



Benedict XVI said: “There is a close link between holiness and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The actual conversion of the heart, which is open to the transforming and renewing action of God, is the “engine” of all reform and translates into a truly evangelizing force. In the confessional, the repentant sinner, by the free action of the divine mercy, is justified, pardoned and sanctified; he leaves the old man to put on the new man. He who has been profoundly renewed by divine grace can’t but carry in himself, and therefore announce, the newness of the Gospel.” ([Speech to the participants in the course of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the internal Forum, the 9.III.2012](#))

Many times because of fear, shame or influences of the world telling us that we don't need God, we miss or underrate the importance this Sacrament that is so beautiful and so full of mercy. The Sacrament of Reconciliation opens the doors to participate in the feast of the Eucharist and leads us into the holiness and grace that God wants to give us.

As such, today we would like to present this gallery. Often, just like immature children, we are not only full of excuses for failing to respond to the Father's plan, but we also justify and hide our flaws. Yet, God knows us and welcomes us as we are, with our mistakes and virtues. It is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we can return to the Father, repentant, and can receive His forgiveness and the grace of His love.

1. I'm worried my friends might see me in the confession line

«Shame is also good; it is healthy to feel a little shame, because being ashamed is salutary. In my country when a person feels no shame, we say that he is 'shameless,' a 'sin verguenza.' But shame too does good, because it makes us more humble, and the priest receives this confession with love and tenderness and forgives us on God's behalf. Also from a human point of view, in order to unburden oneself, it is good to talk with a brother and tell the priest these things which are weighing so much on my heart. And one feels that one is unburdening oneself before God, with the Church, with his brother. Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one

feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession!» (Pope Francis, General Audience, February 19, 2014).

2. I don't feel forgiven when I confess.

There is a theological formula in Latin that sounds complicated, but is really simple: the Sacraments act “ex opere operato.” If you translate it literally, the statement reads: “the Sacraments act with the work being done.” Crystal clear, isn't it? In other words, if the Sacrament is performed correctly, it doesn't fail. For the strength of the Sacrament does not derive from the mood or merit of the one doing it (that is, of the priest's holiness or my own). They rely on God's grace. Obviously, the better our inner disposition, the more we will be able to open our lives to that grace. Still, if done in good faith, even if you don't feel it, you can be sure that you have been forgiven.

3. The priest always gives me a hard time and exaggerates.

Pride, among other things, generates a high sensitivity and susceptibility, especially when it comes to our shortcomings and errors. In some cases, it even manages to create a series of complexes, delusions of persecution and aggression against those who question us in this field. With this in mind, ask with humility: could it not be me and my pride at fault rather than the priest's defects? If this is not the case, then ask yourself whether God might perhaps be using this grumpy band-aid to help me grow in humility? If you feel this is not what God is trying to teach you, then look for a calmer priest and keep the former one in your prayers.

4. The priest dislikes me and he doesn't listen to me.

Talk to the priest if you can. Charitably tell him what you think. Explain your situation. If things don't go well, look for another priest. And, above all, pray for him and ask God to bless His Church with kind and patient priests.

5. I confess directly to God.

If this is true, then go to confession. This Sacrament is the safest way to confess directly to God. If you are not convinced, consider what you mean by “direct” and “indirect.” When I want to speak directly with someone, it is just not enough to have an inner and spiritual dialog. I like going to see the person and talking with him or her face-to-face. I am more like those Greeks who said to Philip: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” There is a momentum, a deep and irresistible desire that drags me to search for contact; I desire to see, hear, touch. God knows how much we need this concrete and physical certainty. This is why the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us! And for this reason, He also instituted the sacraments as visible, concrete, tangible, mediations. These are the real

direct dia-logos.

6. The confessional line is too long... I don't have time to wait.

To that excuse, the Book of Proverbs and a quote both give an answer. First, from Proverbs: «I passed next to the vineyard of a foolish man, and it was invaded of nettles, Thistles covered the ground, fence of stones was ruined.» «To see it reflected in my heart, to contemplate it learned the lesson: A little sleep, another little Snooze, another little lie with crossed arms and will, as a tramp, your misery and as a beggar your poverty» (Pr 24: 30–34). Further, says the man who would later be named Pope Leo XIII: “If out of laziness you stop using the means necessary to become humble, you will always feel oppressed, restless, unbearable to yourself and perhaps also to others, and what is worse, you will run the risk of being eternally lost” (J.Pecci — León XIII-, Practice of Humility, 49). In other words, I think it's better to wait in line.

7. But I'm a good person. It's not like I've committed murder or stolen anything.

Here we must apply the “Socratic effect.” Let me explain: Socrates, when he received the Oracle at the Temple of Delphi (proclaiming him the wisest man in Athens), could not believe it. He could not be wiser than the wisest men of his time (whom he knew well). So he ended up walking around the city trying to disprove the oracle. Paradoxically, by accepting his ignorance and the limits of his wisdom, he began to formulate a series of some of the most incisive questions that ended up crowning him as one of the wisest men of all. Metaphorically, something similar happens with the saints. Having perceived both the love of God and their own lack of merit in such an intense way, they are the first ones to deny their cause for holiness. Paradoxically, their humility and their confession opens their hearts to God's mercy and leads them along the path of holiness. Conversely, whoever suffers from the “I am holier than you” mentality suffers from one of the worst diseases: that feeling of self-justification known as pride. If you suffer from this, no worries, because it's effect is inversely effective. The antidote is going to Confession!

8. I'll go when I'm really sorry.

This statement is partially correct. Confession requires true repentance in order to be fruitful. In any case, it would be good that one strives and intends to achieve contrition as soon as possible. How? Pray more. Read the Bible, meditate more and make a deeper examination of conscience. Why? Because life passes by and we don't always have the time that we think we will. “Despair not; pardon has been promised you. Thanks be to God, he says, because it is promised; I hold fast the promise of God. Now therefore live well. Tomorrow, he replies, I will live. God has promised the pardon; no one promised you tomorrow.... » (St. Augustine, commentary on Psalm 102).

9. I don't have time. I will confess later. Jesus doesn't discriminate.

Now, if you weren't able to confess for a grave reason (arguments like "I didn't make it because I was watching the football game" don't work here) and made an act of perfect contrition, then, yes, you can receive Communion. So says the Catechism in paragraph 1452. But, make sure you understand just what "perfect contrition" really means: «This means the firm resolve to have recourse as soon as possible to Sacramental confession (cf Council of Trent: DS 1677)». This means that after the Mass we should look for a priest to confess with ASAP. In any case, it's better not to take risks. Take it safe. Arrive on time and confess with full peace of mind.

Remember Saint Paul's words: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor 11:27–29).

10. My daily prayers, sacrifices, and works of charity make up for my sins. Surely God forgives me with those.

This is true. The Bible says it: "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 P 4.8). The Catechism confirms this in the number 1452: "contrition when it springs from the love of God loved above all things is called 'perfect contrition' (contrition of charity). Such contrition forgives faults.» However, the Bible also reminds us of Jesus' words to the apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."» (Jn. 20, 22–23). And the Catechism goes on to say: "such contrition forgives venial faults; 'It also obtained the forgiveness of mortal sins, if you understand the firm resolve to appeal as soon as possible to the Sacrament of Confession (cf Council of Trent: DS 1677)'." One truth isn't opposed to the other, both are to be integrated. The confession is not externally imposed or an optional question. It is ill-advised to receive communion without the certainty of forgiveness. Confession gives us that security.

11. Why should I confess my sins to another sinner?

When the priest says 'I absolve you,' a great miracle happens. The same thing happens when he says: "this is my body". In that moment, it is no longer the priest who is speaking or acting. That "I" that you hear is the voice of Christ himself. Yes, it is a voice that comes from the heights of heaven and from the depths of the heart. That "I" belongs to Christ. It is hard to believe, but it is the pure and simple truth. Thus, He who forgives, albeit through the priest, is Christ.

12. I don't need confession. I am aware of my mistakes and I can correct them by

myself.

Here we need to distinguish between two different things. Improving your mistakes is one thing, forgiving sin is another. With regards to the form, you are totally right. You can and should work to improve your mistakes, keeping in mind that only with God's grace can one truly improve. Moving on to the second distinction, here confession is essential. Only God forgives sins. This powerful truth was one of the reasons for the conversion of G. K. Chesterton; he said with great clarity: "when people ask me or anyone else why would you joined the Church of Rome?, the first answer essentially, although partly incomplete is: 'to save me from my sins'. Because there is no other religious system declaring truly to pound people's sins. (...) The Sacrament of penance gives a new life, and reconciles man with everything that lives: but not as optimists and pagan preachers of happiness do. The gift is given at a price and conditioned to the confession. I have found a religion that dares to go down with me to the depths of myself."

13. God isn't going to forgive me. My sins are too great.

It is true, God will not be able to forgive you if you continue to believe that He can't. His mercy knocks on the door of our hearts, time after time, but He never boots the door down. Try your best to change your mind. Repeat after me: "God can and wants to forgive me. God is infinitely merciful. God wants nothing more than to embrace me with his forgiveness." Remember, as Pope Francis said: "Let us not forget this word: God never ever tires of forgiving us! 'Well, Father what is the problem?'. Well, the problem is that we ourselves tire, we do not want to ask, we grow weary of asking for forgiveness. He never tires of forgiving, but at times we get tired of asking for forgiveness."

14. I know the priest. It is embarrassing to tell him what I have done.

Some say that modesty is the inner experience that leads us to recognize the value of what should be protected (and often hidden). Walking down the street naked, for example, would be "immodest." Embarrassment, on the other hand, is the inner experience of the value of something that has been offended. It is this experience that is often helpful because it sensitizes us to the ugliness of certain actions and prevents us from committing them. Embarrassment, however, can be a double-edged sword. The Curé of Ars once said that the devil takes away our embarrassment before the sin, and restores it when you are going to confess. This is unhealthy embarrassment. Healthy embarrassment, on the other hand, is the kind that leads us to a deeper and more sincere confession, in addition to aiding us in avoiding that same action in the future. The key, then, is to take advantage of our embarrassment and use it as a positive catalyst (remember the Prodigal Son). If it is still too difficult for you to go to that priest that you know, then find another priest or a confessional with a screen to maintain anonymity.

15. I am not going to tell my sins to another. It is a private matter.

Saint John is pretty clear about this: «If we say that we do not sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. He is faithful and just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.» (1 Jn 1, 8–10) One might say: I confess only to God. And, yes, you can tell God your sins and ask him for forgiveness. But our sins are also committed against our brethren and against the Church. That is why it is necessary to ask for the Church's pardon as well. What's more, "from a human point of view, in order to unburden oneself, it is good to talk with a brother and tell the priest these things which are weighing so much on my heart. And one feels that one is unburdening oneself before God, with the Church, with his brother. Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession!" (Pope Francis, General Audience of February 19, 2014).

Extracted from CatholicLink: <http://catholic-link.org/2015/04/28/15-reasons-not-to-go-to-confession-answered/>