

Taking the Fear out of Confession



“Perfect Love casts out Fear.” Jn 4:18

Written by Teresa Kehoe & Carol Harnett, Maryvale Institute, Birmingham 2013

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What is it we are frightened of?

- Discuss in pairs / threes what exactly is it you think we / they are frightened of.
- Have you or has anyone you know, ever catechised on this sacrament and said, “It’s not scary” or “Don’t be frightened,” “Don’t be worried,” “It’s alright really”? Why?
- Are you projecting your own worries and fears onto others? How?

What is the sacrament of?

- Confession?
- Penance?
- Reconciliation?



A Sacrament of Love and Healing

- So what's scary about that?



Is that the problem?

- What is the truth?
- What is the truth about you or me?
- Are we ashamed of facing the truth or are we denying the truth?
- Is worry about the truth preventing us from accessing the Truth?

Truth



- Jesus said “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” (Jn 14:6)
- It is Christ, through the priest, who hears and forgives
- “Perfect love casts out fear.” (Jn 4:18)

A sense of sin

- Do we have a sense of sin or has this been lost in our culture?
- Discuss this point in pairs/threes.

“However disturbing these divisions may seem at first sight, it is only by a careful examination that one can detect their root: It is to be found in a wound in man's inmost self. In the light of faith we call it sin: beginning with original sin, which all of us bear from birth as an inheritance from our first parents, to the sin which each one of us commits when we abuse our own freedom.”

Reconciliatio et Paenitentia (RP) 3, John Paul II



What is sin?

Think about our mission to be witnesses to Christ in the world. How do we do that?

Our lack of witness can give a bad example, so our sin becomes one against God and against man.

How often do we hear people pointing out the poor behaviour of other Catholics? What we do reflects well and badly on others.

Culture

- How does the media affect our understanding of sin?
- What is right and wrong?
- How attuned are we to reality or to what the media tells us is reality?



What is sin?

Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.

It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1850

Sin is an offense against God: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight."

Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it. Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God through the will to become "like gods," knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is thus "love of oneself even to contempt of God."

In this proud self-exaltation, sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, which achieves our salvation.

(CCC 1850)

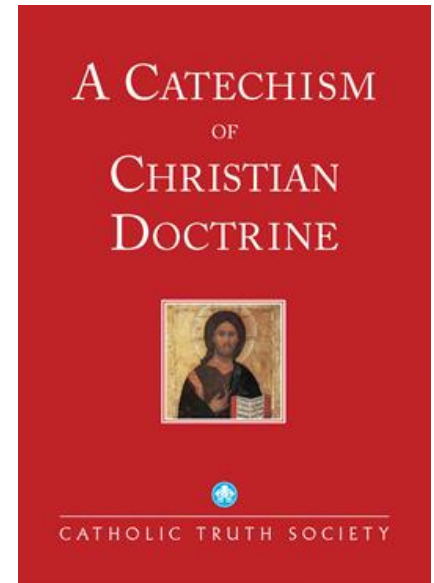
Fear of the sacrament or fear of facing up to reality?

- By accepting the need for the sacrament, we accept the reality of our own sin.
- Yet the world tells us nothing is wrong, every action can be seen as right as we change the boundaries to suit ourselves.
- The clarion call of “if it’s right for you”, the culture of tolerance and the real sin becomes intolerance. Who are you to judge?

To sin or not to sin

- That is the question!
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church
“Concupiscence (any intense form of human desire) stems from the disobedience of the first sin. It unsettles man's moral faculties and, without being in itself an offense, inclines man to commit sins.”
(CCC 2515)

Unless you are a saint, you sin, and so do I.



The Prodigal Son, Lk 15:11-32

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, **I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy** to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

The Other Son

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘**you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

The Return of the Prodigal Son is an oil painting by Rembrandt.



Which son are you?

The Prodigal?

“This prodigal son is man every human being: bewitched by the temptation to separate himself from his Father in order to lead his own independent existence; disappointed by the emptiness of the mirage which had fascinated him; alone, dishonored, exploited when he tries to build a world all for himself sorely tried, even in the depths of his own misery, by the desire to return to communion with his Father.”

(RP 5)

The Elder Brother?

“Man every human being-is also this elder brother. Selfishness makes him jealous, hardens his heart, blinds him and shuts him off from other people and from God. The loving kindness and mercy of the father irritate and enrage him; for him the happiness of the brother who has been found again has a bitter taste. From this point of view he too needs to be converted in order to be reconciled.”

(RP6)

The Father's Love

“The most striking element of the parable is the father's festive and loving welcome of the returning son: It is a sign of the mercy of God, who is always willing to forgive. Let us say at once: Reconciliation is principally a gift of the heavenly Father.”

(RP 5)

What are we waiting for?

We know the Father is waiting for us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. He waits, open armed with his mercy. We need to come to our senses, repent, and go meet Him. Then we will be reconciled with the Father and with others, and know the healing that comes from this sacrament. And we can go back again and again and again! The Father will never let us down or refuse us his mercy.



Nothing scary about that

- There's nothing scary about that!
- The only person or thing holding us back is ourselves.
- Why?
- Are we attached to our sin or too scared to face up to it?
- Through the sacrament, we receive forgiveness and also **grace**. It is this grace which helps us resist and avoid opportunities to sin.

“In the light of this inexhaustible parable of the mercy that wipes out sin, the church takes up the appeal that the parable contains and grasps her mission of working, in imitation of the Lord, for the conversion of hearts and for the reconciliation of people with God and with one another-these being two realities that are intimately connected.”

(RP 6)



Mercy and Forgiveness

“.. we know that God, ‘rich in mercy,’ like the father in the parable, does not close his heart to any of his children. He waits for them, looks for them, goes to meet them at the place where the refusal of communion imprisons them in isolation and division. He calls them to gather about his table in the joy of the feast of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

(RP 10)

Catechesis

“While some are called to the specific ministry of catechesis, we are all, as baptised members of the Church called to catechise.

In catechesis we echo the faith of the Church, the deposit of faith.”

Fidei Depositum 1

“In catechesis we bring people into an intimate relationship with Christ.”

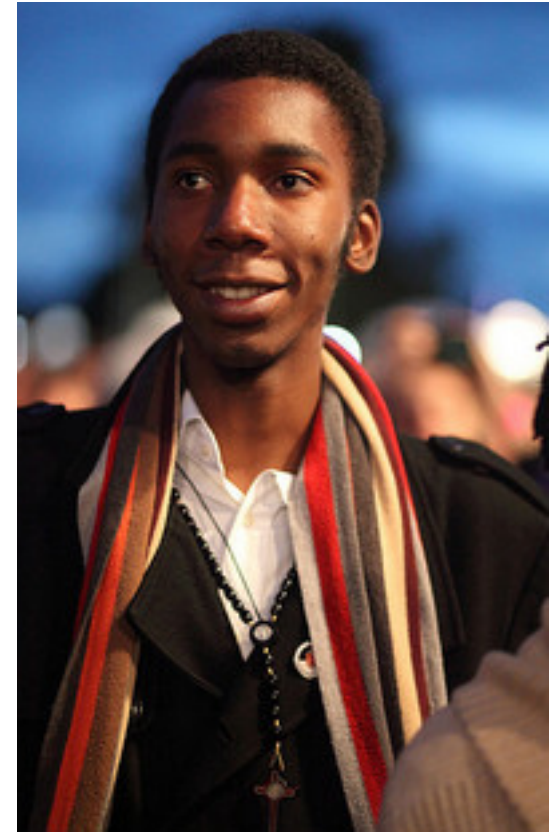
Catechesi Tradendae 5

- We are all therefore to **catechise** about this sacrament of love and mercy, through our word and through our witness.
- We are all called to **evangelise**, through our word and witness.
- Catechesis is a moment in evangelisation.
General Directory of Catechesis 276



You can't give what you don't have

In order to pass on this love of the Father, through the salvation offered by Christ on the Cross, and brought to us in the sacrament of reconciliation in the power of the Holy Spirit, we have to have a true and authentic relationship ourselves with Christ and His Church. We have to love the sacrament ourselves. We are living witnesses to its healing power!



A personal challenge



Take these thoughts to the Lord in prayer:

How often do I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Do I love the sacrament and all it offers me or do I stay clinging to my sin?

Am I over zealous or over lax?

What kind of witness am I?

Am I full of fear or full of joy when I talk about this sacrament?

A message of love and mercy, not fear.

“The message we announce should be the ‘heart of the Gospel,’ which is the joyful proclamation that Jesus loves them, gave his life to save them and seeks to live at their side each day to strengthen and free them.”

Evangelii Gaudium 164



Do not be afraid.



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