

The Sacraments of Reconciliation & the Anointing of the Sick

A. SCRIPTURES THAT TALK ABOUT THE CHURCH BEING A WAY TO FIND RECONCILIATION WITH GOD:

John 20:21 - before He grants them the authority to forgive sins, Jesus says to the apostles, "as the Father sent me, so I send you." As Christ was sent by the Father to forgive sins, so Christ sends the apostles and their successors forgive sins.

John 20:22 - the Lord "breathes" on the apostles, and then gives them the power to forgive and retain sins. The only other moment in Scripture where God breathes on man is in Gen. 2:7, when the Lord "breathes" divine life into man. When this happens, a significant transformation takes place.

John 20:23 - Jesus says, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Matt. 18:18 - the apostles are given authority to bind and loose.

James 5:15-16 - in verse 15 we see that sins are forgiven by the priests in the sacrament of the sick. This is another example of Jesus giving authority to the Church to forgive sins on earth.

B. WHY GO TO CONFESSION?

WELL, WHEN DESCRIBING CATHOLIC BELIEFS AS OPPOSED TO EVANGELICAL/NONDENOMINATIONAL/PROTESTANT BELIEFS, THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE THINGS IS ALWAYS TO SAY, ABOUT EVERY NON-CATHOLIC TAKE ON A GIVEN BELIEF, "YES, BUT ALSO": SO FOR CONFESSIONS, SOME NON-CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS QUESTION GOING TO CONFESSION, SAYING THAT WE JUST NEED TO TURN TO JESUS OURSELVES, IN OUR OWN HEART....AND DON'T NEED TO GO TO A PRIEST. WELL, THE CATHOLIC RESPONSE WOULD BE: "YES, BUT ALSO --- "YES" -- WE KNOW THAT IF WE TURN TO JESUS WITH A SINCERE HEART AND ASK FOR FORGIVENESS FROM GOD IN OUR HEARTS WE ARE FORGIVEN -- AND NO CATHOLIC WOULD EVER SAY THAT IF WE HAD COMMITTED A SERIOUS SIN AND THEN WERE STUCK ON A DESERT ISLAND AND DID NOT GO TO CONFESSION THAT WE WOULDN'T BE FORGIVEN BY GOD. "BUT ALSO" Catholics know that Jesus started a Church, not just a system of personal interaction with Jesus through the Holy Spirit, and Jesus wanted his followers to be a part of the Church and to benefit from God working through the Church.

So, for Catholics, just as we don't just sit at home on Sunday mornings by ourselves and pray over the Bible, but go to Church to pray with others....BECAUSE WE BENEFIT FROM BEING PART OF THE CHURCH AND BENEFIT OTHERS -- (something any non-Catholic Christian would find very acceptable to say), Catholics then also say, "*Why wouldn't I want the prayers and the grace of God working through the Church to be with me at those moments when I have sinned? Why am I supposed to 'go it solo' when it comes to working out my sins and my reconciliation to God? Why do this alone?*" So: "Yes, but also...."

Frankly, I cannot think of a really compelling reason why it is **WRONG** to ask for prayers and assistance from the faith community after we can sinned.

C. THE HISTORY OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:

The Church has always had a sacrament of reconciliation, since the very beginning of the Church, but it has changed its form:

In the first 600 years of the Church there was a **PUBLIC** ritual that could only happen once in a lifetime. It involved a lot of public things like wearing sackcloth and ashes.

For some reason (! Ha ha) this sacrament was not very popular, and around 600 AD or so, a new form developed in Ireland and England -- a private form, with a one-on-one private confession to a priest. This form was so much more popular than the public form (I wonder why?!) that within a couple of generations the old form had died out and the new form became the norm.

D. HOW TO GO TO CONFESSION:

1. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.
2. Say, "Bless me Father for my sins it is _____ (how long) since my last confession."
3. Confess your sins (talk about the **MAIN ISSUES** of your spiritual life -- gossip? negativity? materialism? bad language or behavior?)
4. Priest will work with you on a "penance," something to do later to remind yourself to grow in faith. This could be a prayer or an action.
5. Say the Act of Contrition. If you have forgotten yours, here is a simple one to say: "Oh my God, I am sorry for my sins, please forgive me and help me to do better."
6. Then the priest will pray the "Prayer of Absolution" in which we have faith that God forgives your sins if you are sincere of heart -- because we have faith that God always forgives a sincere heart, and because we have faith that Jesus works through the Church, in this case, to work through the priest to forgive the sins of the penitent.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK:

Again, here is a sacrament where we don't just suffer in our sickness **ALONE**, but call on **THE CHURCH** to pray with us in our sickness. There are special prayers for those who are sick but hope for recovery, and also prayers for those who are dying. These sacraments are, ideally, communal sacraments where the sick person is prayed for by many people.