

The Value of Confession by Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Frequent Confession has not only deep spiritual value, it is also immensely beneficial psychologically. In other words, the frequent reception of the sacrament of Penance contributes to the well-being of our mind. In one declarative sentence, it is a divinely instituted means of giving us peace of soul.

Remember what happened on Easter Sunday night. As described by St. Luke, "The doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and He said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this, He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained'" (Jn 20:19-23).

As the Catholic Church teaches, by these words of the risen Savior, He instituted the sacrament of Confession. For twenty centuries, it has been called the sacrament of peace.

The principal source of conflict in the human spirit is the sense of guilt. Psychologists tell us, it is the mysterious feeling of guilt which lies at the root of most people's disquiet of mind and disturbance of will. On both levels, the sacrament of Confession is the Lord's great gift to His followers.

***The more frequently we receive the sacrament
of Christ's mercy, the more grace is restored to our soul.***

Peace of mind is the experience of knowing the truth. We all know that we are sinners. We also know that, as sinners, we have offended God and become estranged from His love in the measure of our sins. How we need the assurance, based on faith, that this offended God is still pleased with us. When Christ tells us that there is greater joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine who are just, He is speaking of us who have deserved His rejection. The more often we receive His sacrament of mercy, the more deeply we are at peace.

Peace of heart is the experience of doing the will of God. There is no peace in doing what we want. I know whereof I speak when I say that, doing one's own will is hell on earth. God wants us to enjoy peace of heart. That is why He instituted the sacrament of Confession. The more frequently we confess our failings, no matter how minor they may seem to be, the more deeply peaceful we shall be. Why? Because if there is one thing that God wants us to admit, and keep admitting, it is that we are sinners who trust in His loving mercy.

There is some value in explaining what the Catholic Church understands by guilt. Guilt is the loss of God's grace. The more deeply we have sinned, the more guilt we incur. That is what mortal sin means. It is the supernatural death of the soul by the loss of sanctifying grace.

But all sin incurs guilt. Every sin we commit deprives us of more or less of the grace of God. The subjective experience that is called guilt is only the tip of an iceberg. Beneath the feeling of guilt is the objective fact that we have been deprived, however minimally, of God's friendship.

I like the statement of St. Thomas Aquinas who says, "The act of sin may pass, and yet the guilt remains."

The more frequently we receive the sacrament of Christ's mercy, the more grace is restored to our soul. We can experience the effect by growing in that peace of soul for which there is no substitute this side of heaven, realizing and not only knowing that, in spite of our sins, God loves us with that special love He reserves for repentant sinners.