

THREE REASONS TO GO TO CONFESSION ASAP ·

by:

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“If anyone wants to go to confession, I’m available before Mass!”

I was in Nicaragua traveling up to Guatemala when I heard this rushed invitation yelled in Spanish from a church sanctuary. It was my second time in Latin America. On my first visit there, I’d had a conversion experience and went from being an atheist to believing in God. And the second time, a year later, I received for the first time in over a dozen years what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the “sacrament of conversion” (CCC, no. 1423).

When I first heard the priest’s hurried invitation, I was hesitant to accept. My Spanish was not really that great. And I knew it would be embarrassing to relate my laundry list of sins in a second language. All of my concerns spun around in my mind until my thoughts coalesced into a sudden decision to leap up and head to the empty chair. My sins spilled out of my mouth and the old priest earnestly tried to understand my rudimentary Spanish. Then he gave me absolution. Relief washed over me. I had needed this, and I didn’t even know that I had needed this

The sacrament of penance can be intimidating. It is hard to go to confession, especially if you have been away for a long time. There is often a physical feeling of revulsion, of wanting to stay away because it seems so difficult, so humiliating. Sometimes we convince ourselves that our sins are just between us and God, that there is no need for the sacrament. We put it off and make excuses that it just doesn’t matter that much anymore.

But it does.

Here are some reasons why I love going to confession:

1. Jesus is waiting for us: I once had a priest yell at me in the confessional. He misunderstood what I was saying and he was generally a grumpy man so he began to sound off before I even finished. Thankfully, at that point, I already loved the sacrament and I knew that I was there to see Jesus, whether the priest was the face of Christ to me or not. As I left the confession stunned and a bit angry, I couldn’t help but smile. “Jesus can give me the graces of this sacrament, even through that old grump!” I marveled. This sacrament is not meant to be just an advice booth or a counseling session; it does not even require a loving and understanding priest, although that is always helpful. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “Only God forgives sins” (CCC, no.1441). The graces of this sacrament come from the hands of Jesus and are administered through the human hands of his priests, on their good days and bad days.

2. Increase of grace: The sacrament of penance actually has the power to renew the presence of the Trinity within us if we have severed our relationship with God through mortal sin. I'll say that again because it is important. This sacrament can renew our baptismal grace if we have lost it through serious sin. The Fathers of the Church called this sacrament the "second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace" (CCC, no. 1446). We don't always know exactly how badly we have severed our relationship with God so it pays to go to confession at least once a year as the Church advises. But it's even better to go more often if we are able. Even if we have not fallen into mortal sin. This sacrament increases grace in our souls and helps us to overcome and avoid sin. I don't know about you, but I could definitely use some help in that area.

3. Source of spiritual healing: My mom told me when I was younger that I would feel "as light as an angel" after I received absolution in this sacrament and I always have. Going in with humility and pouring our sins out to the Lord allows us to walk away renewed in mind and body. When the priest says the prayer of absolution, a weight lifts from my shoulders and relief washes over me. It is a healing experience because I know that the Lord has heard me and is walking with me. He knows my needs and will help me to grow closer to him and has provided me with specific graces to help me overcome my sin. For this reason, I often begin or end my confession with a plea for healing by saying, "I am asking Jesus for the grace to..."

You might still be feeling hesitant to take advantage of the graces available to you in the sacrament of penance. Maybe you have not gone for years. Maybe you are not convinced it is actually helpful. Maybe you are not sure it is necessary or even biblical. I am not here to convince you of these things, (although I do recommend some research if you are interested).

But I will be praying that you receive the grace of inspiration and motivation to receive this sacrament. We often feel a great resistance to it precisely because it is so powerful and the forces of evil in the world do not want people taking advantage of the graces available to them through the sacraments.

Our broken, violent, and disturbed world would be a better place for every person who returned to this powerful sacrament.