

V2_6th_after_Pentecost= The Necessity of the Sacrament of Penance

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U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. 2 = The Penitent Christian

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Necessity of the Sacrament of Penance

“I have compassion on the multitude.” Mark 8: 2.

Our Lord is so good and compassionate towards men, that he could not see those who wished to follow him suffering temporal want, without pitying them; so that he went beyond the bounds of nature, and wrought a miracle in order to feed his hungry followers. How much greater must not his pity be for the poor souls he sees continuing for years and years in the miserable state of sin? Yes, this is the sort of misery and poverty that moves God most deeply; so wonderful is the mercy of God to the sinner, that the means he has prescribed for him to obtain complete pardon is a most easy and advantageous one, namely, the Sacrament of Penance. Consider therefore, my brethren, that

The Sacrament of Penance is a necessary means of salvation to all who have sinned mortally after Baptism; and that he who has grievously sinned, ought to have recourse to this means at once.

I do not say that the Sacrament of Penance is of such an absolute necessity, that the sinner under no circumstances can obtain pardon unless he actually receives it. Even the Baptism of water is not necessary in that sense; inasmuch as he who has not the opportunity of receiving Baptism can be cleansed from sin, and save his soul by the efficacy of a perfect love of God, which is called the Baptism of desire. Yet the Baptism of water is called a necessary means of salvation in this sense, that he who has the opportunity of receiving it, and deliberately neglects to avail himself of it, cannot go to heaven. So with the Sacrament of Penance for those who have committed mortal sin after Baptism. If I have sinned grievously, an act of perfect contrition will certainly obtain pardon for me from God; but there still remains the obligation for me to declare my sin in confession, when I have the opportunity of doing so, in order that I may receive sacramental absolution. For perfect contrition blots out sin, because it includes an earnest resolve to keep all the commandments, and consequently to go to confession when an opportunity occurs. If I have not that intention, no contrition can avail me to the pardon of my sins; and, dying without confession and sacramental absolution, in that case, I should be lost forever.

Confession is not a human invention, or a law prescribed by the Popes, as most heretics and opponents of our holy religion assert or pretend to believe. Regarding auricular confession as an insupportable burden, such men have made a point of crying it down, that they may be more at liberty to follow their

evil inclinations and desires, since there is no doubt that the fear of the shame one feels in disclosing his secret vices is for many a great means of keeping them from sin; It is not a Pope, or an emperor, but God himself who has placed this restraint on sinful men. It is God who commanded sinners to declare their sins in confession; and that command he has made so strict, that he has determined in the law of grace not to pardon mortal sin, unless to those who make use of this means, provided they have the opportunity of so doing. Therefore, neither Pope nor emperor can dispense any one, or even himself, from the obligation of confessing mortal sin. Jesus Christ promulgated this law to the world, when, after his Resurrection, he instituted the Sacrament of Penance in the words he said to his Apostles, and in their persons, to all validly-ordained priests: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20: 22, 23). From these words, it is evident that one must declare his sins to the priest; for how can I forgive or retain, if I know not what sins have been committed. It would be ridiculous for the minister of a king to receive full power from his sovereign to decide all disputes amongst his subjects, to condemn, to absolve, to punish, or to reward, if the subjects were not bound to go to the minister and state their case to him. And it would have been just as ridiculous for power to have been given to priests to forgive or to retain the sins of men, unless men were bound to confess their sins to the priests. It is therefore in accordance with a divine, and not a human law, that we are bound to confess our sins. And in order to eliminate all erroneous ideas on this matter, the Church in the General Council of Trent has publicly proclaimed it as an article of faith: "If any one denies that sacramental confession is instituted, or that it is necessary to salvation according to the divine law, or says that it is a mere human invention, let him be anathema" (Sess. 14, Can.6).

And truly, if we consider the matter, we shall see that this law is a most just one. For what can be more just than that the sinner should confess that he has offended the divine majesty, and humbly ask for pardon? Do not imagine that confession is anything novel in divine worship. From the very beginning God exacted confession from the sinner, though not exactly in the same manner as he now does in the Sacrament of Penance, before he would remit his sin and receive him again to his friendship. Our first parents in Paradise were obliged to confess their sin. "The woman whom thou gavest me to be my companion," said Adam to God: "gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3: 12). Adam's confession being finished, Eve's turn had to come: "And the Lord God said to the woman: Why hast thou done this? And she answered: the serpent deceived me." How did he deceive you? What have you done? I have obeyed him "I did eat" (Gen. 3: 13). The Almighty acts as if he knew nothing of the whole matter; and he examines them both until they confess the truth and declare what led them into sin. He acts, so to say, like a father who questions his child before punishing him, when the latter has committed a fault. Where have you been? he asks, raising the rod. What have you done? Will you not tell me at once? And yet the father may be well aware all the time of everything that has happened.

God acted in the same way with Cain, after the latter had slain his brother Abel. "Where is thy brother Abel?" (Gen. 4: 9.) Cain did not wish to confess, but tried to give an evasive answer: "I know not," he said; "am I my brother's keeper?" (Ibid.) "Why art thou angry?" asked the Lord, "and why is thy countenance fallen?" (Ibid. 6.) But Cain remained silent. At last God asked him, "What hast thou done?" (Ibid. 10.) Dost thou still refuse to answer me? Then I will say what thou hast done: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the earth's (Ibid.). See what thou hast done: and, "Now therefore cursed shalt thou be upon the earth. . . when thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit" (Ibid. 12). Why did not God curse Adam and Eve, as well as Cain? Because, he says, they confessed their sin; but he cursed Cain for refusing to acknowledge himself guilty of having murdered his brother.

Yes, God has always required confession, as a necessary condition of pardon for sin, and consequently for those who have sinned grievously and who have the opportunity of confession, it is a necessary means of salvation. "Let no one," says St. Augustine, "tell me that it is enough for him to repent in his heart, that God, who forgives him, knows what he has done; for if that were the case, in vain would the keys be given to the Church; in vain, has Christ said to his Apostles: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are

forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' To act thus would be to make a mockery of the Gospel." Do you wish to know, O sinner, what you have to do? "Open your mouth to the priest; for that alone is the gate of paradise." If you refuse to do that, or do it not honestly, there is no help for you; if you have not the sincere intention of confessing your sins, everything else you do is useless as far as your salvation is concerned; you will be lost forever.

It follows from all this that they are guilty of great presumption, and are in a most desperate state with regard to their eternal salvation, who, I do not say put off their confession and repentance to their death-bed, but who are in the habit of going to confession only once or twice a year, or who put off confession for a long time after having committed mortal sin. Foolish people, what are you thinking of? If any here present are in that state, I now speak to each one of them in particular. It is certain that you must die, O sinner, and it deserves your serious consideration. It is uncertain *when* you will die, whether to-day, or to-morrow, or in a year's time. It is uncertain *how* you will die, whether after a long illness, or suddenly, and this latter is often the case. It is certain that, if you die in the state of mortal sin, you are lost forever. And yet you are not afraid to put off to an uncertain future, the use of the necessary means to your salvation?

Ah sinner! No matter who you are, I beg of you, for the sake of your eternal salvation, consider the state you are in, and how much depends on it. There are few Christians now in hell among the demons, who had not the same intention as you, of confessing their sins at some future time; but they did not do so. And they will all burn in the flames of hell, forever, because they did not confess and repent of their sins, when they could have done so. Therefore, say at once earnestly from your heart, I will not wait till old age, nor till Easter, nor till the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nor till next Sunday; but this very day. "To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. 94: 8). To-day, the Lord calls me to repentance; now is the time to go to confession; and therefore, as soon as the sermon is over, I will try to remember my sins, and free myself from them by a good confession, that I may not be lost eternally. Such is now my firm resolution, which I am determined to carry out, and at once. Amen.

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