
CONFESSION: THE SACRAMENT OF FREEDOM

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WEEK 4~ *Why Do I Need a Priest?*

1) The Church tells us to

- **It's not an option.**

- i. We don't pick and chose how Christianity works
- ii. In the same way that it's not an option to throw out the bible, or to believe in one verse but not the other, it isn't our option to embrace or not embrace confession
- iii. This is our faith handed down to us from the apostles.

- **This has always been the view of the church:**

- i. "Thou shalt confess thy transgressions in the Church...and shalt not come unto prayer with an evil conscience" ~ *Didache 48 A.D*

- **Metropolitan Joseph**

- i. "As Orthodox Christians, Confession is not an option which we can choose or not choose to do. It is absolutely necessary for our spiritual healing and well-being, and those who think they can go without Confession for long periods of time are setting a trap for themselves that will be evident when they encounter tragedy and loss. Orthodox Christians benefit greatly from Confession, when we repent of our sins and receive freedom from the bondages of our heavy consciences...In Confession, we can forgive ourselves and others, and release the heavy load that unforgiveness sets on our shoulders." ~ Metropolitan Joseph on Confession

2) God doesn't forgive us individually – He forgives us through *His priests*

- "Whosoever sins ye remit they are remitted, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." ~ John 20:23

3) There is nothing private about our sins or our salvation

- **No sin is a private matter**

- i. "We, though many, are one body in Christ and individually part of one another" ~ *Romans 12:5*
- ii. "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy." ~ *I Cor. 12:26*
- iii. "There are no entirely private sins. All sins are sins against my neighbor, as well as against God and against myself. Even my most secret thoughts are, in fact, making it more difficult for those around me to follow Christ." ~ *Bishop Kallistos Ware*

- . **The scriptures tell us that confession is a public matter**
 - i. “Therefore *confess* your sins to *each other* and pray for *each other* so that you may be healed.” ~ *James 5:6*
 - ii. “[Confession] is not a private procedure, a treatment of some guilt-ridden individual on an analyst's couch.” ~ *GOARCH*

 - . **General Confession IS NEVER A SUBSTITUTE**
 - i. “General Confession is not meant simply to replace individual confession” and that it “is not and must not become a substitute.” ~ *Ruling of the 1972 Holy Synod of Bishops of the OCA*
 - ii. “Experience shows, that those who take part in such a General Confession begin to have a much better individual confession.” ~ *Fr. Schmemmann*

 - . **Christianity is ALWAYS community**
 - i. You can’t have Jesus without the body
 - ii. The most direct way to relate with God is always through the Church
 - 1. We never relate with God in a purely spiritual way – it’s always through the Church, through one another, and through tangible sacraments.
 - 2. Our relationship with God is always physical – this is the whole purpose of the incarnation and the means for salvation.

 - . **Confession is a sacrament**
 - i. This sacrament is as real and tangible as the Eucharist – a transformation

 - . *** Confession in the church is as different from confession in the shower as Marriage in the church differs from co-habitation.***
- 4) **Accountability**
- . "You either make yourself accountable or you will be made accountable by your circumstances"
 - . You can’t work out your salvation *ALONE*

 - . ***We need accountability to resist temptation***
 - i. *This is demonstrated in Peru, where city authorities discovered that by placing pictures of Jesus and Mary on walls of polluted streets, people were less likely to litter.*

 - . ***Hidden thoughts have more power over you***
 - i. “If impure thoughts trouble you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your spiritual father and condemn them. The more a person conceals his thoughts, the more they multiply and gain strength. But an evil thought, when revealed, is immediately destroyed. If you hide things, they have great power over you, but if you could only speak of them before God, in the presence of another, then they will often wither away, and lose their power.” ~ *Desert Fathers*

- . We can't see the ugliness of our sins until revealing them to another person
 - i. "It's a fact that we cannot see the true ugliness and hideousness of our sins until we see them in the mind and heart of the other to whom we have confessed." ~ Fr. Thomas Hopko

- 5) Confessing to *another* person teaches us humility
 - . Just try it – it works ;)
 - . This painful experience of exposing yourself is the answer to our greatest flaw – *pride*.
 - i. That *IS* what saves us (James 4:10)

 - . We don't need a guru...we just need some self-honesty

 - . THE NEED TO BE KNOWN
 - i. "Stick with the priest or confessor who really knows you. Spiritual transformation takes time and changing confessors inhibits growth, since you waste time letting the new priest get to know you. You wouldn't consider changing medical doctors every few years, not when your doctor knows your health history and is watching out for changes in your body that need attention. How much more the soul needs the guidance of a priest or abbot who really knows us, having established a relationship of trust. We all need the guidance of one who doesn't allow us to avoid working on that which inhibits growth in our relationship with God. Stability can be for us the vehicle by which we are able to confront the habits, sins and vices that inhibit God from transforming our lives and making us whole. Constant movement allows us to hide from ourselves." ~ Abbot Tryphon

 - . By consistently confessing to the same person, you develop a relationship and *he knows you*.

 - . Self-Honesty → Repentance
 - i. That way, you recognize and he recognizes **bull**
 - ii. Consistent confession brings out honesty – the beginning of repentance

- 6) It's the Holy Spirit – *Not* the man
 - . The priest's advice is sacramental/ Holy Spirit speaks through him

 - . "But what does *he* have to say to me?"
 - i. "I'm not sure he'll have anything worthwhile to say..."
 - ii. "He's so young, what will he know about this?"
 - iii. "He won't understand..."

 - . We forget...confession is a sacrament...**NOT** counseling
 - i. It doesn't *really* matter who he is
 - ii. "All you need is a monkey with a stole on" ~ Fr. Edward Hughes

 - . It's usually simple
 - i. *Most of the time, anyway*, we don't need very profound advice. We usually just need to hear, from another person, what we know deep down.

7) **We need encouragement**

- . "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." ~ *Thessalonians 5:11*
- . Your confessor is the soldier in the front lines right next to you, encouraging you to press on

8) **Our relationship with the rest of the Church is healed.**

- . **Remember ---- There is no such thing as a "private sin"**
- . Your sins hurt everybody – and especially everyone in the parish
- . *On a very practical level:* The priest is the father of the family. He needs to know what is going on to help so many interconnected people.
- . *Mystically:* The priest represents the body of the faithful – and when you confess, you heal that division between you and the church brought about by your sins.

9) **Confession restores us into a life of True Communion**

- . To be human is to be in relationship
- . This is demonstrated in St. Andrei Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity
- . Confession is a communal act
 - i. "A Christian, at any rate an Orthodox Christian, views repentance as a dynamic act of responsibility to God, but also to other men. It is not pining away in narcissistic self-reflection, even while implying self-knowledge and self-examination. Sin itself is a relational act - a break in the "I-Thou" relationship. It concerns my relationship with another person. When the prodigal son "came to himself" in the Gospel parable (Luke 15), he did so in relation to his father: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before You" (v. 18). We repent in the face of God; and we repent in communion with others, in the Church." (GOARCH)

10) **Penance: Taking Steps to Heal**

- . Christ calls us to take up the cross daily – we have work to do *here & now*
- . "Confession is not merely the reading off of a list of sins, but delving deep into the heart to discover the passions and suffering that drive us to sin. Once found, we can take steps to receive the cure for these passions through spiritual exercises called Penances. A Penance is not a 'punishment,' but an act which helps us gain greater awareness of the passion under treatment, so that we can more fully invite the Holy Spirit into us and receive healing. When someone commits a serious sin, such as marital infidelity or violence against another, he or she should not receive the Sacraments for an extended period, so that the penitent can achieve greater realization of the seriousness of such a sin, so that he or she will not fall into it again. Penances aid us in becoming better persons, freeing us from enslavement to repetitive sins." ~ *Metropolitan Joseph*