

***The Fourth Sunday of Advent***  
***December 19, 2021***  
***Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #49)***

*“Of how much greater faith and salutary fear are they who . . . confess their sins to the priests of God in a straightforward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience . . . I beseech you, brethren, let everyone who has sinned confess his sin while he is still in this world, while his confession is still admissible, while the satisfaction and remission made through the priests are still pleasing before the Lord.”*  
*(St. Cyprian of Carthage, The Lapsed, A.D. 251)*

As much as I would like to spend a vast amount of time upon our reflection this weekend, I must be brief for the homily on the Fourth Sunday in Advent has traditionally been offered by our Archbishop of Mobile. Out of due respect for him, allow me to offer all of you a series of quotes taken from various church fathers concerning confessing your sins. As one can understand, the sacrament was not given to us, from the hand of God, perfectly complete in its celebration. This sacrament, as well as all Christian beliefs, had to first be studied, prayed about, and finally, reflected upon. All of these things were necessary before the early church fathers could begin to formulate coherent ideas as to the Divine Nature of God. The pages which accompany this reflection will show you some of how this development would come to pass. The most important point is that it did have a very real beginning. The earliest writings of Christians still existing speak of confessing sins.

And yet I asked, last weekend, if Christians prior to A.D. 1,400 were confessing their sins privately to a priest, then what was the reason it changed? Why was Christianity turned upside down and people began to profess they no longer found it necessary to confess their sins to a priest? Can we point to a certain person or to a particular idea which would lead so many to no longer practice Christianity as countless generations had before?

Again, to be very brief, the person is the Frenchman, Jean Cauvin (John Calvin, in English). In his work, *Christianae Religionis Institutio*, commonly referred to as *The Institute*, the Sacrament of Confession took on a new meaning. For Calvin developed a new Christian religion which did away with the need for an ordained, separate group of priests who would “oversee or dictate” the religious lives of their flocks. Instead, taking the first letter of Saint Peter as his guide, Calvin wrote both of the “priesthood of all believers.” (1 Peter 2:5-9) and Jesus being the only one who could rightly forgive sins. This work, dated to its time, still affects Christianity to our day. Calvin sought to limit the influence priests would have upon the lives of individuals, through both the church and government. Sadly, for so many, its effect - dissolving the priesthood would lead to no gift of the Sacrifice of the Mass and no one present to extend absolution through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I have run out of time; we will place this thought upon the back-burner of our mind and return to it at a later date for its effects are still found active in the lives of Christians today who may not ever be aware of why they believe the way they currently do.