

THEOLOGICAL TEACHING ON SIN & SALVATIONGod created all things GOOD: He did not create evil or sin

- God creates with **original justice** wherein nothing lacked its due good
- **Evil is a privation (lack) of a due good** (a bird without wings, a man without legs)
- **Original sin deprived human nature of its full (due) capacity** to live in original justice with God
- **Sin is willed evil** that offends God, reason, truth, and right conscience (*Catechism [CCC] 1849-1850*)
- **Concupiscence is the inclination to evil** resulting from original sin's wounding of human nature
- **Sin corrupts even our knowledge**, so stay diligent in examining your heart to know your sins

"Perhaps the greatest sin in the world today is that men have begun to lose the sense of sin" (Pope Pius XII, Radio Message, 1946)

The LOGIC of SIN & SALVATION: Sacrificial Offerings of the True & False Saviors

Christ 'takes away the sins of the world' through **self-giving forgiveness by sacrificing Himself**

- This is a *total removal of sin through absolution*, an uplifting movement to God & heaven
- Jesus goes deep into the wound of sin to uproot it all (see roots & wounds on opposite side)

Satan: 'takes away the sins of the world' through **scapegoating violence by sacrificing others**

- This offers a *partial replacement of sin through violence*, a downward spiral to death & hell
- Satan stays on the surface, *condemning the sin by replacing it with another sin*

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a person it roams through arid regions searching for rest but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my home from which I came.' But upon returning, it finds it empty, swept clean, and put in order. Then it goes and brings back with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they move in and dwell there; and the last condition of that person is worse than the first." (Matthew 12:43-45)

"If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then, will his kingdom stand?" (Matthew 12:26)

The Roles of the Holy Spirit & the Unholy Spirits

Satan points us into the pit of sin 

Enticer: denies harm of sin (get into the pit)

Accuser: despair of salvation (stay in the pit)

God points us out of the pit of sin 

Admonisher: shows harm of sin (stay out of the pit)

Advocate: gives hope of salvation (get out of the pit)

CONFESSION as Reconciliation

- **Mercy** is the shape of God's love towards sinners - God has always already chosen to forgive you
- **Reconciliation** happens not when God chooses to forgive, but when you choose to be forgiven
- Knocking on heaven's door: "Lord, I need Your Mercy!" or "Lord, I'm good enough as I am"
"Those who are healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous to repentance but sinners" (Luke 5:32)
- All sin ruptures our **Communion with God**, so it is God alone who can forgive sins
- Sin breaks **Communion with Christ's Body-Church**, so God's *spiritual fathers* restore *lost sons & daughters*

CONFESSION as a Sacrament

- Sacraments have **matter** (water, bread, penitent) & **form** (words of consecration, vows, absolution)
- In particular, the matter of confession is the penitent's acts: contrition, confession, satisfaction
 - Contrition involves sorrow for sin. It can be perfect (love of Christ, share in His sorrow) or imperfect (fear of punishment). Contrition is not *emotionalism*: sin may or may not make you *feel* bad.
 - Confession incarnates our contrition in the admission of sin & faith in the Incarnate Word
 - Satisfaction completes what contrition began by making amends through fulfilling a penance
- Without the penitent providing this matter, the form of the priest's absolution cannot take place
- Contrition, confession, & satisfaction should be daily practices to prepare you for the sacrament

CONFESSION: ARRR'ing our Brokenness

- **Acknowledge** your sins & need for forgiveness with an *Examination of Conscience* (opposite side)
- **Relate** your sins ...to God directly (for venial, lesser sins) or through His confessor (for mortal sins)
- **Receive** His mercy...
 - with *Act of Contrition*, *Penitential Rite*, *Eucharist* for venial sins
 - in *Sacramental Confession* for mortal & serious sins
- **Respond** to His mercy with your *Penance* & with your transformed heart

PRACTICAL TEACHINGS ON CONFESSION

WHAT do I confess?

- Confess all serious and mortal sins
 - Mortal sins are (1) serious, (2) committed with full knowledge of its seriousness, (3) freely chosen
 - Mortal sin kills divine life in us. Venial sin chips away at our divine life & entices us to sin mortally
 - Some sins are still serious even if not mortal because of unintentional ignorance of the sin's gravity, an inability to choose freely, impulse, habit or pathological disorders (see CCC 1860)
- Any venial sins that you are intensely purifying
 - Venial sins are less serious sins. They are your everyday faults and failings, but
 - You should be confessing your everyday sins to God...everyday! Confession should not be a rapid-fire list of all these venial infractions you committed...does that really *help* you to grow?
 - Tell the priest the ones that you need most help with, but take ALL of them daily to God.

HOW OFTEN should I confess?

- All Catholics are obligated to confess *serious sins* at least once a year (Canon 989)
- A good start is to go during Advent and Lent (Penitential Seasons)
- Periodic confessions examine the soul's state, offer good counsel, & encourage growth in holiness

HOW LONG should confession take?

- Confession should take about 5 minutes whether you confessed last week or 50 years ago
- Confession is for absolving your sins: it is not spiritual direction, counseling, or therapy
- The priest may be able to spend more time with you, being mindful of the penitents after you
- Enter confession knowing your serious & habitual sins, confess them in a straightforward manner, listen to counsel from the priest, receive absolution, and do your penance within a reasonable time

PREPARE for Confession:

- **EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.** Become aware of all serious sins you have committed, and what venial sins are weighing heavily on your heart that you would really like to work on changing. Let the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, 7 Deadly Sins, the Scriptures, and your conscience guide you.
 - **ROOTS.** While it's important not to dwell on sin, it is important to find the roots of that sin.
 - Confession provides an opportunity not only to trim the leaves off the weed, but to uproot it entirely. Ask in prayer: "When did this sin first enter my life? What strong inclinations surround this sin? Do any persons or situations in my life compound my struggle with this sin?"
 - Share the ROOTS of your sinfulness with the priest (this is not reliving the details, but unearthing the underlying causes of sin: fear, loneliness, despair, hatred, guilt, shame, selfishness, arrogance, etc.). Search your past with Christ.
 - **WOUNDS.** Sin causes deep wounds in our relationships (with self, others, and God).
 - When we sin against others, or if they sin against us, the relationship is wounded, the bond of charity is broken. Left untreated, these wounds bleed out. Some of them require a bandaid, but others require deep surgery from our Divine Healer.
 - How have you been wounded by sin (your own or others)? This question is difficult to answer because we prefer hiding our wounds from others, from God, and even from ourselves: "Oh, I'll be fine" may be what we say, but it is necessary to give all wounds to Jesus. **ARRR** prayer can help you acknowledge and relate these wounds, so as to receive his healing and respond with grateful love.

CONFESSING your sins

- **CLARIFY** the wounds and roots of your sins as best you are able. This is different than reliving the gory details of the sin. Sin is garbage. Don't relive its story with the garbageman: just toss it!
- **FURTHER HELP.** Let the priest know if you need further conversation, counseling or resources, and he may recommend meeting with you or directing you to someone who can help.
- **SACRAMENTAL GRACE.** Confession doesn't solve all the problems that are due to sin. It does remove guilt & provide the sacramental grace to deal with the aftermath of those sins.

AFTER CONFESSION

- **PENANCE.** It's not punishment, but an act to patch up wounds and move us to deeper conversion.
- **BUILD** new habits based on your prayer and the priest's counsel to move you from sin to salvation.
- **FORGIVE YOURSELF.** You put yourself above God if you call yourself dirty when he calls you clean.
- **FORGIVE TRESPASSERS.** Forgiveness is a process for us. Continue daily to forgive your wrongdoers.
- **EUCHARIST.** Receive the Eucharist with new love, new fervor. You are reconciled to Christ & Church!
- **SHARE** your experience of the Sacrament of Confession. Like sharing your experience of Mass, you share the Holy Spirit's grace you have received. Obviously, you do not share your sins, but the gift of mercy and how it has impacted you.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER IN PRAYER

- Put it all to practice. Take these questions to prayer, speak to the Lord, journal your next steps:

Am I tempted to believe the lies of Satan about my inability to grow in holiness? When? How so?

Do I have proper reverence for the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

How often do I make it to confession? Would the Lord be pleased with this (excessive or deficient)?

Do I spend enough time examining my conscience to make a good confession?

What do I find most helpful to guide my examination of conscience?

Do I leave anything out of confession: past wounds, shameful sins, hardness of heart, unforgiveness, a Church teaching I disagree with or am not living up to?

What are my habitual sins? What are the roots of these sins? What am I truly seeking?

How long do my confessions usually last?

If less than 5 minutes, why: vagueness, omitting sins, rapid-fire 'listing'?

If more than 5 minutes, why: unreadiness, over-analyzing, talkativeness (me or priest)?

Do I truly believe in the sacramental grace of absolution?

Do I continue to hold myself guilty of a sin I've already confessed?

What activities do I engage in directly after confession? What would help solidify the grace?

Do I complete my penance within a reasonable time? Is the penance helpful (if not, please let the priest know what you tried, and if he suggests you try again or do a different one)?

What changes do my friends & family see in me after confession (ask them, invite them to notice in the future, then answer after your next confession)?

How long do my confessions 'last' before I go back to old ways (the 'old Adam')?

Do I radiate the joy of the 'new Adam' when I leave the confessional (transfigured Christ)?

Has confession helped my reverent adoration & reception of the Eucharist?