

FR. CLIFF'S Notes

What is Sin?

Sin is any offense against reason, truth and right conscience.

It is a failure with respect to love of God, neighbor and self.

Sin is a wounding of ones relationship with God and with our neighbors;

all sin has a communal dimension.

Sin is always a form of disobedience.

Sin is always rooted in our free will; it is always a choosing for something other than God.

Sin is a radical exercise of Human Freedom

Mortal Sin: also called *grave* sin, involves a (1) grave/serious matter, (2) sufficient reflection/full knowledge and (3) full consent of the will. It results in a complete severing of our relationship with God, a loss of sanctifying grace, an inability to perform meritorious actions.

Venial Sin: [from the Latin for *pardonable*] involves less serious matters, reflection and consent; the consequences are likewise less serious, our relationship with God is marred but not broken; the supernatural life within the individual is still alive.

Some people wonder why Catholics have to confess their sins to a priest. Can't we just ask God directly?

For most of our minor sins, we can go directly to god. But some sins so harm our relationship with God that we need a more effective kind of healing. Consider: for a paper-cut, a bruise, a scratch, a simple cold, I can take care of it with a Band-Aid, some first-aid cream or an aspirin. But for a serious bleeding cut, a broken bone, 103-degree fever, I don't try to take care of it by myself ... I go to a doctor or an emergency room.

The vast majority of our sins only bruise and scratch or dent our relationship with God, and can be healed by a sincere prayer of contrition to God, with a resolve to try harder to do better. We call these "venial sins," from Latin for "pardonable." These lesser sins are also forgiven in the Penitential Rite of the Mass, on receiving the Eucharist when properly disposed, and in the context of other sacraments such as Anointing of the Sick.

But some sins are so serious that we, in essence, turn our back on God and sever our side of our relationship with Him. We call this "mortal sin," because it kills all grace in our soul. This sort of sin, like killing the innocent, adultery, and other deliberate evil acts, requires a greater kind and sign of healing, which in its earliest form, meant a public confession and a public expression of contrition. In keeping with the seriousness of the sin a serious time of penance to show the seriousness of our sorrow and desire to reform our lives was required.

Originally this sort of forgiveness was given only by a bishop, who exercised the *Power of the Keys* to "loose sin" (*Gospel of Matthew 18:18; John 20:23*), but by the Middle Ages this exercise was shared with priests by delegation from their Bishop. Priests and bishops act "*in persona Christi*" ... the Presence of Christ, who does the forgiving. They also stand for all those humans we have harmed through sin ... a human voice offering forgiveness along with the Divine forgiveness.