

From the Pastor

March 6, 2022

First Sunday in Lent

Confession: The Ritual

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 to simply get to Penance/Reconciliation, it is equally important to observe the ritual regarding 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 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. It prevents the falling into vain conversation as though the sacrament were a kind of feel-good therapy session. 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. After the priest formally greets you with words such as, **"Peace be with you"** (as I typically do), respond with, **"And with your spirit,"** and then immediately follow with – while making the Sign of the Cross –
- **"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, to assist the Penitent in their effort to lead a holy life and avoid these 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. Padre Pio would only give two minutes to each penitent, and he filled heaven with repentant sinners. Generally, the more we speak) the less salutary our confessions will be. It is understandable that the lonely seek conversation with a kind soul, but it should not be in confession.

- 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 which begins with the words **May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ....**

Then he will 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 for you penance.

Here at St. Paul’s, we have confessions for 45 minutes before the Saturday evening Mass and on Sunday mornings from 7.45 to 8.15 and then again from 9.45 to 10.15. We also have confession every Wednesday after the 9.00AM Mass.

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 I will once again provide the little column on the examination of conscience or what we call the 90% confession.

SCHEDULE

Many are aware that two years ago we began to have a winter/summer schedule for the Saturday afternoon Mass. This was done to accommodate our parishioners who have difficulty in driving in the darkness. After trying this schedule for two years we will be returning to our former practice. **THE SATURDAY AFTERNOON MASS WILL REVERT OT 5.00PM BEGINNING SATURDAY MARCH 19TH** The Saturday afternoon Mass will then remain at 5.00PM throughout the year as most parishioners have asked. This will eliminate any confusion about Mass times and will afford us the opportunity to be of service to our young brides and grooms. Because Covid-19 forced so many young people to postpone and reschedule their weddings, St. Paul’s has had the largest number of weddings in several years. Although a schedule cannot please everyone we appreciate your cooperation. Although in the late autumn the nights grow longer, we must remember that at Christmas the sun returns. There are merely 4 Saturdays when it would be night at 5.00PM

*A Blessed Lent
Buona Quaresima*

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda