

Message from the Rector

March 17, 2019

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Given this season of grace when many people will be going to confession – some after a long absence, I wanted to offer some comments on the celebration of the sacrament. What can be said in the context of a bulletin message is limited but it is important to offer some counsel.

Firstly, what is the focus of confession? After an examination of conscience, the penitent should indicate to the confessor the time since their last confession and then in concise fashion, identify by name and number of occurrences, the sins that they have committed since their last confession. One should not confess sins which have already been confessed and for which absolution has been given. If a person wishes to do a “general confession of life”, the proper context would be during a retreat of some days in a retreat centre or religious house. As confession should be concise, it is not necessary – nor helpful unless asked by the confessor – to give your history of the sin, nor examples.

Secondly, what should be the frequency of regular confession? It is my considered view that one should not be going to confession more than weekly. The Church requires that we go to confession at least once a year. The traditional practice has been monthly confession. As for the frequent confessions of the saints, the example that is helpful from modern times is that of Pope St. John Paul II. He went to confession weekly. Going to confession more than once per week creates a number of concerns: 1° the danger of scrupulosity is evident, which leads us to look only at ourselves, and at our faults, and not rely on God’s mercy; 2° too frequent confession begins to put the emphasis on what “I” do and my practices – a sort of semi-pelagianism – and not on the mercy of God, which is the focus of the sacrament; 3° if we are too busy preparing to go to confession and going to confession, we run the danger of not taking the time to see the mercy of God working in our lives. What should we do, then, if we are aware of serious sin before our next weekly confession? This may be the situation in which one should attend Mass, receiving the graces that come from praying with the faith community and listening to the Word of God but abstaining from receiving the host. It would be best to celebrate the weekly confession so as to receive communion on Sunday (or the Saturday Vigil Mass of Sunday), which is the primary feast day of Catholics. What if I am in danger of death and am aware of unforgiven serious sin? Call a priest. If a priest is not available, then make a perfect act of contrition relying on God’s mercy. The Church through the Sacrament of Confession is at the service of

God's mercy. God's mercy is greater than the Church whose mission is to make known, celebrate and be a minister of His Mercy.

Finally, it is not necessary to confess venial (minor) sins, although it is a good practice to confess them in a monthly confession. With respect to our minor sins, we can rely on the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass where we ask God for pardon and peace before we celebrate the sacred mysteries.

Fr. Kevin