

You And Your Service Sheet

— Sixth of a Series —

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YOUR PIETY (Continued)

13. — Your Confession

Probably your Service Sheet has a blank space for "Others"; that is, other spiritual exercises that can help you in your spiritual life. Of special importance among "Others" is Confession. Therefore, counting on your indulgence, I will say something about it.

When you made the Cursillo you went to Confession. Perhaps it was your first Confession after many years of separation from the Sacraments. At any rate, you were happy that you did, because in Confession you found Grace, advice, happiness...

Speaking of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, we said that you do not have to go to Confession every time you go to Communion, as long as you are in a state of Grace.

However, this does not mean that you should not go to Confession often; for instance, once a month.

Confession forgives not only mortal but also venial sins. Therefore, if you have venial sins -- and who hasn't? -- you can go to Confession.

Confession not only forgives sins and restores lost grace. It also increases the sanctifying grace that you already have in your soul. Don't you want to increase your sanctifying grace?...

Confession not only gives and increases sanctifying grace. It also gives you Sacramental Grace; that is, the strength you need to resist

temptations and avoid sin. Don't you think you need this additional strength...?

You have had this experience! After a good confession, you feel happy, strong, confident that, with the help of God, you will be able to lead a good Christian life. But after some days your strength begins to decrease, temptations look stronger, occasions of sin seem to be more difficult to avoid, your confidence falters... If you do not do something about it your soul will grow weaker and weaker until you may find yourself in real danger of losing your grace.

Do you want to do something about it? — Go to Confession!

Frequent Confession recharges your soul, increases your fervour, renews your strength, and keeps you away from many sins!

Of course, in order to derive all these benefits from the Sacrament of Penance, your Confession has to be good; not just a mechanical repetition of the same sins month after month.

You know how to make a good Confession.

First, you find out when was the last time you went to Confession, and what sins you have committed since then. For this, you make an Examination of Conscience. Ask yourself if you have kept the Commandments of God, the Commandments of the Church, the duties of your state of life, the ethics of your profession; if you have practised the virtues taught to us by Christ (justice, charity, patience, resignation to God's Will, humility, etc.), if you have fulfilled your obligations towards others, etc... And try to discover how many times you have failed, and the reasons why you have failed.

With your sin before you, think about them; and then think of Christ. Think of how much He loves you, of the Cross where He died for you. Think of how you have repaid Him!...

But when you think of Christ, think of Him with confidence, without fear. Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son of your Cursillo. Remember that He is all-merciful, that He is ready to welcome you and to forgive your sins as long as, truly repentant, you go back to Him.

And then do just that. Go back to Him! Tell Him that you are sorry; that you do not want to offend again a God who loves you so much; that you will do your very best in the future. And make sure that you mean what you say.

Once you have done this, go to the confessional box, and tell your sins to Christ's representative, the priest. Begin by letting him know how long ago your last confession was. And then enumerate your sins.

When you enumerate your sins do not waste your — and the priest's — time with details of no consequence. Explain briefly the nature of your sins and how many times you have committed them. If you do not remember the exact number, give an approximate number. All your mortal sins should be confessed. It is not necessary to confess venial sins; but, for the reasons explained above, it is most convenient to do so.

Neither fear nor shame should keep us from confessing all our mortal sins. A penitent has to be sorry for all his sins, not for just a few. To leave out a mortal sin intentionally is the same as to say that we are not sorry for it. When a man does this, his confession becomes an act of hypocrisy, and, instead of bringing grace to his soul, it increases his guilt. It is an insult to Christ. Let us remember that we can deceive the priest, but we cannot deceive God. He knows everything. Besides, why would you be afraid or ashamed? — Because the priest knows you? . . . Don't you know that he is there not only as a judge, but also as a spiritual physician, as a father? And he knows that he is also a human being, with his own sins. At any rate, if that is your reason, you can always look for a priest who does not know you. ~

It is you who are making a confession. Therefore you should confess your own sins; not the sins of other people. Actually, you should not talk about other people unless — and only to the extent — that it is necessary for the integrity of your Confession.

If you have any doubts or questions about your sins or anything related to them, ask your confessor. But please keep in mind that the confessional is not the place to talk about everything. Other penitents may be waiting; and if your confession is unduly prolonged, they may be inconvenienced. In general, questions and problems of spiritual life, not related to the matter of your confession and which call for lengthy dis-

cussions, belong to Spiritual Direction, and they should be taken care of outside the confessional. If you think that this has to be done in the confessional, look for an occasion when the priest has enough time to attend to you and when no other penitents are waiting.

After you have confessed your sins, listen to what Christ — through His priest — has to tell you. If the priest asks any questions, answer them clearly and truthfully.

Then comes the absolution. Christ tells you that your sins are forgiven. While the priest pronounces the words of the absolution you say, with all the sincerity and fervor you can muster, the act of contrition, or some other prayer, to tell the Lord that you are sorry for the sins you have confessed and for all the sins of your life.

When the priest says "go in peace", you stand up and go back to your pew. There — or at some other convenient time — you fulfill the penance given to you by the priest. Such penance, gladly accepted and carried out, is a sign of true repentance on your part.

Before you leave the Church, give thanks to the Lord for having granted you the grace of a good Confession, and ask for His help for the future.

Sometimes we find many excuses for not going to confession. "What is the use" — we say — ; "no matter how many times I go to confession I always commit the same sins!" When we feel like talking in this way, let us ask ourselves these questions: "Are my confessions good? Are my examinations of conscience thorough? Is my repentance sincere, true? Am I really doing my best?"... And we should keep trying in earnest and with all seriousness!

At times we get discouraged: "I go to Confession and Communion often; and I am still the same!" — Let me ask you this: Do you think that you can become a saint overnight? You are not as good as you would like to be; but how good would you be if you did not go to Confession and Communion often?

The best way to make sure that you do not miss your Confession is to set aside a definite day and time for it, and to ask yourself about it in your daily Examination of Conscience.

Here I am speaking of the regular reception of the Sacrament of Penance by those who usually live in a state of grace. Needless to say, if we happen to commit a mortal sin, we should not postpone receiving the Sacrament on the ground that it is not our Confession Day. On the contrary, we should go to Confession immediately.

You can go to confession to any priest in any church. But it is advisable to go always to the same priest; to have your own confessor. Knowing your soul well, he will be in a position to advise you better and to help you get the full benefits of the Sacrament of Penance.

It is convenient, although not necessary, that your confessor be at the same time your spiritual director. "Not necessary", because confession and spiritual direction are two different things. "Convenient", because these two practices of piety are intimately related to each other and in many ways cover the same ground. Therefore, if you can combine both; that is, if you find a priest who can and is willing to be both your director and your confessor, you will in all probability make faster progress in your spiritual life.

By the way, as it was explained to you in *Life in Grace*, the commitments of your Service Sheet do not bind you under penalty of sin. You do not commit a sin — not even a venial one — if you do not fulfill your Morning Offering, your Meditation, etc. These are not moral obligations. These are acts of Piety you decided to practise in order to improve your spiritual life. Therefore, your Service Sheet failures are not to be confessed. They should, however, be taken up with your Spiritual Director, in or outside the confessional.