

THE THIRD ORDER

Of the Society of St. Pius X



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Dear Postulants and Professed members,

One of the obligations by which we as 3rd Order members are bound is the reception of **fortnightly Confession**.

It is unfortunate that we have such a natural aversion to the word "bound" (at least when it applies to us), because *this* binding obligation, like many obligations even on the natural level (like being "bound" to eat), is entirely geared towards our happiness here and hereafter.

They say (Fulton Sheen said to be wary of the phrase "They say...") that the best things in life are free, and so what could be better than to freely have not only an unlimited supply of divinely-guaranteed forgiveness, but an abundant source of sanctifying and sacramental grace at our fingertips! Let's look at some ways that may help us to come away with more grace when we step out of the confessional.

People don't usually say "I'd like to go to the sacrament of *Penance* today", but "I'd like to go to *Confession* today". Along with satisfaction, penance (contrition) and confession make up the 3 integral (i.e. for the sacrament to be as complete as it can be) parts of this sacrament. Books on theology prefer to call it the sacrament of "Penance" rather than the sacrament of "Confession". Why is this, and why on the other hand do the laity prefer "Confession"?

The reason is that there is a strong tendency in all of us to focus not so much on the internal *sorrow/penance* for our sins, but on the precise and complete external *confession* of them. Why is this? It is not so much because of laziness (there is not less effort required to do a good examination of conscience than to excite sorrow), but because we are generally (due to the Fall) more affected by *sensible* considerations (the oral confession of the sins) than by *intellectual and volitional ones* (our *non-sensible* and spiritual sorrow). Also, somewhat like to a student's preponderant interest in "getting a good mark" on paper rather than truly learning and being educated, we are prone to emphasize the aspect the priest *can* perceive (our confessed sins) rather than our contrition which he *cannot*.

But it is not the *priest* we must aim to please ("I must think of *something* to say to father!), but *God Himself*. Of what profit to us is it to confess with razor-sharp precision sins for which we are really not sorry (or for which we *cannot* by truly sorry, such as indeliberate venial sins like distractions in prayer or "impatience"), when the very kindling the priest's words of absolution are designed to set fire to, scil. Contrition, is missing?! That's right, without at least imperfect contrition/sorrow (and "fear of hell" suffices here *only* if united to the *firm will not to sin again*) our sacramental confession will be no sacrament at all, and at least a material (i.e. if not deliberate) sacrilege.

What is the answer then? We must do all we can to excite **contrition in our will**. Contrition (or sorrow) has a 2-fold aspect, one in the past, the other in the future. **Firstly**, we must excite hatred (yes, hatred, even if political correctness forbids "hatwed") in our will for not just sin in general, but *my personal* sin/s in the past, which, besides being the ultimate object of frightful ugliness to our perfect heavenly Father, have truly added extra pangs of agony to His Incarnate Son. **Secondly**, we must have a firm desire to avoid the sin in the future, which logically must include the desire to avoid what usually *leads* to the sin ("I promise to lose weight, but I'll still wander into McDonald's a few times per week....only to admire their decor of course").

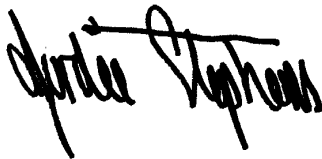
The grace we come away with after Confession has *nothing to do with the amount and detail of sins we confess*, but the **supernatural (not the natural "I'm so disappointed with myself") contrition which we excite in our soul**. If there is no mortal sins (which must all be confessed), it is more grace-giving to confess 1 venial sin with more contrition than 7 with less, even though exteriorly the latter sounds better and may be apparently more pleasing to your confessor. This is not at all to say that we are not free to confess the sins we wish, especially those concerning our dominant fault and those which are deliberate venial sins. Not at all. (*Please* don't concern yourself with indeliberate venial sins which barely qualify as sins, catching us by surprise and with which we are stuck for life). But let us ask ourselves the question: Does the confession of these particular venial

sins (remember there is *no* strict obligation *ever* to confess *any* venial sins to the priest) assist or inhibit the excitement of contrition in my will?

Perhaps in the past, out of human respect, and fear that Father so-and-so might not think we made a good examination, we spent more effort on coming up with lots of sins than inciting our sorrow. If you as a regular penitent confess well and sorrowfully only 1 venial sin, the priest has *no right* to demand that you mention more sins, and it is a perfectly good confession, fulfilling all the requirements and filling your soul with grace.

So let us make use of all the exterior aids offered to us to help incite interior contrition, from the lowly position we take on our knees (sin makes us lower than brute animals, and *truly* takes away our human dignity), to the darkness and shadow of the confined confessional (sin diminishes the light of reason and Faith in our soul, and puts us in a claustrophobic vice-like grip). And remember that the "Act of Contrition", like the helps just mentioned (and like the crucifix), is just another one of these helps, and not an essential part of the confession. But, although not essential, it is the *most conducive* (because the *most expressive*) of all these helps to increase our contrition. So read it slowly and from the heart, piling up that kindling of contrition in your soul which the spark of the priest's absolution will turn into a consuming conflagration.

In the Sacred Heart, through the Immaculate heart of Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordie Stephens". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr Jordie Stephens
Spiritual Director of the Third Order of SSPX for Australia