

# FR. CLIFF'S NOTES

By Fr. Clifford Smith

## ***Going to Confession ... Reconciliation Part II***

Penance, Confession, Reconciliation ... all words used to indicate the Sacrament that heals our separation from God and neighbor caused by sin. **Penance** is the most correct and official term used by the Church. Most of us grew up calling it **Confession** because that was the hardest part ... honestly putting into words for a priest to hear all our failings and faults. But Penance and Confession only point to parts of the sacrament: the word **Reconciliation** speaks of the effects. In the Sacrament of Penance, properly disposed, we are reconciled with God, neighbor and self. Not only are our sins forgiven by a loving God, but we are reinvested with the grace of our Baptism. Like all the sacraments, we receive grace as the primary effect, not merely making us blank slates in need of grace. But in order to receive the fullness of grace God wants us to have our confession must be thorough and honest.

### **Examination of Conscience**

A good confession comes from a good **examination of conscience**. Although God will forgive what we have legitimately forgotten, we are expected to take time to look over our lives since our last confession. The Ten Commandments are a good starting point:

**The First Commandment:** Do we truly love God above all, or do we sometimes give greater importance to things of this world: money, possessions, power, popularity or other selfish desires? Do we really want to be transformed by the will of God, or do we just use our religion in order to "*look*" like good Christian people?

**The Second Commandment:** Do we show disrespect for God's name by misusing it out of frustration or anger or to look "*cool*" to others? Do we hesitate to mention God's name in appropriate situations, in conversations with friends and family members in matters of faith?

**The Third Commandment:** Do we come to Church to celebrate the Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days? Do we attend Mass only when it is convenient or when it will make us "*feel good*?" Do we participate in the Eucharist by praying all the prayers, or do we simply sit as spectators and wait to be entertained? Are we *Church-goers* or *pew-warmers*? Do we really listen to the Word of God and let it take effect in our lives? Do we acknowledge the "*real presence*" of Christ in the Eucharist and receive Communion with awareness, respect and reverence?

**The Fourth Commandment:** Do we help bring peace and happiness to our families, or are we disrespectful of others and a source of division for those closest to us? **As parents**, are we generous and patient with our children? Do we listen to our children carefully and treat them with respect? Do we spend time with them and give them the attention and love they need? Do we set responsible limits for them and make sure they follow rules that will help them grow into responsible adults? Are we willing to say "*no*" to our children, or are we more likely to ignore problem behavior and hope it will "*go away*?" **As children**, are we loving, respectful and obedient to our parents? Do we appreciate the sacrifices they make for us? Do we say "*Thank you*" and "*I love you*" often enough? Do we do our chores without being asked, or do we wait for our parents to become upset before we move away from what we are doing? Do we ignore or pretend not to hear our parents?

**The Fifth Commandment:** Have we injured others through carelessness or fighting? Have we placed others or ourselves in danger because of reckless use of alcohol or other drugs? Have we risked our lives by driving or riding with someone under the influence alcohol or drugs? Do we try to forgive those who hurt us, or do we hold on to resentment and a desire for revenge? Do we use our voting rights, in order to fight war, oppression, and injustice, or do we allow those evils to continue by our apathy and our silence? Have we been violent or abusive either in action or speech? Have we been verbally abusive to our children, parents or others? Do we share what we have with those in need? Do we support the life and mission of the Church by responsible stewardship ... sharing our time, talent and treasure? Do we

bring our Christianity to every day situations, or do we stand on the sidelines and complain about every flaw we can detect in others? Are we only Sunday Christians?

**The Sixth Commandment:** Do we respect the dignity of the human body and the holiness of Christian marriage? Do we show that respect in our speech, or are crude language and jokes often part of our conversations? Do we take pleasure in listening to such conversations? Do we understand and appreciate the gift of our sexuality as a means of expressing our love and God's in the Sacrament of Marriage? Have we been faithful to our marriage, priestly or religious vows? Do we keep our commitments simply because we said we would, or do we seek to nourish ourselves and others through our lifetime commitments? Have we dishonored our bodies by impure or unworthy conversation or thought that lead to impure actions? Do we expose ourselves to pornography on television, video, print-media or Internet? Have we encouraged others to sin by our failure to maintain good moral standards?

**The Seventh Commandment:** Do we respect the property of other people? Have we stolen, damaged or vandalized the property of others? Have we made restitution for what we have stolen or damaged? Have we cheated at work or in school? Have we encouraged others to sin by pressuring them into helping us cheat? Are we honest and hardworking in school and at work? Have we cheated on homework or tests? Are we faithful to our promises? Can we be trusted?

**The Eighth Commandment:** Have we lied to stay out of trouble or to avoid a difficult situation? Do we gossip about others or enjoy listening to gossip? Have we damaged the reputation of another person by exaggeration or making up stories about them? Can we be trusted with a secret? Do we stand up for those unjustly accused, or are we merely a channel through which rumors pass, whether or not they are true?

**The Ninth Commandment:** Have we weakened or damaged our marriage commitment through our obsession with another person? Do we respect the commitments of others and help them remain faithful to their promises? Do we treat our marriages casually in our conversations and attitudes? Have we said or done anything which made a mockery of our sacred promises?

**The Tenth Commandment:** Are we satisfied with what God has given us, or are we jealous of those who seem to have more? Do we try to prove we are better than others by bragging or buying more things? Do we appreciate our own good qualities, or do we constantly compare ourselves with others and become resentful or bitter? Do we cope well with the problems that confront us and maintain our Christian hope in spite of hard times and difficulties? Do we truly "*seek first the Kingdom of God*" in our lives and place our trust in Him?

**Remember:** Sin is not just *doing* (**commission**) but also *failing to do* (**omission**.) Although the Ten Commandments largely address what we should not do, Jesus made it clear that we had an even greater duty to be proactive ... to first love God and neighbor.

**Canon Law of the Catholic Church teaches: Can. 959** In the sacrament of penance the faithful who confess their sins to a legitimate minister, are sorry for them, and intend to reform themselves obtain from God through the absolution imparted by the same minister forgiveness for the sins they have committed after baptism and, at the same, time are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by sinning.

**Can. 988 §1.** A member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and number all grave sins committed after baptism and not yet remitted directly through the ... Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which the person has knowledge after diligent examination of conscience.

**§2.** It is recommended to the Christian faithful that they also confess venial sins.

**Can. 989** After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her **grave sins at least once a year**. (*It is my opinion that Catholics should seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least twice a year, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent even if they have committed no grave/mortal sins.* Fr. Cliff)