saint of the confessional...why? He was a priest and Vicar-General of the Diocese of Prague. He was also the advocate and confessor of the poor in the court of King Wenceslaus IV. Because of his holiness, he became the confessor of the Queen, whom Saint John taught and encouraged to bear the heavy

cross, the abuse of her husband the King. Saint John was eventually imprisoned for refusing to disclose to the King the confession of his wife. When he continued to honor the seal of the confessional, he was ordered executed. He was burned and then tied to a wheel and thrown off a bridge into the Moldau River. On the night of his death, seven stars hovered over the place where he drowned.

From Saint Augustine: *“Whoever confesses his sins...is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: when you hear ‘man’ – this is what God has made; when you hear ‘sinner’ - this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made...When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light.”*

Also from Saint Augustine: *“If you want to flee from God, flee to Him instead. Flee to Him by confessing to Him; don’t flee from Him by trying to hide. For you can’t hide, but you can confess.”*

One more from Saint Augustine: *“In failing to confess, Lord, I would only hide You from myself, not myself from You.”*

From Saint Francis de Sales: *“Go to your confessor, open your heart to him; display to him all the recesses of your soul; take the advice that he will give you with the utmost humility and simplicity. For God, who has an infinite love for obedience, frequently renders profitable the counsels we take from others, but especially from those who are the guides of our souls.”*

NEED FOR REGULAR CONFESSION

Unfortunately, the mindset in our country in many dioceses is to go to confession twice a year – Advent and Lent. The Church recommends that we go at least once a month.

Think of Pope John Paul II and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta who went to confession once a week. Is there a correlation between frequent confession and Personal Holiness in their lives?

I would also encourage you to have a Regular Confessor as this is where an ongoing dialogue can take place and the real hard work can begin.

Many sins are rather habitual in nature – Saint Alphonsus Liguori encourages confessors to be especially compassionate and pastoral for those who seem stuck in the midst of habitual sins.

Father John Corapi – “A good confession should not take more than five minutes – usually.

PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION IN BOTH THE WESTERN AND EASTERN CHURCHES

Read both Absolutions

Explain how one confesses sin in both the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

5TH STEP IN THE 12 STEP PROGRAMS – “Admitted to God, to myself and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.” - What is this? Confession.