

## **FROM THE PASTOR FEBRUARY 18, 2024 FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**

### **Confession: The Ritual**

#### **Dear Parishioners:**

It is Lent; the season par excellence for Confession, and it is essential that every Catholic who is eligible to receive absolution should, at the very least, make an annual sacramental confession of their sins. Yet, while it is important simply to get to Penance/Reconciliation, it is equally important to observe the ritual in regards to the proper celebration of this Sacrament; almost as much as a Priest must follow the rubrics (instructions) for the celebration for Holy Mass and the other Sacraments of the Church. So whether we are seven or ninety- seven, here is a good format to follow:

- In advance of coming to Confession, make time for a prayerful **examination of conscience**, asking the Holy Spirit to enlighten you as to all of your sins, known and unknown, and that you may have sorrow for them. It is often good to use a guide, such as may be found in many Catholic prayer books, or in the Primer for Confession, or other such pamphlets. If necessary, write out your sins, so that you do not forget to confess any of them. The list should then be destroyed after Confession.

- Come to church when Confessions are scheduled (or if necessary, make an appointment with a priest), and spend some time in prayer and recollection before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and while waiting in line.
- When the priest-confessor is ready to begin receiving penitents (the green light usually indicates such in ours and in many other churches), enter the confessional. Here at St. Paul's we have the option of either kneeling or sitting to make our confession. Whichever posture we select there will be the grate or screen. The Latin word for grate is grata, which means protection. The grate protects the integrity of the sacrament and protects both priest and penitent. While in most circumstances it is good manners and common courtesy to greet another person and inquire as to their well-being, etc. when encountering them, it is generally not good practice to do so in the Sacrament. It is best to resist that temptation.
- **“Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been (indicate the interval of time) since my last Confession, and these are my sins” or “I accuse myself of the following sins.”** Please remember that we give the interval of time (how long ago our confession was). We do not say when our last confession was, i.e., the year my aunt died, the time I was in Montreal, etc. These usually do not help the priest to learn how long ago our last confession was. .And while the Sacrament is anonymous, it is also a good practice to let the Priest know your state in life, such as, “I am a married mother of three young children,” or “I

am a single university student,” or “I am a retired widower,” because that may give some context to your confession. (N.B.: A Priest, Deacon, Religious Sister or Brother must always identify themselves as such when making their Confession.) Then proceed to the humble and forthright telling your sins. \*\*\*Please make every effort to keep yourself to a succinct “laundry list” of your sins – kind and number (of times) – and not ramble, become engaged in needless conversation or tangential details; the airing of complaints about various persons, television programs or governments; or the telling of others’ sins and character defects, etc. (This subject will be elaborated upon in next week’s column.) Also, do not purposefully omit any sins – especially mortal sins – or confess your sins in such a cryptic or convoluted manner that the Confessor is confused as to what is being confessed. We come to Confession to accuse ourselves of our sins as best we know them to/through the Priest who is God’s sacramental representative. We should be ashamed of our sins, but how can we be forgiven if we are not straightforwardly honest in admitting them? It is then as if we are not giving them to God as He desires we do, but still holding them to ourselves. The Priest may ask a question for clarification, if necessary, so as to assist the Penitent in their effort to lead a holy life and avoid these particular sins in the future. We say there are four c’s to a good confession. It should be **1. Contrite, 2. Clear, 3. Complete, 4. Concise.** The more we avail ourselves of the sacrament of penance the more we see our need for it. It is best to confess once each month.

When you have come to the end of the list of sins, say something to the effect of, **“For these, and for all the sins of my past life, especially...** (name one or several of your past serious sins as an act of humility), and for the sins that I cannot remember, I am truly sorry.” This will clearly indicate to the Priest that your Confession has indeed come to an end.

- Then the Priest may offer some advice and encouragement; he will give a penance to perform – prayers and/or action – and then will ask you (if you have not already begun to do so) to make an Act of Contrition. There are numerous versions, but the one that I and many people in this part of the vineyard still use is: **“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, 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 Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life (and to avoid the near occasions of sin.) Amen.**

The Priest will pronounce the formula for Absolution, which concludes with the words, **“...And I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”** While he is pronouncing those words and blessing you, make the Sign of the Cross. He may offer an additional prayer and say, **“Go in peace, your sins are forgiven.”** To which you may respond, **“Thanks be to God. Thank-You, Father.”** Then leave the confessional and, unless you are in a

terrible hurry, go back into church to offer thanks to God for His forgiveness and mercy and offer any prayers the Priest may have given you for penance.

Please keep this page to use as a guideline when you come to Confession, and for the Act of Contrition (which should be memorized), that can be kept in your wallet or purse.

Next week we will present the examination of conscience

**In Jesus and Mary,  
Monsignor James F. Pereda**