

***The First Sunday of Advent***  
***November 28, 2021***  
***Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #46)***

*“When he saw their faith, he said, ‘As for you, your sins are forgiven.’ Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?’” (Luke 5:20-21)*

As you may be aware, the Archdiocese of Mobile’s celebration of The Year of the Parish and Eucharist ended last Sunday with the celebration of Christ the King. For our parishes, however, since we started on the first of January this year, I would like to continue our examination of our Catholic faith for the next few weeks. With this being stated, I would like to take some time and reflect upon our understanding of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as Confession or Penance).

May I begin with some observations and then pose one question for you to ponder? My question is this: Since the 1960’s we have witnessed a steady decline in church participation. We see fewer people attending Sunday Mass, yet of this number, relatively few remaining in the pews, not getting into line to receive the Eucharist. Catholic parents are having fewer children than previous generations, yet we are not witnessing a large portion of these being withheld from either Baptism, First Communion, or Confirmation. Couples are still wanting to be married in our churches. People still call for the priests to come to the bedside of their dying loved ones. Despite fewer numbers, men are still studying to become priests. This is why I ask, why is it that of all of the sacraments that Catholics can receive, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the one least experienced?

I remember reading an article describing Catholicism in the early 1900’s. The author spoke of witnessing long lines for confession and small lines for communion. Now, I would imagine that same author, if alive today, would experience the exact opposite had they attended a Catholic parish in our time - long lines for communion and small lines for confession. Has humanity suddenly become more holy in these past hundred or so years? Or, have we slowly rationalized away the notion of sin, stressed too much the mercy of God, thereby diminishing our need for sacramental reconciliation/confession? After study, prayer, and reflection, I fear the latter to be true. I could always be wrong in my observation, but I fear we have grown far too accustomed to viewing sin through the prism of natural human responses or emphasized God’s mercy to such an exaggerated view, that now God can and will forgive even after the person has died. No matter what I have or have not done prior to my death, the moment I behold His glorious face, I will fall upon my knees, ask forgiveness, and will be forgiven. In

essence, we have lost the true meaning of sin and its effects upon ourselves, others, and God. And, by opening the door to forgiveness, even after death, why should any person ever feel the need to live a good life now, obey the laws of their country or the church, when they can be forgiven even after their own death?

I offer all of you these questions to reflect upon until we join together next weekend. At that time, I would like to slowly walk you through our Catholic understanding of what sin is, how do we define serious/mortal sins as opposed to the lesser/venial sins, and finally who can forgive sins. Before we conclude this day, I need you to remember one thing always concerning the Sacrament of Reconciliation/Confession - Never are you confessing your sins to a priest. You are confessing to God, and the priest, acting as His ambassador, offers to you His forgiving grace by repeating His words "Through the ministry of His church, I absolve you of your sins."