

ABSOLUTION, SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:

Dear Parishioners,

Having considered in previous weeks the three acts of the penitent, contrition, confession and satisfaction, we now briefly consider the priest's **absolution**, and the matter of **spiritual direction** in the sacrament.

1. ABSOLUTION:

In confession God forgives my sins when the priest absolves me: He says: "I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When I am absolved, my sins are forgiven. Gone. No need to look back. Never to be held against me. That is forgiveness.

A young man went to confession to St Francis de Sales, and, having confessed with genuine sorrow the great offences he had committed against God, he asked the saint:

"Father, what do you think of me when you hear such enormous sins?"

"My son," answered St Francis, "what do I think of you? I think that you are a saint. A moment ago you were God's enemy, but now the Almighty has pardoned you and made you one of His Elect."

What an extraordinary thing.

This is what God does for us in this sacrament.

It is God who forgives through the ministry of the priest.

God heals. As Christ cleansed and restored the skin of the lepers, so he cleanses and restores our soul.

The Catholic Catechism reminds us (no 1441): "Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name." (cf John 20:21-23).

The Catechism also reminds us that "in imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church... Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God." (CCC 1444-1445).

Through this absolution I am reconciled to God and to the Body of Christ, the Church.

What is the formula of absolution the priest uses in the sacrament?

"God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

2. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION:

The priest will normally offer a few words of advice in confession.

Saint John Bosco, the great friend and guide of youth, advised:

"In confession, pay great attention to the advice of the confessor."

"Remember that the confessor is a father who very much wishes to help you and to keep all sorts of evil away from you."

"Often think over the advice your confessor gave you at your last confession."

"What is the best and surest means of keeping from sin? Put into practice the advice you receive from your confessor."

One of the youths at St John Bosco's Oratory in Turin was Dominic Savio, who died at the age of fifteen and was canonised in 1954.

In his "Life of Dominic Savio", written for the sake of Savio's companions, Don Bosco writes:

"Dominic had the most complete confidence in his spiritual guide and would speak to him with the greatest simplicity about his soul and matters of conscience also outside the confessional. Someone advised him to go to another priest sometimes, but he would not hear of it. He replied: "The confessor is the doctor of the soul. People do not go about chasing from one doctor to another unless they have lost confidence in their own doctor or their case is pretty desperate. I have full confidence in my confessor who is so kind and helpful to me and I don't think I have any trouble that he cannot cure."

"Nevertheless his confessor did suggest that occasionally, e.g. at the time of retreat, he should go to another priest and Dominic did so without any hesitation.

"Dominic was very pleased with this state of affairs. He said: "If I have any problem I take it to my confessor and he solves it for me according to what God wants. Jesus has said that the voice of the priest is the voice of God. If I have some particular need I go to Holy Communion in which I receive the body, blood, soul and divinity which Jesus offered for us on the cross. What more do I need to make me happy? Nothing in the wide world.

Only one thing remains - one day to see revealed in heaven, him whom we can only see with the eye of faith here below."

(Don Bosco's "Life of Dominic Savio", ch 14)

Payot, an unbeliever and friend of the young, wrote in support of spiritual direction in the Church:

"It is a human need. If only we would realise the importance of a word of encouragement, of a piece of advice, even of a friendly rebuke, when a young man is at the difficult age of twenty! If only the state schools and universities with all their high-mindedness and great knowledge would take from the Catholic Church some of the knowledge of man's heart that she has acquired through centuries of experience in the confessional! Youth would then be benefitted without a shadow of a doubt. Nothing could take the place of the person-to-person contact of a sensible and sensitive guide."

(L'Educazione della Volonta, p 316f)

There can certainly be spiritual direction in the church apart from the sacrament of reconciliation, but it is also certainly an excellent and obvious place for spiritual direction to occur.

Let us also pray after each confession for our confessor, and pray for all confessors in the Church.



Next week we shall consider the seal of the confessional and perhaps a couple of other concluding aspects of the sacrament.

