

Frequent Confession, the Eucharist, and Our Need for Conversion

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During this Lenten season we are called to examine our lives more closely in light of our relationship with Christ and His Church. Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving bring us deeper into the mysteries of Christ and our own journey to holiness. Lent is also a time to draw closer to the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance, also known as Reconciliation or Confession. The Eucharist unites us to Christ's body, blood, soul, and divinity while Penance drives us to seek healing and forgiveness for the ways we sin and fail in our daily lives. Penance is not only a Sacrament for mortal sin, it is meant for all sin which weighs us down over time.

In the Encyclical Letter, [Redemptor Hominis](#), Saint John Paul II discusses the connection between these two great Sacraments of the Church. Both the Holy Eucharist and Penance are linked to the mystery of Jesus Christ. Saint Paul said, "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." The link between these Sacraments is apparent. In approaching the Lord's Supper at each Mass, we must be aware of our failings and whether or not we are in a worthy state for reception of Holy Communion. The Holy Eucharist is not a right. It is a gift reserved for those in a state of grace who are members of the Church. The Sacrament of Penance provides the necessary cleansing and healing for those times we fall into serious sin, but also as we struggle with sin in our daily lives.

One of the essential aspects and teachings of Jesus Christ is, "Repent, and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15)." It is true that on the surface this is a call to become a follower of Christ and to receive Baptism

in order to join the Mystical Body; however, it is also a call for each one of us to "repent" in our daily lives. Conversion is a life-long process. We each have sins deeply entrenched in us whether through habit or other factors. We cannot follow Christ unless we are constantly dying to self and listening to His call for repentance in our own lives. Even if we are not falling into grave sin, we are still failing somewhere and need Christ to give us the grace to overcome those sins. Saint John Paul II highlights the great importance of repentance, the Holy Eucharist, and Penance:

Indeed, if the first word of Christ's teaching, the first phrase of the Gospel Good News, was "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (*Metanoete*), the sacrament of the passion, cross and resurrection seems to strengthen and consolidate in an altogether way this call in our souls. The Eucharist and Penance thus become in a sense two closely connected dimensions of authentic life in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, of truly Christian life. The Christ who calls to the Eucharistic banquet is always the same Christ who exhorts us to penance and repeats His "Repent."

[Redemptor Hominis 20](#)

Our Lord knows our struggles and our failings on the path to holiness, which is precisely why He calls us to Himself for forgiveness and contrition in the Sacrament of Penance, so that we may more fully participate in the Holy Eucharist.

Without this constant ever renewed endeavor for conversion, partaking of the Eucharist would lack its full redeeming effectiveness and there would be a loss or at least a weakening of the special readiness to offer God the spiritual sacrifice in which our sharing in the priesthood of Christ is expressed in an essential and universal manner.

Ibid

It is important to remember that all the faithful are members of the common priesthood by virtue of Baptism. We offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass through the ministerial priesthood. Our lives are meant to be of sacrifice, which is the very nature of priesthood. In order to fulfill this Baptismal role, we must be ever mindful of our daily need for

conversion. It is Christ who is our example in sacrifice.

In Christ, priesthood is linked with His sacrifice, His self-giving to the Father; and, precisely because it is without limit, that self-giving gives rise in us human beings subject to numerous limitations to the need to turn to God in an ever more mature way and with a constant, ever more profound, conversion.

Ibid

The Sacrament of Penance is one of those ways we mature spiritually. It is through this Sacrament we must enter more deeply into our failures, idols, and those hidden places within us. Christ calls us to place those sins before Him, so that He can heal us through grace and the powerful words, "Your sins are forgiven, go in peace and sin no more (The Rite of Penance)." We can never be forgiven too many times. Many of the great saints in the Church's tradition have done weekly or even daily Confession (not common today). Penance is done through the Mystical Body, but it is also a deeply individual act of conversion.

We cannot however forget that conversion is a particularly profound inward act in which the individual cannot be replaced by others and cannot make the community be a substitute for him. Although the participation by the fraternal community of the faithful in penitential celebration is a great help for the act of personal conversion, nevertheless, in the final analysis, it is necessary that in this act there should be a pronouncement by the individual himself with the whole depth of his conscience and with the whole of his sense of guilt and of trust in God, placing himself like the Psalmist before God to confess: "Against you... have I sinned (Psalm 50:6)."

Ibid

No one else can stand in our place on the journey to the Beatific Vision. Only we will stand before Our Lord at the hour of our death. This means that while conversion occurs within the Church community it must be done by the individual. We must make the walk to the Confessional and acknowledge our sins before God and the Mystical Body through the hierarchical priesthood. Through Penance we enter more deeply into the great mystery of our

Redemption, as well as the mystery of the Eucharistic feast.

As is evident, this is also right on Christ's part with regard to every human being redeemed by Him: His right to meet each one of us in that key moment in the soul's life constituted by the moment of conversion and forgiveness. By guarding the Sacrament of Penance, the Church expressly affirms her faith in the mystery of the Redemption as a living and life-giving reality that fits in with man's inward truth, with human guilt and also with the desires of the human conscience. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matthew 5:6)." The Sacrament of Penance is the means to satisfy man with the righteousness that comes from the Redeemer Himself.

Ibid

When we receive the Sacrament of Penance we not only acknowledge our sins before God, but we accept the Redemption we are given by virtue of our Baptism. We accept the grace we need to persevere in the long road to holiness. Conversion is not a one-time experience; it occurs daily through our choices. We all sin multiple times a day. This means sins are compounding in each one of us and slowing down or impeding our journey to our eschatological end, which is Heaven. Confession is the gift Christ has given us to help banish sin from our lives. It requires us to examine our consciences daily and to intentionally seek out times to go to Confession.

To progress on the path to holiness frequent Confession is absolutely necessary. Frequent Confession shows us the sins we do daily and the sins that have become habitual or learned in childhood. We need the knowledge gleaned from Confession in order to be able to overcome those sins. If we ignore them or are not aware of them, then the path to holiness is much harder as we battle ourselves. The goal for our lives is sainthood, it is holiness. In order to achieve that goal, we should look to the saints and leaders of our great Catholic Faith. All of them went to Confession frequently: weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly. Let us come to meet Christ who is the Divine Physician in the Sacrament of Penance as often as possible, so that we may grow in holiness and participate more fully in the Holy Eucharist.