

## CHAPTER 25

# Turning Back to God

Just as God was always ready to forgive the stubborn children of Israel when they turned back to him, he is always waiting for us to turn away from our sins and come back to him to be reconciled with him. There is no sin in the entire world which is too big for Jesus to forgive. Even the biggest mortal sin is not too big for Jesus' love to wash away! But no matter how small our sins are, we still need to keep turning to God to forgive us and to give us his grace to grow closer to him.

And just so that we will know that we are forgiven, Jesus gives us a great gift—the sacrament of Penance, which is sometimes called Confession. It is also called the sacrament of Reconciliation because it reconciles us with God and with the Church. This sacrament not only forgives our sins but it gives us grace to avoid those sins in the future. It is such a great gift that some people want to become Catholics just so that they can go to confession!

### **The Prodigal Son**

To show the people of Israel and everyone how much Our Heavenly Father is ready to forgive us, Jesus told the following story.

There was a man who had two sons. One day the youngest said to his father, “Father, give me my share of all the money that will come to us after you die.”

So the father divided his fortune between them. At once, the younger packed his things and set off on a journey to a faraway land. There he lived a wild life and wasted all his money.

After his money was spent, a famine started in that country and he began to grow very hungry. So he found a job on a farm feeding the pigs. He was willing to eat even the pigs' food, but no one gave him anything.

Suddenly, one day he realized how foolish he was being. “All my father's servants have enough food to eat. I'm no longer worthy to be called his son but at least I can be one of his servants.” So he left and went back home.

While he was still a long way from the house, his father saw him and had pity on him. He ran out to meet him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. Then the son cried, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

Right away, his father ordered his servants to bring the best robe and put it on his son and to put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then he said, “Bring the calf that we have been fattening for a special occasion and kill it. Let us eat and make merry because this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found!”



## The Sacrament of Penance

This is the story of your soul. In it, Jesus shows you what happens when you sin, when you come back to God and ask him to forgive you. It is almost as if Jesus sees you coming to confession and runs to meet you there so that he can heal you and give you the grace you need to be good—he wants to help you that much! But in order to be ready to meet Jesus in the sacrament of Penance, there are certain things that you must do.

### Examination of Your Conscience

First of all, you must examine your conscience. Remember that your conscience judges whether what you have done is good or bad. Now that you know the Ten Commandments, you are able to make your judgments based on them. When you examine, or look at, your conscience, you look back on your thoughts, words, actions, and omissions since your last confession. Have you sometimes not followed the Ten Commandments? If you have trouble remembering what your sins are, ask the Holy Spirit, and he will help you.

### Sorrow for Your Sins

Once you know what your sins are, you must be sorry for them. *Feeling* sorry is not necessary or even important because you cannot always feel the way you would like. To *be* sorry for your sins means that you realize that they offend God and deserve punishment. This thought will help you to see how much your sins keep you from really loving God with all your heart.

## Intention to Avoid Your Sins

To be sorry for your sins also means that you do not want to offend God again. So you must make up your mind that you will not commit those sins again. Also you will try to stay away from anything that would lead you to commit those same sins. This is called avoiding the near occasions of sin. An *occasion of sin* is a person, place, or thing that would tempt you to sin. For example, if you always misbehave when you sit next to your friend at school, you might decide that you will try to sit somewhere else.

### Confession of Your Sins

After you have examined your conscience and have made up your mind not to commit those sins again, you are ready to meet Jesus in the sacrament of Penance. You go into the confessional. After the priest blesses you, he waits for you to tell him your sins. Remember that it is really Jesus whom you are telling. The priest represents Jesus.

### Your Penance

After the priest has listened to your sins, he might want to give you some advice on how to be better in the future. Then he gives you a penance, which is something you do to make up for the wrong you did. This penance may be a prayer that you are to say or it might be some

“There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

(Luke 15:10)

good action that you must do. Your penance helps you to correct what is wrong in your soul, and, since all sins deserve some kind of punishment, your penance also makes up for some of the punishment your sins deserve.

### **Absolution**

The priest will ask you to say a prayer of contrition or sorrow for your sins. You can find this prayer at the back of this book. Then the priest gives you absolution. He and all priests were given this power to forgive sins by Christ himself. It is really Christ who is forgiving you through the priest. He says, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” To absolve means “to loosen”. At the moment the priest gives you absolution, your sins are forgiven.

After you leave the confessional, as soon as you can you should do the penance the priest has given you. If it is a prayer, you can say it right there in church, maybe even in front of Jesus in the tabernacle. If it is an action, try to do it that day so you will not forget.

Jesus is very pleased to have you come to

him in confession. So although it is necessary to receive the sacrament of Penance only once a year and then only if one is in mortal sin, Jesus does not want you to do only the very least you can do; he wants you to grow closer to him. Because of this, the Church asks you to set aside certain times during the year when you will receive this sacrament. For example, you might want to receive the sacrament of Penance once a month.

### **Words to Know:**

Penance      confession      reconciliation  
absolution      occasion of sin

“Return to me with all your heart. . . .  
Return to the Lord, your God, for he is  
gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and  
abounding in steadfast love. . . .”

(Joel 2:12–13)

#### **Q. 80** *What is Penance?*

Penance is the sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ to forgive the sins committed after Baptism.

#### **Q. 81** *How many things are required to make a good confession?*

To make a good confession five things are required: 1) examination of conscience, 2) sorrow for sins, 3) the intention of not committing sin again, 4) the accusation of our sin, 5) satisfaction or penance.

**Q. 82** *How is the examination of conscience done?*

The examination of conscience is done by recalling to mind the sins we have committed in thoughts, words, actions, and omissions against the Commandments of God, beginning from the last good confession.

**Q. 83** *What is sorrow?*

Sorrow or repentance is displeasure and hatred for the sins we have committed, which bring us to form the intention of not sinning again.

**Q. 84** *What is the accusation of sins?*

The accusation of sins is the declaration of our sins made to the priest-confessor in order to receive absolution.

**Q. 85** *What is absolution?*

The absolution is the judgment by which the priest, in the name of Jesus Christ, forgives the penitent his sins, saying, *“I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”*

**Q. 86** *What is the “satisfaction”, or the penance given in the sacrament?*

The satisfaction or sacramental penance is a good work imposed by the confessor for the punishment and correction of the sinner and to take away the temporal punishment which he or she merited by sinning.

**Q. 87** *What is an occasion of sin?*

An occasion of sin is anything, whether it be a person or a thing, that puts us in danger of sinning.

**Q. 88** *Are we obliged to avoid the occasions of sin?*

Yes, we are obliged to avoid the occasions of sin, because we are obliged to avoid sin itself.