

Lesson 3 : Why confess my sins to a Priest?

1. How do we know that Jesus instituted the sacrament of Reconciliation?

- a. In 1857, the pope had a vision of Jesus that told him to create this sacrament.
- b. Solely because of the Tradition of the Church
- c. Jesus clearly gives the authority to forgive sins to the apostles in the New Testament.
- d. Ancient scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1967 reveal the rite in detail.

Discussion

Why does it matter that Jesus instituted the sacrament of Reconciliation?

Hint: John 20:21-23 Matthew 16:19.

2. How do we know that there was confession in the early Church?

- a. The fifth chapter of Genesis describes confession.
- b. The letter of James speaks of this practice in the early Church.
- c. In the fourteenth century, St. Terminus found confession mentioned in an ancient manuscript of the Bible.
- d. We don't know for sure.

Discussion

Why does it matter that confession was practiced in the early Church?

3. How did the priest in Fr. Mike's story explain meditation to a Baptist minister?

- a. The minister talked about healing someone, and the priest pointed out that healing is from God, who simply works through the one who heals.
- b. The minister talked about a time he got his congregation to compromise and meet him "halfway," and the priest affirmed that this is what Jesus calls us to.
- c. The minister talked about his former career as a jet pilot, and the priest pointed out that Jesus ascended into heaven.
- d. All of the above

Discussion Starter

Have you ever been a mediator for God, even in a small way? How? T

4. How is confession a victory?

- a. Confession gives us victory over sin. Sin enslaves us, infects our relationships, and ultimately separates us from God.
- b. Confession is a victory for certain priests, who get a prize if they hear the most confessions in their respective dioceses.
- c. Confession is a victory because it helps us overcome our fear of sharing.
- d. Confession is a victory for the Church because it helps keep Catholics in line and faithful to Church rules.

Discussion Starter

What is one thing in your life that you need victory over?

5. Have you ever been hesitant to go to confession? Why? How do you feel about Fr. Mike's explanation?

6. What do you think would help you be better prepared to make a good confession? What concrete steps can you take?

7. Share the fruits and benefits of the sacrament of Reconciliation in your own life. Why do you go? What have you experienced in this sacrament as a result of it?

CONFESSION SIMULATOR ACTIVITY

Make three copies of the script on the next two pages for your chosen "actors."

Overview

This activity gives students a "run through" of the sacrament of Reconciliation so that they can be more confident about what happens and can be better prepared to make a good confession. Choose three students to play the roles of narrator, priest, and penitent.

Set-up

Place two chairs facing each other in the front of the room-or, if you want to get fancy, set up a kneeler and a screen sideways so that the other students can see what is happening. Your three "actors" will then act out the script that follows. If time allows, you can field any practical questions at the end.

SCRIPT

[Priest and penitent are in the front of the room with the narrator standing on one side.]

Narrator: [NAME OF PENITENT] hasn't been to confession since the second grade. You could say that one thing led to another, time flew by, and here we are in tenth grade... seven years later. [NAME] recently went on a retreat and wanted to go to confession, but [he/she] was embarrassed about not remembering what to do... since it has been seven years. Today is the day, though. [NAME] has made a thorough examination of conscience and is ready for confession.

[PENITENT enters the "Reconciliation room" and sits down (or kneels).]

Penitent: Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been ... [coughs and mumbles] ... seven years since my last confession. Here are my sins... [grimacing]

Priest: [Smiling] Welcome back! Go ahead.

Penitent: [Looking relieved] Well... here goes...

[As the penitent mimes confessing sins to the priest, the narrator says the following.]

Narrator: So [NAME] went through the sins that came to mind, beginning with those that were directly against God and moving on to those against family, friends, and neighbors. On [NAME]'s retreat, it was suggested that structuring one's confession according to the commandments was a good way to get organized. [NAME] understood that mortal sins were what [he/she] really needed to confess. [NAME] had a few things that [he/she] thought fit that description and confessed them, along with how many times they were done. You may be dying to know what those were, but that's between Father and [NAME].

Priest: Well, you have made a very thorough confession. I would like to help you with a few things...[Priest continues, miming his advice to the penitent.]

Narrator: Father is now giving [NAME] some helpful advice, making some observations, and offering some encouragement. He will then give [NAME] a penance for the sins that [he/she] confessed, then say the words of absolution: "I absolve you from your sins..." These words forgive every sin confessed and

wipe away their eternal consequences, while the penance helps to remedy the effects of one's sins. A penance might be as simple as a few prayers, or it may be a bit more involved. The penance given isn't necessarily a gauge for the seriousness of one's sins; it is simply the judgment of the priest that the penance will be helpful for the person.

Priest: [NAME], for your penance, pray one decade of the Rosary. I would like you to pray the first joyful mystery, the Annunciation. While you are praying, think about Mary's "yes," and ask her to help you to say "yes" to God's will today. Please make an act of contrition.

Penitent: O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you... [Mimes the rest.]

Narrator: The traditional form of the Act of Contrition isn't really that long, but it can make some people nervous. There may be a card with it in the Reconciliation room. But it is OK if you use a different form. You simply need to state your sorrow for your sins and ask God for the grace to avoid sinning in the future.

[When penitent finishes, the priest raises his hands and says the words of absolution.]

Priest: God, the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins...

[Priest mimes the rest and then makes the sign of the cross over the penitent.]

Narrator: Here is where one's sins are powerfully and effectively wiped away.

Priest: Go in peace.

Penitent: Thanks be to God. [Gets up, smiles, and walks out.]

Narrator: So, who's next?