

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON CONFESSION

Q. What is Confession?

A. Confession is the telling of our sins to a duly authorized priest, for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness.

Q. Who is a duly authorized priest?

A. A duly authorized priest is one sent to hear confessions by the lawful bishop of the diocese in which we are at the time of our confession.

Q. What sins are we bound to confess?

A. We are bound to confess all our mortal sins, but it is well also to confess our venial sins.

Q. Why is it well to confess also the venial sins we remember?

A. It is well to confess also the venial sins we remember:

1. (1) Because it shows our hatred of all sin, and
2. (2) Because it is sometimes difficult to determine just when a sin is venial and when mortal.

Q. What should one do who has only venial sins to confess?

A. One who has only venial sins to confess should tell also some sin already confessed in his past life for which he knows he is truly sorry; because it is not easy to be truly sorry for slight sins and imperfections, and yet we must be sorry for the sins confessed that our confession may be valid -- hence we add some past sin for which we are truly sorry to those for which we may not be sufficiently sorry.

Q. Should a person stay from confession because he thinks he has no sin to confess ?

A. A person should not stay from confession because he thinks he has no sin to confess, for the Sacrament of Penance, besides forgiving sin, gives an increase of sanctifying grace, and of this we have always need, especially to resist temptation. The Saints, who were almost without imperfection, went to confession frequently.

Q. Should a person go to Communion after confession even when the confessor does not bid him go?

A. A person should go to Communion after confession even when the confessor does not bid him go, because the confessor so intends unless he positively forbids his penitent to receive Communion. However, one who has not yet received his first Communion should not go to Communion after confession, even if the confessor by mistake should bid him go.

Q. Which are the chief qualities of a good Confession?

A. The chief qualities of a good Confession are three: it must be humble, sincere, and entire.

Q. When is our Confession humble?

A. Our Confession is humble when we accuse ourselves of our sins, with a deep sense of shame and sorrow for having offended God.

Q. When is our Confession sincere?

A. Our Confession is sincere when we tell our sins honestly and truthfully, neither exaggerating nor excusing them.

Q. Why is it wrong to accuse ourselves of sins we have not committed?

A. It is wrong to accuse ourselves of sins we have not committed, because, by our so doing, the priest cannot know the true state of our souls, as he must do before giving us absolution.

Q. When is our Confession entire?

A. Our Confession is entire when we tell the number and kinds of our sins and the circumstances which change their nature.

Q. Is our Confession worthy if, without our fault, we forget to confess a mortal sin?

A. If without our fault we forget to confess a mortal sin, our Confession is worthy, and the sin is forgiven; but it must be told in Confession if it again comes to our mind.

Q. Is it a grievous offense willfully to conceal a mortal sin in Confession?

A. It is a grievous offense willfully to conceal a mortal sin in Confession, because we thereby tell a lie to the Holy Ghost, and make our Confession worthless.

Q. Why does the priest give us a penance after Confession?

A. The priest gives us a penance after Confession, that we may satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to our sins.

Q. Why should we have to satisfy for our sins if Christ has fully satisfied for them?

A. Christ has fully satisfied for our sins and after our baptism we were free from all guilt and had no satisfaction to make. But when we willfully sinned after baptism, it is but just that we should be obliged to make some satisfaction.

Q. Is the slight penance the priest gives us sufficient to satisfy for all the sins confessed?

A. The slight penance the priest gives us is not sufficient to satisfy for all the sins confessed:

1. (1) Because there is no real equality between the slight penance given and the punishment deserved for sin;

2. (2) Because we are all obliged to do penance for sins committed, and this would not be necessary if the penance given in confession satisfied for all.

The penance is given and accepted in confession chiefly to show our willingness to do penance and make amends for our sins.

Q. Does not the Sacrament of Penance remit all punishment due to sin?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits the eternal punishment due to sin, but it does not always remit the temporal punishment which God requires as satisfaction for our sins.

Q. Why does God require a temporal punishment as a satisfaction for sin?

A. God requires a temporal punishment as a satisfaction for sin to teach us the great evil of sin and to prevent us from falling again.

Q. Which are the chief means by which we satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to sin?

A. The chief means by which we satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to sin are: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving; all spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and the patient suffering of the ills of life.

Q. What fasting has the greatest merit?

A. The fasting imposed by the Church on certain days of the year, and particularly during Lent, has the greatest merit.

Q. What "ills of life" help to satisfy God for sin?

A. The ills of life that help to satisfy God for sin are sickness, poverty, misfortune, trial, affliction, etc., especially, when we have not brought them upon ourselves by sin.

Q. How can we know spiritual from corporal works of mercy?

A. We can know spiritual from corporal works of mercy, for whatever we do for the soul is a spiritual work, and whatever we do for the body is a corporal work.

Q. Which are the chief spiritual works of mercy?

A. The chief spiritual works of mercy are seven:

1. To admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead.

Q. When are we bound to admonish the sinner?

A. We are bound to admonish the sinner when the following conditions are fulfilled:

1. (1) When his fault is a mortal sin;

2. (2) When we have authority or influence over him, and

3. (3) When there is reason to believe that our warning will not make him worse instead of better.

Q. Why is it a work of mercy to pray for the living and the dead?

A. It is a work of mercy to aid those who are unable to aid themselves. The living are exposed to temptations, and while in mortal sin they are deprived of the merit of their good works and need our prayers. The dead can in no way help themselves and depend on us for assistance.

Q. Which are the chief corporal works of mercy?

A. The chief corporal works of mercy are seven:

1. To feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead.

Q. How may we briefly state the corporal works of mercy?

 **Saint Michael Center**
for the Blessed Virgin Mary

CONTACT US :
1-808-943-7088
1-800-505-MARY (6279)



1481 S King St #150B Honolulu, HI 96814 1-800-505-MARY (6279) / 1-808-943-7088 www.saintmichaelusa.org

A. We may briefly state the corporal works of mercy by saying that we are obliged to help the poor in all their forms of want.

Q. How are Christians aided in the performance of works of mercy?

A. Christians are aided in the performance of works of mercy through the establishment of charitable institutions where religious communities of holy men or women perform these duties for us, provided we supply the necessary means by our almsgiving and good works.

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