

March 2, Tuesday of the Second Week in Lent

COME NOW TO CONFESSION

Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins are like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they are crimson red, they may become white as wool (Is 1:10, 18).

God is good all the time.

Many Catholics wonder today whether Confession to priests is of any significance. We must ask the question, has it ever been significant? And is it now? We will boldly answer the first with a yes and the second with an even stronger yes.

For most of us, the struggle and reluctance we feel towards Confession are not about whether there is any sin to confess but to whom we may admit our sins. There is always sins we can confess about "what we do" and "what we fail to do."

Our conviction in the power of Confession transcends the priest's humanity and availability as a confessor and the "lover of souls;" it is rooted in God's invitation and action of mercy, which come to us upon embracing and availing ourselves before the priest.

Consider God's comments in Isaiah about how he called the Israelites to experience the gift of forgiveness, something foreshadowing the sacrament of Confession. After comparing their sinful conditions to unpardonable sins of Sodom and Gomorrah(Cf. Gen 19), God assures the people of the unimaginable effect of a sincere confession. "Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins are like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they are crimson red, they may become white as wool."

The phenomenal whiteness and beauty of snow is quite familiar. And if confession makes our soul as white as snow, why should I ever resist it for my soul? King David illustrates to us the positive effect of Confession. After his adulterous relationship with the wife of Uriah and going ahead to murder him, David admitted to the prophet Nathan of his sins and received absolution from his sins. Nathan told David assuredly, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die" (2 Sam 12:13). This was what God meant when he said, "Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord: Though your sins are like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they are crimson red, they may become white as wool."

Following the grace from his Confession, David said something as compelling as our need for the sacrament. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long....then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my

iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:3-5).

When Jesus taught his disciples to listen and do what the Pharisees and the scribes teach because they sit on Moses's throne, he implied that God entrusts authority to human beings to act on His behalf. It is in this same vein that Jesus said to the disciples, "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn 20:23).

Let people spin the words of God in Isaiah or Jesus in John whatever way they choose, but the truth of God's word remains till today that through the humble admission of our sins before God in the presence of the priest, God transforms our souls to become as white as snow. It is God's decision and declaration; let not men alter it, fail to believe it, or accept it contrary to what the Church urges us.

The beauty and innocence of the soul after an adequate confession before the priest, not "self-assurance" or "self-pardon," is what the DIDACHE, a document about the teachings of the apostles going back to A.D. 70 was concerned with as it expressed, "Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . . On the Lord's Day gather, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure" (*Didache* 4:14, 14:1).

Again, it is the same reason that inspired the church fathers like Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Augustine, and Hippolytus to speak and write eloquently about Confession before the priest in the first three centuries of the Christian era. It is the same inspiration that fired up St. Alphonsus, St. John Vianney, and St. Padre Pio, in our modern era to gaze on the faces of the many who came to them for Confession, after spending considerable amounts of time at the confessional, and joyfully see their souls undergo holiness before God.

The same zeal and inspiration should move both priests and members of the church today to flock to the confessional and "set things right" with God and receive forgiveness and grace from God.

God's forgiveness of our sins does not depend on the priest, but it is not without it; so, do not be discouraged by priests who renege their confessional love as "lovers of souls," who may give the impression that Confession is obsolete, or what you consider sinful is not really so, and stay away from it.

Let us pray that God will give light to our eyes to see that sin is our enemy, which must not overcome us or cause us to be shaken before God at the thought of confession and humbly approach God's mercy during this Lent and beyond to recover the desired good for our souls. Amen.

