

## The Sacrament of Confession

When I was about 6 years old my parents took me to a carpet store because they wanted to buy a new carpet for the house. I still remember the carpet store because it had the coolest toys a 6 year old could ask for (especially at a carpet store). When it was time to leave I decided that I wanted to take the toys with me because I loved them so much. So I stuffed them in my socks to sneak them out and I would have gotten away with it had it not been for the high step I had to take in order to get into the car. The toys fell out of my pocket as soon as I stepped into the car and they fell everywhere. My parents realized what was going on and made me return those toys back to the store. As if that wasn't embarrassing enough, they had me walk straight back into that store and apologize to the owner face to face.

So I walked back, head down, ashamed, miserable, embarrassed, dreading, and dragging my feet to the owner to tell him I was sorry.

Isn't this how we often see confession? Our walk of shame up to the priest – dragging our feet, dreading it, embarrassed about what we have done. We are quick to see confession as something negative- a punishment for our sin- a vision of our ugliness. So we think to ourselves, "I'll confess later. I just can't deal with overcoming this sin right now because there is too much going on in my life. I can't work through this right now because too much will be brought up. I'm going to be so vulnerable, exposed, humiliated. I can't see myself in that way. I don't want to be vulnerable, exposed, and humiliated".

The Church provides an answer for us when we think like this. The church guides us to look at the crucifixion and ask ourselves, "What do we see and what do we know?" Do we see vulnerability, Christ exposed, and humiliated. Only on the outside of course because we know in truth that the crucifixion is an icon of victory, hope, love, and divinity. The crucifixion shows us that humility is divinity.

And so that means our confession might be our most divine moment, our most humble moment. It might be our most God-like moment. It might be the most we can identify with Christ- who is the humble one. Our God is a humble God and through confession we enter into that divine humility shown on the cross.

Yes, that also means confession is a cross. It is a struggle to admit our faults, to come to terms with our sinful situation, to see ourselves vulnerable and exposed but it always leads to resurrection for the cross always leads to resurrection. Repentance is resurrection. It is new life-united with God through the surrender of our weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and selfish tendencies. It is turning away from our inward selfish focus and instead looking towards the creator in whose image we were made. It isn't the vision of our ugliness, but instead a vision of God's beauty as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware says.

The focus of confession is on reunion with God. The focus is on union with him and we only reach this union if we ascend the cross and surrender our weakness to him. This entails that we bring him into our battles and invite him into our personal situation. We do this by sharing our biggest fears, our most vulnerable faults, and our embarrassing failures in confession. We lay at

Christ's feet all the crap that weighs us down and tarnishes his image in us and in turn surrender ourselves to him who embraces us and takes us upon his shoulder like the Good Shepherd. In this surrender and in this moment of vulnerability we open ourselves up to God so that he can fill us with himself. What a mystery- that vulnerability leads to union. We can only be unified if we are first vulnerable and open – just like any romance and marriage- we can't truly be united to someone if we aren't first vulnerable. Our path to theosis (union with God) is most certainly a journey of repentance and confession.

This means confession is not something off the beaten path. It is not for the terrible people who sin. It is for the people of the church.

Confession is not shameful. It is human. St John Chrysostom says, "Pay attention carefully. After the sin comes the shame; courage follows repentance. Did you pay attention to what I said? Satan upsets the order; he gives the courage to sin and the shame to repentance."

The Church drives this point home. Repentance is not shameful. It would be one thing if the Bible and hymns of the church weren't filled with talking about our sin, but they are literally filled with it. I don't think you can go through 5 minutes of a service without some mention of our sin and repentance so lets call it for what it is- We sin often and Repentance IS THE REALITY IN OUR LIVES. It is natural to repent. It is human to repent. It is what we are born into. Christ's first words were in his ministry were, "repent". We are born into sinful world and we repent our way to the kingdom. It's just what it is. It is the medicine for our condition. That metaphor might even be a little weak. It is the food we need to partake of in order to grow into unity with God. It is the nutrition we need in order to grow into who God created us to be. It is the process of transformation in which creation becomes like the creator.

Yet we think it's embarrassing and we neglect it- and Christ knew we would. So he drives the point home even further. "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance". Even further Christ gives us the parable of the prodigal son revealing that **confession isn't embarrassing; it is embracing**. It is the embrace of the Father for his son who has strayed but now returned. It is the embrace of love, trust, hope, and mercy for all these are present in the Father's embrace of the prodigal son and all these are present in our confession.

So the next time we think of confession as that shameful walk to the priest, instead we remember it is a joyful leap into the embracing arms of our Lord. We are like the child of a soldier who finally sees his/her Dad after months and months of being away- and we run and jump into his open arms. That's how we come to confession.

Next time we think it is going to humiliate us and break us down. Remember that it is in fact building us up into the likeness of Christ. It is forming us and shaping us into the image of our creator. It is guiding us towards our original calling. It is leading us towards unity with Christ – the **goal** and **aim** of our entire lives.