

Confession – The Plea for Healing

Wouldn't it be great if after birth a person never got sick, never suffered an injury, and never made a bad decision which resulted in harm? Wouldn't that be great? But we all know that never happens.

So, if a person does get sick, or suffers an injury, or makes a bad decision resulting in harm, what are they to do? He, or she, goes to the doctor! And once at the doctor, that person describes the symptoms of their illness, tells the circumstances of their injury, and even admits the embarrassing details of a bad, harmful decision.

Why does a person expose all those sometimes gory details to the doctor? - to be healed, of course, because we know the doctor can diagnose the problem and administer treatment beyond our untrained ability to know how.

Hope for Post-baptismal Sinners

Now, wouldn't it be great if after Baptism a person never sinned, never cracked under temptation, and never harmed themselves and others by turning away from God? Yeah, that would be great, but we also know the sad truth about ourselves.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the

propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 1:8-2:2).

Yes, there is hope for us who sin after Baptism, just as there is healing for those who suffer harm after birth. Christ Jesus is both the Chief Doctor and the Medicine, the Church is the hospital, and we are the patients. Confession is the doctor's office in which the symptoms of sin are described, exposed, and treated. Priests are the assistant physicians in the local church, according to the word of Christ: "*As the Father has sent Me, I also send you...If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (John 20:21, 23).¹

Sick? – Get Treatment!

As the Apostle said above, we fool ourselves by not admitting our sin. We deceive ourselves by not making use of Confession, and so we remain spiritually ill and only grow worse in our sickness.

Jesus said, "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'* For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:12-13). Repentance, literally the turning of your heart to God – this is the first step to healing and the essence of Confession.

We hesitate to admit we're sick. We don't want to turn to the doctor! We say: "I think I'm spiritually healthy." Or, "I think I'm healthy enough." "What great sin do I

¹ Bishops (*episcopoi/overseers*) and Priests (*presbyters/elders*) are successors to the Apostles (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

really have?" "Whatever it is, I can take care of it myself."

But we can't take care of sin by ourselves or we never would have sinned in the first place. We certainly show we can't deal with sin on our own if we deny we have it or make excuses for it.

Hear what the Apostle says: *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church (lit., presbyters/priests), and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (Jam. 5:14-16).*

The Church exists so that when we suffer from sickness, whether physical or spiritual, we come to the Church for healing. Are you sick? – get treatment! Do you have sin? – get to Confession!

"How bad is it, Doc?"

Confession can be scary, just as going to the doctor is scary. It's not a matter of "if" but "what." Even at the so-called "wellness visit," or check-up, there's always the opportunity to improve one's condition, meaning health comes with the effort of maintaining a healthy lifestyle with diligence, discipline, and devotion.

Sometimes our sin is obvious: neglect of Liturgy, laziness in prayers, hatred, fits of anger, sexual immorality, theft, cheating others, lying, foul language, violence, etc. Sometimes our sin is not so obvious: gossip, prejudice, smugness at Church, idle texting, useless entertainments, delight in profane images and music, agitation at news in the world, ignorance of God's ways, stubbornness, etc.

Confession is all about the truth. Do we want to know the truth about ourselves so that we can actually begin the healing process? If so, we have to be able to admit we're sick, we have to open our souls for examination, and we have to accept the treatment plan no matter how intense it might be. Whoever really desires healing wants the honest truth from the doctor about both the condition and the cure.

The Plea for Healing

Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed (Heb. 12:12-13). Because I kept silent, my bones grew old from my groaning all the day long...I made known my sin, and I did not hide my transgression; I said, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord," and You forgave the ungodliness of my sin (Ps. 31[32]:3, 5).

Are you truly sorry for the sins and faults you have? Do you truly desire forgiveness to be freed from them? Do you want to change for the better, to live a new life in keeping with Holy Baptism replete with the fruits of the Holy Spirit?

Confession renews our baptismal covenant and solidifies Communion with God and one another, which is why the Church is so insistent on a regular practice of Confession. We are going to struggle with the sickness of sin, yet by God's grace we can rehabilitate ourselves in wholeness by giving ourselves to healing in Confession.