

## **WHY GO TO RECONCILIATION?**

**Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Bruno Forte**, a member of the International Theological Commission, on the theme "**Reconciliation and the Beauty of God.**"

Confess to a priest?

You then ask: Why must one confess one's sins to a priest and not do so directly to God? Of course, one always addresses God when confessing one's sins. However, that it is also necessary to do so to a priest is something that God himself makes us understand: In sending his Son with our flesh, he shows he wants to encounter us through a direct contact that passes through the signs and language of our human condition.

Just as He came out of Himself for love of us and has come to "touch us" with his flesh, we are also called to come out of ourselves for love of Him and to go with humility and faith to him who can give us pardon in his name with word and gesture. Only the absolution of sins that the priest gives in the sacrament can communicate the interior certainty of having been truly forgiven and received by the Father who is in Heaven, because Christ has entrusted to the ministry of the Church the power to bind and to loose, to exclude and admit in the Covenant community (cf. Matthew 18:17).

He it is who, risen from death, said to the Apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23). Therefore, to go to Confession to a priest is very different from doing so in the secret of one's heart, exposed to so many uncertainties and ambiguities that fill life and history.

You will never know absolutely if what has touched you is the grace of God or your emotion, if you have forgiven yourself or if He has forgiven you in the way He chose. Absolved by the one the Lord has chosen and sent as minister of forgiveness, you will be able to experience the freedom that only God gives and understand why going to Confession is a source of peace.

---

## **HOW TO PREPARE FOR RECONCILIATION**

- Pray to the Holy Spirit for self-knowledge and trust in the mercy of God. Examine your conscience, be truly sorry for your sins, and resolve to change your life.
- Go to the priest and begin with **the Sign of the Cross**. Welcoming you, the priest will say: "May God, who has enlightened every heart, help you to know your sins and trust in his mercy," or similar words taken from Scripture. You answer: "Amen." Then say, "**Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been \_\_\_\_ weeks/ months/years since my last confession.**"
- Confess your sins openly and candidly. Tell the priest of all mortal sins and the number of times each was committed, and then you may confess some of your venial sins. (Although it is not strictly necessary to confess venial sins, the Church recommends that you do.) If you do not know whether a sin is mortal or venial, ask the priest. If you have no mortal sins, confess venial sins you have committed since your last confession; you may also mention some mortal sin from your past life for which you are particularly sorry, indicating that it has already been confessed.
- Then listen to the priest for whatever counsel he may judge appropriate. If you have any question about the faith, how to grow in holiness, or whether something is a sin, feel free to ask him. Then the priest will assign you a penance.
- Pray the Act of Contrition when the priest tells you.
- Listen as the priest absolves you of your sins and enjoy the fact that God has truly freed you from all your sins. If you forget to confess a mortal sin, you are still forgiven, but must mention it the next time you go to confession.
- Do the penance the priest assigns you.

## **AN AID TO YOUR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE**

*I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.*

- Do I seek to love God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength (Dt 6:5)? Do I put anything or anyone above God? Do I pray daily?
- Have I had any involvement with the occult, witchcraft, wicca, ouija boards, séances, tarot cards, new age crystals, fortune telling, or the like? Have I put faith in horoscopes?
- Have I received Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin?
- Have I abused the Sacrament of Penance by lying to the priest or deliberately not confessing a mortal sin?
- Have I denied a truth of the faith out of concern for the respect or opinion of others?

*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*

- Have I used God's holy name irreverently?

- Have I blasphemed God, the Church, Mary, the saints, or sacred places or things?

***Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.***

- Do I try to keep Sunday as a day of prayer, rest, and relaxation, avoiding unnecessary work?
- Have I deliberately come late or left early from Mass without a good reason?

***Honor your father and your mother.***

- Do I honor and respect my parents?
- Have I deliberately hurt my parents?
- Do I treat my children with love and respect?
- Do I support and care for the well-being of all family members?
- Have I neglected family duties?
- Do I honor and obey my lawful superiors?

***You shall not kill.***

- Have I deliberately harmed anyone?
- Have I had an abortion or encouraged an abortion?
- Have I attempted suicide or seriously considered it?
- Have I abused drugs or alcohol?
- Have I led anyone to sin through bad example or through direct encouragement?

***You shall not commit adultery.***

- Have I engaged in sexual activity with anyone of either sex? Have I used artificial contraception?
- Have I deliberately viewed pornographic magazines, videos or internet websites?
- Have I masturbated?
- Have I used impure language or told impure jokes?

***You shall not steal.***

- Have I stolen or accepted stolen goods?
- Have I deliberately destroyed the property of others?
- Have I cheated anyone of what I owe?
- Do I gamble excessively?
- Do I share what I have with the poor and the Church according to my means?
- Have I pirated materials: videos, music, software?

***You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.***

- Have I lied? Have I sworn falsely?
- Have I plagiarized or been academically dishonest?
- Have I gossiped? Have I revealed secrets or confidential information without good reason?
- Have I ruined the good name of others by spreading lies or maliciously revealing their faults and sins?

***You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.***

- Have I deliberately and consciously permitted sexual thoughts about others?
  - Do I guard my imagination and senses?
  - Have I watched shows, plays, pictures or movies that contain impure scenes with the deliberate intention of being aroused by them?
- Am I responsible about what I read?

***You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.***

- Am I envious of the possessions, abilities, talents, beauty, or success of others?

***You shall love your neighbor as yourself.***

- Do I love my neighbor? Is there anyone whom I do not love or refuse to love? Have I wished harm or misfortune on anyone?
- Do I forgive from my heart those who have hurt me? Do I harbor hatred or grudges? Do I pray for my enemies?
- Have I ridiculed or humiliated others?
- Do I seek to help others in need?
- Do I love myself as God loves me? Do I care for my physical, emotional, and spiritual health?
- Do I forgive myself for my sins after bringing them to God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

***Precepts of the Church***

- Have I deliberately missed Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day of obligation without a serious reason?
- Do I go to confession at least once a year when I have serious sins to confess?
- Do I receive Holy Communion, at least once during Easter time?
- Do I take part in the major feasts celebrating Our Lord, the Virgin Mary, and the saints?
- Do I abstain from meat on Fridays during Lent (for ages 14 and over) and fast on one full meal on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (for ages 18-59)? Do I fast for one hour before Holy Communion (water and medicine allowed)?
- Do I contribute to support the material needs of the Church?

**ACT OF CONTRITION**

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.”