

CONFESSION

2 Saturday Afternoons

1. The Grateful Penitent

Here's a story from a Connecticut parish.

A nicely dressed man who looked anxious and upset walked into a church, squinted at the confessional, and couldn't tell if there was a priest in it or not. "Is there a priest in there?" he asked a woman. He didn't care what priest — he just needed a priest. Any priest.

"Yes," came the answer. He barely acknowledged the help, and hurriedly entered the confessional.

After a few minutes he emerged again, looking like a different person. Gone was the haunted expression on his face. Gone was the urgency and anxiety. He was a man set free.

He smiled at the person who had merely pointed out the obvious and said, "Thank you," with the gratitude of someone who had just been handed an antidote to rattlesnake poison.

2. The Ultimate Therapy

Here's a story from a California parish.

A teenage girl's whole character suddenly seemed to change. She was moody and preoccupied for weeks, so her parents took her to a counselor.

Therapy sometimes does wonders for people who suffer from mental anxiety. In this case, it didn't help. Their daughter had seasons of improvement, but always ended up back in her distracted, unhappy state. This continued through college, and afterward.

By coincidence, the therapist met her outside near a Catholic church one rainy Saturday afternoon. Stepping out of the rain, they saw someone leaving the confessional.

The girl asked if she should go to confession, too. The therapist advised against it. She ducked in anyway.

She emerged smiling, the first smile

the therapist had ever seen on her young patient. The therapist noted that in the days, weeks, and months that followed, the girl was no longer troubled with her old moodiness and unhappiness.

The therapist started to look into confession more, and then herself decided to enter the Church. Now, she counsels regular confession for all her Catholic patients.



9 Confession Promises

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church,

confession gives you ...

1. Pardon and mercy

"Those who approach the sacrament of penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him" (1422).

2. Reconciliation

Confession reconciles us with the Church, with God, and helps us reconcile with others (1424).

3. A Welcome from the Father

Comparing our journey to the story of the prodigal son, the Catechism calls confession "the first step in returning to the Father" (1423).

4. A second "Baptism"

We are first "converted" and become Christians at our baptism, but a second "conversion" is needed. Said St. Ambrose: "There are water and tears: the water of baptism and the tears of repentance" (1428-9).

5. Interior change

Peace comes from "a radical reorien-

tation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil" (1431).

6. A new heart

"The human heart is heavy and hardened," says the Catechism. "God must give man a new heart. ... It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin" (1432).

The world tells us that sin owns us, and that we can never change. The Holy Spirit has "proved the world wrong about sin" and is "the Consoler who gives the human heart grace for repentance and conversion" (1433).

7. A just penance

The penance that a priest gives "must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear" (1460).

8. The strictest secrecy

"Every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives" (1467). "It is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason" (2490).

9. Strength for the battle

Confession improves us, offering "spiritual strength for the Christian battle" (1496). It's a rescue boat "after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace" (1446).