

TEN TIPS FROM PRIESTS FOR A BETTER CONFESSION ·

by:

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I wish I could hear other people's confessions.

Don't worry, I'm not bugging the confessionals in the convent. I just think I would learn something from hearing how others go about it.

I've been partaking of the sacrament of penance for several years now but I still don't feel like I know what I am doing. Sometimes I leave the confessional wondering: "Did I do that right? Should I have been more specific? Was I honest enough?"

The other day as I left confession, I thought: "I know, I will ask for some advice from the men who do hear other people's confessions for a living!"

Here is what they said:

1. Father Bryan Brooks, Tulsa, Oklahoma:

By doing an examination of conscience we are confronted with our sins, but when we go to confession we are confronted with God's love, mercy and forgiveness.

2. Father Sean Donovan, Pawhuska, Oklahoma:

After saying about how long it's been since your last confession, briefly tell the priest about yourself. (Are you single, dating, remarried, a religious sister?) If we know your situation, it helps us to counsel you.

3. Father Gabriel Mosher, O.P., Portland, Oregon:

Sins are bad choices, not unpleasant emotions; so, confess your sins, not your emotional states.

4. Father Damian Ference, Wickliffe, Ohio:

Sins committed are an offense to God, but sins confessed are a Canticle to God. So, when you confess your sins to a priest in the sacrament of penance, know that you are also singing praise to God for his great mercy.

5. Father Matthew Gossett, Steubenville, Ohio:

Frequent confession is edifying for your priest and good for your soul! Sins, especially deep-seated or habitual sins, require patience and persistence. Never give up, no matter how many times you've committed the same sin... confession is a sacrament of healing, and just like physical wounds, spiritual wounds can take some time to fully heal.

6. Father James Martin, S.J., New York, New York:

Confession is not so much about how bad you are but about how good God is.

7. Father Anthony Gerber, Cottleville, Missouri:

The priest is like a physician: when you go to the doctor, you tell him what has been hurting you and with more or less detail so that he knows how best to heal you. And remember: he has seen many patients with the same symptoms. Trust him, listen to his counsel, and you'll get better soon!

8. Father Joshua Whitfield, Dallas, Texas:

God works best with a simple, humble confession of sins. God doesn't need a novel. He's read it already. Pride and impenitence sometimes hide beneath our many words. Speaking simply and plainly, naming our sins: it's like being stripped for the Cross, for the death of our sins and the resurrection of forgiveness.

9. Father Jeffrey Mickler, S.S.P., Youngstown, Ohio:

Just go, no matter what. God's love is stronger than our sins.

10. Father Matthew Schneider, L.C., Washington D.C.:

For many people, the biggest improvement in confession would be switching from viewing it as an obligatory, abstract listing of sins to the renewal of a relationship with God.

And a bonus!

Father Mark Menegatti, O.S.A.:

Confession is not just a removal of sin, it's an encounter with Christ.

Were any of these tips helpful to you?

Tip number 3 helped me to rethink how I do my examination of conscience and I realized that I probably should be more specific when listing my sins (not that God needs it but because it would be helpful to me). And all of these tips renewed my love for the sacrament of penance and for all priests who give their lives to serve God and his people.