

CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Continuing in the spirit of this Lenten season, this is a slightly revised version of an article from last year.....

Most Catholics of a certain age grew up with what priests sometimes call a “grocery list” mentality in confessing sins: “I lied seven times, I was impatient twelve times, I was angry twenty-five times, etc.” Somehow, our teachers either got it wrong or we missed the message that only mortal, “deadly”, sins – which are extremely rare – need to be specifically identified and numbered in confession. It would be important to mention that you murdered six people rather than just one, while the number of times you were angry isn’t terribly important.

A much better way to celebrate the sacrament and to confess sins is to ask oneself a question that comes from a classic definition of sin: “Where have I *missed the mark*?” The essence of sin is the failure to live up to what Jesus and the Church expect of us as disciples of Christ and members of the Body of Christ; and 99% of those sins are what we call “venial” – ordinary, everyday human faults that don’t **have** to be confessed sacramentally, but that we should make an effort to correct whether we go to confession once a year (as the Church prescribes) or more often. The “once a year” precept could be considered in the same way as the annual physical it’s wise for everyone to undergo. Shouldn’t we also have a periodic spiritual “check-up” to help us remain healthy in our relationship with God and the Church?

The Sacrament of Penance offers an opportunity for Catholics to look at life and sin, not so much in terms of names and numbers, but in a more thoughtful or introspective way: “I’m not as patient as I could be. I’m not always as honest as I should be. I can be selfish at times; I need to be more generous. I struggle with purity. I don’t tell my wife/husband how much I appreciate her/him. I don’t pray as much as I should.” This is the “confession” part of the Sacrament and it’s followed by a “penance” which is meant to help the penitent leave sinful behavior behind and live more fully in God’s grace. The Sacrament concludes with the “reconciliation” which occurs through the absolution the priest offers – not by his own power, but by the grace of God at work in this wonderful Sacrament.

The Sacrament of Penance is celebrated privately every Saturday from 4:30 to 5:00p.m. Our Lenten Communal Penance Service will take place on Monday, April 3rd at 7:00p.m., and the regular Saturday reconciliation time will be extended on Saturday, April 8th, from 3:30 to 5:00p.m. These are great opportunities to accept the Ash Wednesday invitation to “return to the Lord with your whole heart.”

Fr. Bob