

Message From the Rector

March 15, 2020

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Our confessors are edified by the number and quality of confessions that we celebrate at Saint Patrick's. It is one of the ministries that we offer here, making it readily available, thanks to the number of priests who minister with us. It is not the situation in most parishes. As we are well into the penitential season of Lent, it is helpful to reprint and update my message from last year on the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession): **Firstly, what is the focus of confession?** After an examination of conscience, the penitent should indicate to the confessor the time since their last confession and then in concise fashion, identify by name and number of occurrences, the sins that they have committed since their last confession. One should not confess sins which have already been confessed and for which absolution has been given. If a person wishes to do a "general confession", the proper context would be during a retreat of some days in a retreat centre, monastery or religious house. As confession should be concise, it is not necessary – nor helpful unless asked by the confessor – to give your history of the sin, nor examples.

Secondly, what should be the frequency of regular confession? Our advice is that a penitent should not be going to confession more than weekly. The Church requires that we go to confession at least once a year. The traditional practice has been monthly confession. As for the frequent confessions of the saints, the example that is helpful from modern times is that of **Pope St. John Paul II**. He went to confession weekly. Going to confession more than once per week creates a number of concerns: **1°** the danger of scrupulosity is evident, which leads us to look only at ourselves, and at our faults – thus the burden of sin – and not rely on the experience of God's mercy; **2°** too frequent confession begins to put the emphasis on what "I" do and my practices – a sort of semi-Pelagianism – and not on the mercy of God, which is the focus of the sacrament; **3°** if we are too busy preparing to go to confession and going to confession, we run the danger of not taking the time to see the grace and mercy of God working in our lives. **What should we do, then, if we are aware of serious sin before our next weekly confession?** This may be the situation where one should attend Mass, receiving the graces that come from praying with the faith community and listening to the Word of God but fasting from receiving the consecrated host. It would be best to celebrate the weekly confession close to Sunday, so as to receive communion on Sunday (or the Saturday Vigil Mass of Sunday) which is the primary feast day of Catholics. **What if I am in danger of death and am aware of unforgiven serious sin?** Call a priest. If a priest is not available, then make a perfect act of contrition, relying on God's mercy. The Church through the Sacrament of Confession is at the service of God's mercy. God's mercy is greater than the Church, whose mission is to make known, celebrate and be a minister of His Mercy.

Finally, it is not necessary to confess **venial (minor) sins**, although it is a good practice to confess them in a monthly confession. With respect to our minor sins, we can rely on the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass where we ask God for pardon and peace before we celebrate the sacred mysteries.

Fr. Kevin