



Won't Go to Confession

I am a priest in the Diocese of Plymouth in England, and for seven years I was the Catholic chaplain in a rather large local hospital there. One day as I was visiting patients, a man told me he did not want to see me. I said, "Okay, that is all right." Each day as I passed his bed, I would greet him and then walk on.

On one occasion he called me and said, "Listen, if I wanted to receive the sacraments again after more than sixty years, I know I would have to go to confession and I cannot do that." I assured him that going to confession would be quite easy, and that I would ask him the questions. We talked for a long time and finally he said he would go to confession. I made an appointment for him for three days later.

The following day as I passed his bed he called to me and said, "Sorry, but I cannot possibly tell you what I have been doing all these years. I won't go to confession."

I sat at the foot of his bed and asked him, "What are you afraid to tell me?"

To my amazement, he told me about all the sins he thought he could not tell in two or three days' time! When he finished talking, I asked him, "Is there anything else you have to tell me?"

He said, "No, that is everything."

I asked him if he was truly sorry for all these faults and failings because he had now confessed everything! Then I told him about God's love for him and for all of us. I gave him absolution and anointed him. He was so happy!

The next day when I went to the hospital, I was informed that the man had died during the night. All I could say was, "God is so great! His love is beyond understanding."

Daniel A. Longland

Sidmouth, Devon, England



A Special Memory

St. Peter's Church has been my home since I became Catholic almost six years ago. However, my story begins a few years before that.

In 1996, my best friend and her family moved to Beaufort, South Carolina. It was during my visits to see her that I attended Mass and became familiar with St. Peter's Parish. As I look back now, I can see that every time I attended Mass, I was being called home. I remember knowing in my heart that I would become Catholic if I ever decided to move from Illinois to South Carolina.

At the age of twenty-nine, I bravely traveled 900 miles, with my cat as my only companion, and arrived in Beaufort on August 31, 1999. Although I did not have a job or a home to call my own, I was eager to start my life anew.

In the spring of 2000, five months after I arrived, I celebrated my first Communion and confirmation at the Easter Vigil Mass. At that point in my life, I was feeling unloved and unworthy. I had been struggling hard to see myself as God sees me, and I was seeking a deeper understanding of His love. I was also trying to grasp our Blessed Mother's love for me.

One day after receiving the sacrament of reconciliation, I had an experience I'll never forget. Like all my other confessions, once I was absolved and out of the confessional, I felt lightness within me. Then I prayed my penance as I knelt in front of our beautiful crucifix. The memory of what happened afterwards has never left me and I pray that it never will.

St. Peter's has a beautiful icon of Mary, and I had always wanted to kneel in prayer in front of it, but I had never had the courage to do so because I didn't know if there was a certain code of behavior for doing this. I was afraid of making any mistakes, and I let fear of the unknown keep me from what I now know is a simple process.

As I knelt in front of my Lord after confession on that unforgettable day, I felt called to Mary. I went to her statue, lit a candle and then knelt in prayer. As I was praying, I began to feel the loving arms of Mary wrap around me. I felt her loving embrace and was made aware of how real she is in my life. It was with Mary's hug that I began to see just how much she will help me draw ever closer to her Son and my Lord, Jesus Christ.

I still have struggles and weaknesses, but I will continue to be blessed by the sacrament of reconciliation for as long as I live.

Amanda S. Abbott

Beaufort, South Carolina



Time to Return

My last reconciliation had occurred prior to Vatican II. Back then we always confessed our sins to the priest in a darkened confessional. The sound of the sliding window signaled the time for me to shed the usual minor sins of youth. Confession terrified me, not so much because of the darkness of the confessional, but because of the darkness hidden within me.

College in the tumultuous 1960s came along and I was drawn away from my faith. To me, the Church was little more than a building without any real human or spiritual connection. I became convinced that the Catholic Church had little to offer me and drifted away. I went on to pursue my education, a successful career, and the many distractions of the world.

More than three decades passed. I married outside the Catholic Church and despite our intrinsic spirituality, my husband and I rejected church, and all that seemed irrelevant to us.

We had a good life and traveled abroad frequently, appreciating the world from its multiple perspectives. Curiously, in our travels I found myself exploring cathedrals and chapels, pretending that I was just ad-

miring the flying buttresses and stained glass windows. I never dared to admit that what I was really admiring was the faith and passion that could build such things. I also never dared to admit that I was seeking faith and a passionate relationship with the Lord for myself.

It eventually became abundantly clear that it was time for me to return to God. The Catholic Church was familiar and comfortable, and that was where I was being called to return.

Much had changed in the Church during the decades I had been away. I spent weeks looking for the right parish and a priest to whom I thought I might be able to go to fill in those lapses. A kindly bishop literally half a world away directed me to a local parish.

I scoured the internet for advice on how to go about making a good confession. I spent days and sleepless nights examining my conscience and dutifully prepared a list so I wouldn't forget my sins from more than thirty years. What became painfully clear was that I had committed the greatest sin of all. I had turned my back on God.

Not knowing what to expect or even how to actually go about a formal reconciliation at the dawn of the twenty-first century, I waited anxiously in line. It brought back all of those childhood memories of Saturday confessions from so long ago.

The first word I heard from Father Jim when I entered was "Peace." Gradually I settled in and recounted my general sins from the last thirty-plus years. Then it was time for the *big one*.

I had a conversation with the good priest, telling him how I had rejected God all those years. He absolved my sins and blessed me, and ended with gentle encouragement. He told me that I had made his day by laying all the sins of my adult life before him and expressed his joy that I had returned to the Church.

I was relieved that the priest did not act as though my story was unique or horrendous, and was happy that I had recognized the genuine nature of my greatest sin. Both of these points contributed to me having made a good confession.

My penance was to say a prayer for my non-Catholic husband who would have much adjusting to do as I recommitted myself to a life in which God was now the center.

Later that day I realized it was the feast of Christ the King, and the last Sunday of the Year of the Eucharist. Since then, every year I celebrate that feast day as the anniversary of my rebirth.

Candice Francis

Escondido, California



Walking on Air

When I was a child, I attended Immaculate Conception grammar school in Rochester, New York, where we were encouraged to go to confession weekly. Father Wood was the dynamic pastor at the time, and he and the other parish priests, Father Dunn, Father Roach, and Monsignor Cameron, were loved by all the children.

We lived about a mile or so from the school, and had to walk there and back four times a day. One Saturday, my mother told me to walk to church for confession. I did as she said, but when I got there I was so scared that I turned around and walked back home. Mother told me to go back to confession, which I did. When I arrived back at the church and talked to the priest, he was so understanding, patient, and kind that I felt as if I were walking on air when I left. I realized then that I didn't need to be afraid of confession after all.

I also fondly remember the nuns walking us over to church from the school and staying with us as each child went to confession. As I think back on it now, it was a wonderful experience to see long lines of children, each waiting to see one of the priests, and then to see the smiles on their faces as they returned to their seats.

Joan M. Beebe

Rochester, New York



“Mortal sin is a serious break in a relationship of love with God, neighbor, world and self. We can think of it as a radical no to God and to others. It happens when we refuse to live in a positive, life-giving way. Just as acts of heroism and extraordinary generosity are evidence of our capacity to say a radical yes to God, so calculated acts permeated with malice are evidence of our capacity to say no to God.”

Understanding Sin Today

by Richard M. Gula, S.S.

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Thirty Day Penance

I believe the sacrament of reconciliation is the perfect way to obtain freedom from the state of sin and to become one with God. How fortunate for me that my first experiences of confession were positive and made me feel good. I knew from early on that going to confession was an uplifting sacrament, and knowing this helped me through an especially challenging time in my life.

As an adult, I experienced some very sinful emotions that changed my life and spirituality for a while. Before that point, I never would have dreamed that I could become so enraged about something that it would take over my life and emotions.

It all started when my ex-daughter-in-law was in our family and her behavior and actions infuriated me. My first response was to act with the three sins of anger: revenge, retaliation, and resentment. Morally I knew these thoughts and actions were wrong, but nevertheless, anger was a constant companion of mine. I tried very hard to turn things around and did all I could to make the situation better, but my efforts proved futile.

I knew I had to confess all that I was doing wrong. I was so torn from the griping emotions of guilt, fear, and anger that I could not think of a better way to find peace than through the sacrament of reconciliation. From my childhood experiences, I knew confession would help make me feel better and that I would be in a better state of grace afterwards.

The wonderful priest who heard my confession sensed the fear in my voice and helped calm me. Then, after I got through my list of sins, he wisely knew exactly how to help me return to a state of peace.

As I waited for my penance, I imagined that I would probably have to say several Hail Mary's, or maybe even the rosary. I said, "So, what do I have to do, say the rosary for my penance?" His answer was not what I expected. It was not even close.

The priest said I had to pray for thirty days for my ex-daughter-in-law. My response was, "I can't do that." He replied, "Oh, but you will."

"But when I pray it won't mean anything because it won't be sincere." I told him.

"You will pray for her every time you pray for yourself and your family. At first it will not mean anything to you, it will be just a formality. Eventually you will find that you will truly mean it and want peace for her," he said.

I still had my doubts but I did pray my penance every day. It was the most difficult prayer I ever had to do. At first, praying for her was meaningless. Then, about two and a half weeks into this penance, I began to express meaning in my prayers.

To my complete surprise, I actually began to truly want my ex-daughter-in-law to find peace in her life. I wanted her to be rid of her anger and control. I wanted her to find the God of her understanding, to have God shine in her heart and soul. It was a unique and great experience to sincerely love her without anger.

Lucy O. Scholerman

Bay City, Oregon



Monthly Cleaning

After reading about confession on Sister Patricia's web site, reconciliation was fresh on my mind. I had been thinking that it was about time I went to confession again when one Saturday morning the Lord taught me a little something about the sacrament right in my kitchen.

My coffee pot had been dripping very slowly because I had been procrastinating cleaning it.

I knew I needed to take some action, so I found the instructions and started reading. All of a sudden I felt the Lord speaking to me, showing me my own need for cleaning.

The instructions read: “Descaling—We recommend that you descale your coffee maker once a month because mineral deposits can form a coating in the coffee maker, causing slower brewing time and possibly an off flavor in the coffee. Use a cleaner recommended for coffee makers. Wash the carafe and filter with soapy hot water.” That was it! The instructions were simple!

I, too, need to be descaled and cleared of those gunky deposits that build up in my life and in my heart. As I clean my coffee pot monthly with water and vinegar, I will be reminded to clean my spiritual coffee pot in the great sacrament of reconciliation.

Often the Lord uses everyday things to teach me, making His will clear for me. On that Saturday morning, in my family kitchen, I learned more than just how to clean a slow dripping coffee pot.

Jane M. Adams

Fitchburg, Wisconsin



The Box

As a child I dreaded going to confession. It was always a fearful time as I examined my conscience and wondered, “Am I confessing all my sins? Will I forget some serious sin? Will God punish me if I don’t do it right?” I only felt relief when it was over, and I could breathe easier until the next time. I would liken it to a trip to the dentist.

Sadly, I carried this fear into my adult years. I matured, but the sacrament of reconciliation remained a thorn in my side. I found myself attending Mass but avoiding *the box*. Along the way I met some wonderful priests who talked to me and calmed my fears. I slowly began to see this time as a special gift of God’s grace. After Vatican II, I began confessing face to face when the opportunity arose. I perceived this as a visible help for me to overcome my bad habits and serious faults.

A few years ago when I was visiting relatives in Boston I would often stop by the Arch St. Chapel to pray or attend Mass. One day I decided to go to confession while making a visit. It had been a long time since I had received this sacrament. I expected a reprimand for being away for so long and a very long penance. Instead all I heard was, “I just want to tell you how much God loves you.”

I started crying and instantly felt sorrow, peace, and the knowledge that this is what the sacrament is meant to be. I can’t remember the rest of what the priest said but I was so grateful to him for showing me the forgiveness that comes from God through this sacrament.

Suzanne Ching

Honolulu, Hawaii



What a Beautiful Gift

When I first started thinking of converting from the Southern Baptist Church to Catholicism, I visited a small parish and had a nice talk with the pastor, Father Sullivan.

I was struggling because my family was against my converting. None of them were Catholic. Finally, after three years, I attended RCIA at St. Mathews in Jacksonville, Florida, taught by Father Brian Carey. I loved RCIA and Father Carey was wonderful.

In the spring of 1990, our RCIA class was preparing for our first reconciliation. I was incredibly nervous. We went to Marywood, in Switzerland, Florida. My sponsor was Mrs. Mary Korson, founder of the St. Francis Soup Kitchen at Immaculate Conception in Jacksonville.

We were standing in line. I felt twenty-three years of sins burning through my brain. I was convinced the priest hearing confessions would hear all my many sins and be horrified. I was sure my penance would be doing the Stations of the Cross seventeen times!