

The Mystery of Repentance & Confession

It is told that St. Jerome, as he lived in Palestine and worked in the cave of Bethlehem where our Savior was born, had a wondrous vision on Christmas. Jesus Christ appeared to him as a child and asked him: “Jerome, when everyone presents something to me, what are you going to give me?”

“My virtues and prayers,” answered St. Jerome.

“This is good, but what else?”

“My heart, my soul, and all of myself!”

“I accept that, too, but I want something else from you as well.”

“But what else should I give You, Lord?” wondered the ascetic.

“Give me your sins!”

The Blessed Jerome began to cry brokenheartedly. He asked through tears: “Why do you need my sins, Lord?”

Our Lord replied, “I want to take them on myself!”

This story exemplifies how God feels towards each one of us. In fact, to show that there are no bounds to the measure of His love and forgiveness, Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son. The central figure of the story is not the prodigal son, but the father who stands at the door of his home waiting for his foolish and errant son to return. And when he sees him returning, he runs out to embrace him.

As we embark on our journey through Great Lent, we come to realize that the story of the prodigal son is our own story. The self-willed departure, the blameworthy life, the misery; followed by repentance, return and forgiveness. We all have lived this – and how many times. Essentially, the story focuses on a sacrament of the Church that unfortunately has become known as the “forgotten” sacrament.

The “forgotten” medicine for the faithful of God, Holy Confession, affords us the opportunity to wipe away all of our sins and start life over again. This short article by no means is a treatise for this great Sacrament for this subject presupposes extensive study; however, it is simply a brief reminder that during Great Lent we all should be going to Confession. I pray and hope this article will help us to have a better and concrete understanding on how to prepare for this Holy Mystery.

Why do we need confession? The answer is because we sin. What is sin? Sin is the greatest evil that exists. It destroys both the body and soul. It makes both this life and eternal life bitter. Sin causes discord in families, quarrels among neighbors, and disagreements among relatives. It starts the fire of malice among people. It makes the soul proud and embittered. It poisons the heart with envy. In short, sin separates us from God. The only cure for sin is to seek forgiveness through the Sacrament of Confession. The Christian burdened with sins goes to the priest with deep repentance in his or her soul, and with a sincere desire to change.

One of the greatest examples in the Bible of repentance is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The parable reveals what one must do to repent for his sins; but at the same time, it reveals the unconditional love our Heavenly Father has for us. When we return to Him for forgiveness, He accepts us with no probation, no punishment, and no incrimination but with open arms. Immediate acceptance and forgiveness!

After the Prodigal Son had squandered his father’s money enticed by the world and all its sinful allurements, the Parable tells us that the young man came to his senses. The young man who was

passing his days in sin, living a life of shame, thought nothing else but to return to his father in repentance. “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘*Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.*’” The young man arose and went to his father. “*But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had **compassion**, and **ran** and fell on his neck and kissed him.*”

How amazing is the compassion shown by this father? His tender actions show us that he never ceased looking for the return of his son, just as God always longs for the return of every sinner. The Prodigal son’s example of confession and repentance shines a bright light into all of our darkened hearts and souls; because the Prodigal knew that the only way he would be forgiven was if he returned and confessed to his father.

Upon seeing the sincere repentance of his son, the father responds joyously. He celebrates his homecoming as one who came alive from the dead. “*Bring out the best robe and put it on him,*” says the father to his servants, “*...bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.*”

A priest-theologian tells us that we can save our soul only in two ways; either by not sinning at all, or by repenting for our sins. Since among us there are no sinless ones, if we want to be reconciled with God Whom we anger with daily transgressions of His holy will, there is only one thing left for us to do; to repent sincerely and openly. God will receive us just as the compassionate father in the Prodigal Son. He awaits for our return for this was the reason He came into the world.

As Great and Holy Lent draws near, let us utilize the fast and the Lenten Prayer services to offer ourselves a self-evaluation. Let us look into the mirror and be self-condemning. All of us, and I being the first, can relate very well to the Prodigal Son. At one time or another, we have abandoned our Heavenly Father’s house and have strayed from the path that has been set before us. When the Prophet David committed a serious offense before God, he looked for a sacrifice worthy for the atonement for his great sin: and he did not find a better sacrifice than *humility* and a *broken* and *repentant* heart. The Prodigal Son decided it made more sense to return to his father than to continue in sin, which would eventually take his life.

The Sacrament of Confession is a gift of healing for all of us as well as a medicine we need. It will restore us back to God’s loving arms! He waits for all of us to return to Him! So, then let us run hastily to our Lord Jesus Christ through the powerful and soul-saving Sacrament of Confession. Let us give our lives to Him, so in turn we may find out what life is truly all about.