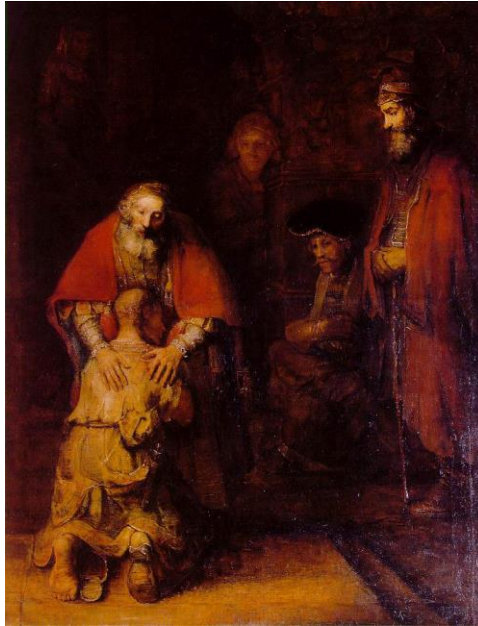


Bible Study On The Sacrament Of Confession (Reconciliation)



REMBRANDT - The Return of the Prodigal Son - 1662 AD¹

LUKE 15:21-24 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; 23 and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; 24 for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

Perhaps no Sacrament better exemplifies God's Divine Mercy more than Sacramental Confession. Let's begin our review with a prayer.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful;
And enkindle in them the fire of Your love.
Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.
And You shall renew the face of the earth.

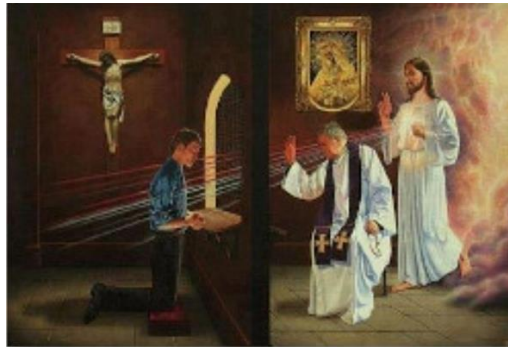
LET US PRAY . . .

O God, Who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that by the gift of the same Spirit we may always be truly wise and ever rejoice
in His consolation, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Return_of_the_Prodigal_Son_\(Rembrandt\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Return_of_the_Prodigal_Son_(Rembrandt)) 1661–1669. Oil on Canvas
Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg

Act of Contrition (Sorrow For Sins) Prayer

Oh my God I am heartily sorry for having offended you.
I detest all my sins and dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of hell.
But most of all because they offend you my God,
Who are all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to confess my sins, to do penance,
to avoid the near-occasions to sin, and to amend my life. Amen.



The Ministerial Priest forgives sins “In the Person of Christ” (“In persona Christi”)

Notes

Introduction

Welcome to the study on the Sacrament of Confession (Also called, “The Sacrament of Reconciliation” or “The Sacrament of Penance”).

We will begin by defining Confession in a New Covenant sense, and review some basic catechesis.

Then we will move to a brief review on the prefigurement to Sacramental Confession, that is, Old Covenant NON-Sacramental confession.

At this point we will see that ONLY God can forgive sins, but a subtle but interesting **hint** in the New Testament that suggests God’s power THROUGH His priests in a **participation** in forgiving sins.

Now we will look at the New Testament passages that allude to the confessing of our sins.

We’ll review: “ONE mediator between God and man—Jesus Christ”, and the objection this raises

Lastly we will discuss some of the practical aspects of Confession and how this can be used to radically grow in the Christian life concerning “frequent Confession” and wrap it up.

After this, you will have (on your own) a sample of the ancient Church Fathers and their comments concerning Confession (Table 1). (See also Table 2 for some basic Q&A from the Baltimore Catechism.)

Confession – Some Basic Catechesis

Confession is the "Sacrament" or “oath” of God in which the Priest, through the Apostolic ministry of reconciliation, and in Jesus’ PERSON/PRESENCE IN His PRIESTS, forgives sins and HEALS the penitent (that is, the person confessing their sins to the priest) from the effects of their sin.

The person confesses their sins to a priest. This person confessing is called “The penitent” and the priest is termed “the Confessor”.

But before we confess to the priest we prepare by going directly to God, carrying out an “examination of conscience” where we recall our sins, and tell God we’re sorry in preparation for a “good Confession”.

The penitent confessing his/her sins must be sorry (contrite), and have “a firm purpose of amendment” which just means you at least have to want to TRY to avoid sinning in the future. The penitent must be honest (otherwise if they are purposefully dishonest and lie to the priest, they commit “**sacrilege**” which just means they misuse a sacred gift from God—in this case they misuse the Confessional—and just compound their sin and lose or forfeit the gifts of that “Confession”).

The penitent privately tells his sins to the priest in a “Confessional” setting. But in the early Church, some of the confessions and penances were to be done OPENLY in front of the congregation! Yikes!

Confession is the "Sacrament" or "promise" or God's own "oath" (Latin for "oath" = "sacramentum") so you can be SURE of the effectiveness of Confession.

In this Sacrament² Jesus, through the priest and his "**ministry of reconciliation**", forgives sins in a special way. But not only are sins forgiven, but this gift gives you special graces to help fight sin in the future (to help protect us from "satan gaining the advantage over us"). This special forgiveness is done in Jesus' name, but not in Jesus' name alone, but in Jesus' "PERSON" (His actual "presence") or in Greek, "prospōn"—"***in persona Christi***".

2nd CORINTHIANS 2:10-11 10 Any one whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the **presence** (Greek word "prospōn" which literally means "person"³) of Christ⁴, 11 to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

2nd CORINTHIANS 5:18 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**;

When done confessing, the priest will ask the penitent to carry out an act of contrition where you express sorrow for sins, and are sorry for the right reason (acknowledging sin is an offence against God), and mention your purpose of avoiding sin in the future. There is no necessary "formula" for this and you are free to express these features in various ways but the American Bishops in the late 1800's put forth an "Act of Contrition" prayer which we did on page 2.⁵

Confession In The Old Covenant

When I was in Israel, while at "The Wailing Wall", I saw what looked to me to be many Jewish people (distinctive dress) in a confessional line. I asked Fr. Pacwa who lived for years in Israel what the line was all about. He said they were going to confession and it's a continuation of their Old Testament practice.

When Old Testament Israelites went to Confession they received a prescription, based upon their sins.

NUMBERS 5:6a-7a 6a When a man or woman commits any of the sins that men commit by breaking faith with the LORD, and that person is guilty, 7 **he shall confess his sin which he has committed**; and he shall make **full restitution for his wrong**, . . .

For forgiveness of sins, they had a PHYSICAL aspect. Their priests would make restitution for them **AND** at Yom Kippur ("The Day of Atonement"). They would place their "sins upon a goat" and release it into the desert year after year. A "scapegoat". Let's look at the priests making restitution for his penitents:

2

1722 [e]	4383 [e]	5547 [e]
en	prosōpō	Christou
ἐν	προσώπῳ	Χριστοῦ
in	<u>[the] person</u>	of Christ

3 Prep N-DNS N-GMS From Bible Hub. A comprehensive Protestant online Scripture resource including interlinear Greek to English translations. https://biblehub.com/interlinear/2_corinthians/2-10.htm

⁴ St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate (From about 400 A.D.) "10b "propter vos **in persona Christi**,"

⁵ Posted in the past in Lincoln, NE Cathedral from Bishop Bruskewitz with slight modification (he adds "to avoid the near-occasions to sin" portion which I have retained on page 2).

LEVITICUS 6:1-2, 7 1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "If any one sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor . . . 7 and **the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD**, and **he shall be forgiven for any of the things** which one may do and thereby become guilty."

Keep in mind the Levitical priest making atonement for his penitent's sins here because we are going to see this in Tradition, in the New Covenant too!

Now let's look at the "scapegoat" dimension . . .

LEVITICUS 16:8-10 . . . 8 and Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel⁶. 9 And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; 10 but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

But St. Paul in Hebrews tells us this did not result in forgiveness of sins in the sense that we have with Christ's work on Calvary.

HEBREWS 10:1, 3-5 1 For since **the law has but a shadow of the good things to come** instead of **the true form of these realities**, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. . . 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. 4 For **it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins**. 5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me;

Concerning Old Testament confession see also Nehemiah 9:1-2, Proverbs 28:13-14 and in the New Testament (but still Old Covenant) we see sinners "confessing their sins" to St. John the Baptist (who was a Levite and priest. That is not surprising as St. John's father Zechariah, was a Levitical priest).

MATTHEW 3:1-2, 5-6 1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." . . . 5 Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan, 6 and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, **confessing their sins**.

CCC 129 b . . . the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁶ As an old saying put it, **the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New**.¹⁰⁷

Old Testament Confession of course, is a "shadow" of New Testament Confession which is among "**the true form of these realities**".

⁶ We are not sure who or what Azazel is, but many think it is probably "the angel of death". "El" at the end of the name is for "God" or "God's messenger" or "of God". The Heavenly angels, Sts. Michael^e, Gabriel^e, and Raphael^e, all have that "^el" at the end of their names. Azazel^e may(?) be another example. Sometimes God is referred to as "^el Shaddai" (God Almighty).

Only God Can Forgive Sins

Only God can forgive sins. (More on that as it pertains to Confession later.)

ISAIAH 43:25a 25 "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions . . .

The Scribes here below were right when they pointed out **God alone** has the authority to forgive sins. (Jesus of course is True God and True Man and therefore DOES have the authority to forgive sins.)

MARK 2:4-12 4 And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. 5 And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "**My son, your sins are forgiven.**" 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" 8 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your pallet and walk?' 10 But that you may know that **the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins**"--he said to the paralytic-- 11 "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." 12 And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

The Church teaches this too . . .

CCC 1441a **Only God forgives sins.** Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." . . .

A Subtle Scriptural Hint In The New Testament Announcing The Coming Of New Covenant Confession

Now let's go onto St. Matthews explanation of probably this very same event. Listen carefully what the Holy Spirit inspired St. Matthew to write at the end of the passage.

MATTHEW 9:1-8 1 And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. 2 And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And behold, some of **the scribes** said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." 4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? 5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk?' 6 But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he then said to the paralytic--"Rise, take up your bed and go home." 7 And he rose and went home. 8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, **who had given such authority to men.**

Jesus uses healing of the body to teach His healing of the soul. And notice what verse 8 doesn't say!

NOT MATTHEW 9:8 8 When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such **authority to a man and ONE man ALONE—Jesus**.

Here again is what Scripture DOES say (and the Holy Spirit **inspired** St. Matthew to write) . . .

MATTHEW 9:8b they glorified God, **who had given such authority to men**.

New Testament Passages That Concern Confession

JOHN 20:20 & The Following Verses **(Helps us to get 20/20 "vision" concerning sin)**

In Matthew 28:18, Jesus tells the Apostles that "**all authority on heaven and earth**" was given to Him. Jesus was sent from Heaven to Earth with Divine authority!

Keeping that in the back of our minds, let's go to the very first Easter Sunday in the Upper Room to John 20:20⁷, where the Apostles were hiding out "for fear of the Jews" (see John 20:19) and see the main verse concerning Confession (John 20:23).

Keep in mind also that Jesus created the world (John 1:3 and Hebrews 1:1-2).
In Genesis 2:7 Jesus breathed life into mankind (Adam's nostrils).

Now in John 20 we are going to see Jesus again be associated with this breath of life in the realm of empowering them in the forgiveness of sins.
Let's look at the very first gift our Risen Lord Jesus gives to his Apostles.

JOHN 20:20-23 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me even so I send you. 22 And when he had said this, **he breathed on them**, and said to them, "**Receive the Holy Spirit**.

23 **If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**"

The Apostles knew the Old Testament, and they knew about confession.
Now Jesus gives to them the power to forgive sins!

Objection: Wait a minute. Only God can forgive sins!

Answer: Yet here is Jesus **explicitly** giving Apostles the **power** and authority to **forgive sins**.

⁷ We will actually only begin in John 20:20. but I stated 20/20 as a memory mnemonic to help you recall WHERE in Scripture the main passage is concerning Confession—that is John 20:23.

ONLY God can forgive sins, yet Apostles who are NOT God, forgive sins. This is only possible by them forgiving sins “**in persona Christi**”, that is; with Jesus working **IN** them **and THROUGH** them (as we have already seen St. Paul explicitly apply to himself in the realm of “forgiving”).

Question: WHY would the priest (or the Apostles) “retain” sins!!??

Answer: The ministerial priests have the power of binding AND loosing sins. If we go back to our catechesis, it becomes more apparent as to WHY priests would sometimes RETAIN sins.

Remember earlier in the study when we learned . . .

. . . We don't automatically receive God's forgiveness in the confessional!

We have to really be sorry for our sins! We have to be contrite.

Also we have to make it a priority to at least try not to sin again.”

So if for example, a guy ditched his wife and children for his girlfriend, and he wants forgiveness he (hopefully) would go to the Confessional. But in the course of his confession, the priest might ask if he is ready to move out of his girlfriend's apartment and go beg forgiveness from his wife and children. If he has no intention of even TRYING to amend his life, then it is the duty of the priest to retain his sin.

Objection: But the passage doesn't explicitly mention confession.

Answer: It assumes it. How else are the Apostles going to know which sins to “forgive” and which sins to “retain” if they don't know about the sins committed?

They wouldn't go around the countryside of Judea randomly forgiving some people's sins, while randomly retaining other people's sins. That wouldn't make sense. Especially since the confession model has already been developed among Jewish culture from back in Moses' day.

JOHN 20:21-23 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me even so I send you." 22 And when he had said this,

he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

23 If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven,

if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Objection: Jesus is REALLY granting the authority to proclaim the MESSAGE of salvation.

Answer: Jesus “**breathed on them**, and said to them, “**Receive the Holy Spirit.** If

YOU forgive the sins of any they are forgiven, if YOU retain the sins of any, they are retained."

You can either believe what Jesus said or not believe it. But that is what the passage explicitly states.

NOT JOHN 20:23a If you preach about forgiveness of sins, and they believe, they are forgiven.

JOHN 20:23a If YOU forgive the sins of any they ARE FORGIVEN.

1st JOHN 1:9

Let's look closer at St. John's teachings in his first Epistle (1st John, not the Gospel of John). In this passage we will see it's the "blood of Jesus" that cleanses us "from all sin".

So the issue is HOW do you get that BLOOD of Jesus applied no "sins" in this context?

Fortunately the Holy Spirit is going to tell us through St. John

1st JOHN 1:6-10 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.** 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 **If we confess our sins,** he is faithful and just, and **will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

We get the forgiving blood of Jesus applied to not only to our "sin" (as in our sinful nature) but "our sins" that we actually committed, "IF" we "confess" those "sins."

Objection: Well I just "confess" directly to God.

Answer: That is appropriate, but alone it doesn't go far enough. St. John's readers knew what "confessing their sins" meant. It includes "go show yourselves to the priest" even after direct prayer with God. Catholic Christians go directly to God too (in our examination of conscience). But we then obey Jesus and go to the priest and have an in-the-flesh incarnate encounter with Jesus through His priests.

Question: Why?

Answer: I don't know WHY Jesus did it this way but He did. Probably because we are incarnate beings and thus in **need** of an incarnate encounter with Jesus. And remember, you don't ONLY get forgiveness of sins in the Confessional. There are other gifts with RECONCILIATION also. In addition, the priest gives you spiritual advice and guidance too⁸.

"The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." How do we get "the blood of Jesus applied to us in this context?

"**If we confess our sins,** he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1st JOHN 1:7b, 9 . . . **the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.** . . . 9 **If we confess our sins,** he is faithful and just, and **will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

⁸ Some Protestant Ministers even get together with one another in a "confession" context and have "accountability sessions".

James 5:16

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is often given in conjunction with Confession.

When we receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, it's proper (not absolutely required, but appropriate) to do Confession at the time of your Anointing. Sometimes people are too sick to do a good Confession. For them they still have access to forgiveness of sins via God's Holy Anointing of the Sick.

Let's see the Holy Spirit instruct sick people to "call for the priests of the Church" ("presbyters or "elders") and these men will administer prayer, a special oil anointing, and carry out Confession.

JAMES 5:13-15 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders (Greek = presbuteroi, "**priests**") **of the church**, and let them pray over him, **anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**; 15 and **the prayer of faith will save** the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has **committed sins, he will be forgiven**. 16 **Therefore confess your sins to one another**, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a **righteous man** has great power in its effects.

Primarily THE "righteous man" here having "great power in its effects" is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ working IN and THROUGH the presbyter (the priest) in persona Christi.

Secondarily the "righteous man" here pertains to the priest. And in a tertiary sense, "the prayer of a righteous man" includes all of us. Not because we are "righteous" **on our own**—nobody is (Romans 3:10). We are only "righteous" because we are **united** to Christ.

One Mediator—Jesus Christ

Objection: There is only "one mediator" between God and man. This confessing to a man for mediation for forgiveness of sins goes against 1st Timothy 2:5

1st TIMOTHY 2:5 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Answer: There **IS** one mediator between God and man. But since we have a "share" or a "participation" or a "koinonia" in Jesus, the question then becomes HOW does Jesus "mediate" here?

Note the context of this very passage assumes a PARTICIPATION IN Christ. The passage does NOT SAY:

NOT 1st TIMOTHY 2 1 First of all, then, you people **cannot make** supplications, prayers, **intercessions**, and thanksgivings for **all men**, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. **Because if you try to do this, you will be attempting to mediate between God and men!** It is a **terrible thing to try to do this mediation between God and men and totally unacceptable in the sight of God.**

The Greek word for “one” as in “**one** mediator” is “**heis**” (“hay-eeese”) and **allows secondary mediation**. The Greek word “monos” could have been used which would be **more exclusive**. But it wasn’t.

We have to varying degrees, a “participation” or “share” or “koinonia” IN Christ. This is WHY you CAN mediate on behalf of “all men” including “kings” and make “intercessions”.

1st TIMOTHY 2:1-7 1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, **intercessions**, and thanksgivings be made **for all men**, 2 **for kings** and **all who are in high positions**, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. 3 **This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God** our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and **there is one (Greek = heis) mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**, 6 **who gave himself as a ransom for all**, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. 7 **For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle** (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Intercessory prayer is one of the ways we exercise our “priesthood of all of the Baptized.” We have a SHARE in that ONE PRIESTHOOD of Jesus Christ through Baptism.

The ministerial priests (and bishops) have an even deeper participation in that one Priesthood of Jesus than we laity. As a result of this DEEPER PARTICIPATION of the **ministerial priests with Jesus**, they now have to power to forgive sins in the context of Confession.

Jesus “mediates” through the ministerial priest in a special way (in persona Christi) in the Confessional in forgiving sins, **and in reconciliation** which goes beyond forgiveness and other spiritual gifts that we benefit from (which we will look at on the following page).

But the priest is NOT DONE with you after you leave the Confessional. Now the priest is required to go and offer sacrifice for his penitents, just like we saw in the Old Testament earlier in the study!

CCC 1466 a,c The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. . . . **He must pray and do penance for his penitent, entrusting him to the Lord's mercy.**

LEVITICUS 6:7a 7 and **the priest shall make atonement for him before the LORD . . .**

Practical Considerations Concerning Confession

Frequent Confession supernaturally helps you advance in the spiritual life in a way that not going to frequent Confession can.

But how do we define “frequent Confession”?

Father Ripley in his book “This is the Faith” states “frequent confession” is Confession at least every other week. He lays out the Church canonical reasons “why” on page 221.

Q: What are (at least some of) the spiritual gifts associated with frequent Confession?

A: Fortunately, the late Pope John XXIII⁹ informed us.

- The expiation of venial sins.
- **Increase in real actual self-knowledge**¹⁰. (This is seeing yourself as God sees you. Wisdom is seeing things as God sees them. A person, even an atheist can be knowledgeable, but lack wisdom.)
- A growth in Christian humility.
- A correction of bad habits or habits that lead one to commit sins.
- Help in overcoming spiritual laziness and lukewarmness.
- Purification of your conscience.
- A strengthened will.
- An increase in self-control.
- Spurred to “be merciful as He is merciful.”
- (Frequent confession is) for “a constant and speedy advancement in the path of virtue.”

In Summary

We reviewed basic catechesis concerning Confession so we have a better idea of what we will be looking at in Sacred Scripture.

We took a look at Old Testament confession and see that many Jews to this day still practice this.

We acknowledged that ONLY God can forgive sins. But we also saw a subtle but interesting **hint** in the Matthew 9 that suggests God’s power THROUGH His priests (“men”) forgiving sins!

We reviewed some New Testament passages that allude to the confessing of our sins. Particularly **John 20:20-23** (to help us have “20/20 vision concerning sin”), **1st John 1:9**, and **James 5:16**.

We saw how the objection that Jesus is the only mediator between God and men, begs the question of how the same passage insists upon humans mediating. And we know it is because of our “participation” in Jesus’ one Priesthood. Ministerial priests have an even deeper “participation” in Christ.

Lastly we reviewed some practical aspects of Confession concerning frequent Confession and how this is used to drastically and rapidly grow in Christ.

And here we now point you to the Ancient Church Fathers who were all Catholic Christians so you can review this on your own later. God bless you.

⁹ Pope John XXIII “On Priestly Perfection” Aug. 1st 1959.

¹⁰ That’s the 20/20 “vision” concerning sin, we discussed earlier in the study.

TABLE 1

Some Early Church Fathers On Confession

ST. IRENAEUS "[The gnostic disciples of Marcus] have deluded many women . . . Their consciences have been branded as with a hot iron. Some of these women make a public confession, but others are ashamed to do this, and in silence, as if withdrawing from themselves the hope of the life of God, they either apostatize entirely or hesitate between the two courses" — St. Irenaeus' book "*Against Heresies*" 1:22, **A.D. 180**

ACTS 19:18-19a 18 Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. . .

St. Cyprian had this to say regarding confession to Priests.

ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE "to those who implore the mercy of God, peace can be granted through His priests . . .
 . . . And because in hell there is no confession . . .
 . . . they who repent with their whole heart and ask for it, should be received into the Church and therein saved unto the Lord."

St. Cyprian died in the year 258 A.D.! These are ancient Church teachings.

St. Clement of Rome (Died in the year 100 A.D.!) was a bishop of Rome and wrote to the Corinthians:

ST. CLEMENT OF ROME "It is better for a man to confess his sins than to harden his heart."

The pagans tied St. Clement's neck to an anchor and threw him into the sea.

This quotation is from **Pope St. Leo the Great, who died in the year 461 A.D.** and concerns not only the Sacrament of Penance (another term for Confession), but "salutary satisfaction" or restitution.

POPE ST. LEO THE GREAT "God in His abundant mercy has provided two main remedies for the sins of men: that they may gain eternal life by the grace of Baptism, and also by the **remedy of Penance**. Those who have violated the vows of their Baptism may obtain the remission of their sins by condemning themselves; the divine goodness has so decreed that the pardon of God can only be obtained by sinners through the power Jesus Christ Himself has conferred upon the rulers of the Church, the power of imposing canonical penance upon sinners who confess their sins, and of allowing them to receive the Sacraments of Christ, after they have purified their souls by a salutary satisfaction ... Every Christian, therefore, must examine his conscience and cease putting the hour of his conversion off from day to day; he ought not to expect to satisfy God's justice on his death bed. It is dangerous for a weak and ignorant man to put off his conversion to the last uncertain days of his life, when he may be **unable to confess and obtain priestly absolution**; he ought, when he can, to merit pardon by a full satisfaction for his sins."

Also in the early Church, Lactantius (Lock-ton-tsee-oos) (died 320 A.D.) stated the following:

LACTANTIUS "That is the true Church in which there is Confession and Penance, which applies a wholesome remedy to the sins and wounds whereunto the weakness of the flesh is subject."

Origen, who died in 253 A.D., wrote . . .

ORIGEN "When you have eaten some indigestible food, and your stomach is filled with an excessive quantity of humour (a "humour" is an ancient medical term for a chemical or substance) you will suffer until you have gotten rid of it. So in like manner, sinners who hide and retain their sins within their breasts, become sick therefrom almost to death. If, however, they **accuse themselves, confess their sins,** and vomit forth their iniquity, they will certainly drive from their souls the principle of evil. **Consider carefully whom you choose to listen to your sins.** **Know well the character of the physician to whom you intend to relate the nature of your sickness ...** . . . If he gives you advice, follow, it; if he judges that your sickness is of such a nature that it should be revealed publicly in church for the edification of the brethren and your own more effective cure, do not hesitate to do what he tells you."

The CCC suggests picking your confessor carefully too.

CCC 1466a The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ. **He should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior,** experience of human affairs, respect and sensitivity toward the one who has fallen; he must love the truth, be faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, and lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity. . . .

St. Firmilian of Caesarea (who died in 268 A.D.!) had this to say . . .

ST. FIRMIILLIAN OF CAESAREA "But what is his error, and how **great his blindness,** who says that **the remission of sins** can be, given in the synagogues of the heretics, and **who does not remain on the foundation of the one Church** which was founded upon the rock by Christ, can be learned from this, which Christ said to Peter alone: "Whatever things **you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven;** and **whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed in heaven;**" and by this, again in the gospel, when Christ breathed upon the Apostles alone, saying to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit: **if you forgive any man his sins they shall be forgiven; and if you retain any man's sins, they shall be retained.**" Therefore, **the power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles** and to the Churches which these men, sent by Christ, established; and to **the bishops who succeeded them** by being ordained in their place.

The Catechism (CCC 1458) quotes **St. Augustine** concerning Confession (d. 430 A.D.)

Whoever confesses his sins ... is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God.
Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities:
when you hear "man" - this is what God has made;
when you hear "sinner" - this is what man himself has made.
Destroy what you have made,
so that God may save what he has made . . .
. . . When you begin to abhor (detest) what you have made,
it is then that your good works are beginning,
since you are **accusing yourself of your evil works.**
The beginning of good works is the **confession of evil works.**
You do the truth and come to the light.

For more early Church Father Items on confession, please see Catholic Answers tract: "What the Early Church Believed: Confession"

TABLE 2

Some Q&A Regarding Confession From The Baltimore Catechism

191. Q. What must we do to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily?

A. To receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily we must do five things:

- We must examine our conscience.
- We must have sorrow for our sins.
- We must make a firm resolution never more to offend God.
- We must confess our sins to the priest.
- We must accept the penance which the priest gives us.

LESSON NINETEENTH: ON CONFESSION

208. Q. What is Confession?

A. Confession is the telling of our sins to a duly authorized priest, for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness.

209. Q. What sins are we bound to confess?

A. We are bound to confess all our mortal sins. but it is well also to confess our venial sins.

210. Q. Which are the chief qualities of a good Confession?

A. The chief qualities of a good Confession are three: it must be humble, sincere, and entire.

211. Q. When is our Confession humble?

A. Our Confession is humble, when we accuse our selves of our sins, with a deep sense of shame and sorrow for having offended God.

212. Q. When is our Confession sincere?

A. Our Confession is sincere, when we tell our sins honestly and truthfully, neither exaggerating nor excusing them.

213. Q. When is our Confession entire?

A. Our Confession is entire, when we tell the number and kinds of our sins and the circumstances which change their nature.

214. Q. What should we do if we cannot remember the number of our sins?

A. If we cannot remember the number of our sins, we should tell the number as nearly as possible, and say how often we may have sinned in a day, a week, or a month, and how long the habit or practice has lasted.

215. Q. Is our Confession worthy if, without our fault, we forget to confess a mortal sin?

A. If without our fault we forget to confess a mortal sin, your Confession is worthy, and the sin is forgiven; but it must be told in Confession if it again comes to our mind. . . .

. . . 218. Q. Why does the priest give us a penance after Confession?

A. The priest gives us a penance after Confession, that we may satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to our sins.

219. Q. Does not the Sacrament of Penance remit all punishment due to sin?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits the eternal punishment due to sin, but it does not always remit the temporal punishment which God requires as satisfaction for our sins.

220. Q. Why does God require a temporal punishment as a satisfaction for sin?

A. God requires a temporal punishment as a satisfaction for sin, to teach us the great evil of sin and to prevent us from falling again.

221. Q. Which are the chief means by which we satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to sin?

A. The chief means by which we satisfy God for the temporal punishment due to sin are: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, all spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and the patient suffering of the ills of life.