

Apologetics – Why do we confess our sins to a priest

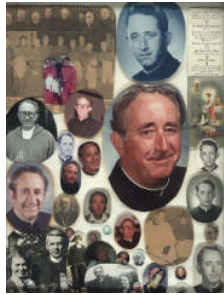
Overview

The question posed comes from both Catholics and peoples of other religious beliefs.

Reconciliation & Confession

God's work in reconciliation does not happen in an instant as it is a journey of conversion to confession to celebration – and in that order.

Fundamentally, the word reconciliation means to reconcile oneself and to make it right with oneself and with God.



In past years the emphasis was on confession or recitation of sins and that celebration was rarely ever a part of the process. The Parable of the Prodigal Son best represents the three stages of that journey. His sin takes him from home as he is more interested in the life centered style. When he discovers himself he has journeyed through *conversion*. Coming home he *confesses* his sins to his father and the father begins a *celebration* of this wonderful occurrence.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Our attitude towards Reconciliation reflects our image of God. We should really believe that our God is not one that is waiting for us to trip up and punish us. Rather our image of God should be one that is ever ready to reach out in forgiveness. Recall the biblical account when Jesus was dying on the cross and reaches out to the man (sinner) next to him and says that he will be with Him in Paradise this very day. This person was forgiven by Jesus even as his last moments of life on earth were to end.

So – why confess your sins?

This is that question that often arises and why should we confess our sins to a priest? Why not just confess our sins directly to God – since He has already forgiven me by the death and resurrection of Jesus? The simple answer to this question is that you can go directly to God – but something is missing.

Firstly, we need personal contact with another human being to help us externalize what is in our

hearts – as the Prodigal Son did when he told his father that he sinned against him. The priest fulfills a “parental function” – revealing the heart of the Father and the image of the Good Shepherd. Next, the priest acts in the role of Jesus and provides absolution. This prayer completes and seals the penitent's change of heart.

There are two important elements related to reconciliation – contrition (being sorry) and reconciling (making it right). Often the priest may provide the penitent with a penance to help make it right. However, the circumstances of the sin make not allow it to be completely made right – and some stain is left on our soul.

How does Purgatory fit in?

You have to understand the concept of Purgatory to recognize that there still may be stain on our souls even after Confession. Heaven is a place of purity and with no allowance for bad or evil. Without Purgatory we would be limited to heaven or hell – and that is not a happy thought! Purgatory is that process that purifies us after the soul departs from the body. Unless we die in perfect harmony with God – as most of us will not be – there is some stain that must be removed. I call Purgatory a “spiritual shower”.

Catholics do not have a monopoly on Purgatory. Non Catholics and peoples of all religious beliefs will experience it even if they do not believe in it. Purgatory would cover those who choose not to confess their sins to a priest or speak directly to God – and those who have never been exposed to Jesus.

Jesus said so

Finally, we can say why we confess our sins to a priest - is because Jesus told us to do so. Jesus commissioned the Apostles with this gift that has been passed on to priests since then – by the laying of hands during ordination. See John 20:22-23; “*And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”*” Also see Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:5-12