19 - Sacraments of Healing

"Of how much greater faith and salutary fear are they who . . . confess their sins to the priests of God in a straightforward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience. . . . I beseech you, brethren, let everyone who has sinned confess his sin while he is still in this world, while his confession is still admissible, while the satisfaction and remission made through the priests are still pleasing before the Lord"

-St. Cyrpian of Carthage, The Lapsed, 28 (A.D. 251)

I. What is “Sin”?

A. The etymology of the word “sin” comes from the Old English synn, which means to incur guilt.

B. The Latin, peccatum, means a slip, a mistake, a fall, or a lapse, but does not necessarily imply moral guilt (culpa). Theologically speaking, although sin is a “mistake” or a “lapse”, it is a culpable lapse and always has the notion of guilt attached to it, as is expressed in the German and Scandanavian roots of the word.

C. sin is an offense against God and is a privation of grace. Sin is nothing else than a morally bad act, an act not in accord with reason informed by the Divine law (St. Thomas, "De malo", 7:3).

II. The Nature of Sin

A. sin is primarily understood as a privation of the good, a disordering of the will in which an evil (or sometimes just a lesser good) is sought over the Highest Good, which is God.

1. This disordered movement of the will brings about a loss of grace in the soul.

2. Sin, properly understood, is a lack of grace, a deprivation of the good, as well as the act that brings this state about (hence the phrase “to commit sin” but also “to be in a state of sin.”

B. Sin is primarily an offense against God. Though we can sin against our neighbor, of course, every sin is committed directly and immediately against God: “Against You, You alone have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Your sight” (Ps. 51:4).

C. Types of Sin - evaluated according to their gravity

1. Mortal Sin - a sin that destroys charity in the heart of man due to a grave violation of God’s law

a. Grave Matter: does the sin violate any of the moral precepts set forth in the Ten Commandments? (CCC 1858)

b. Full Knowledge: does the sinner understand that the action is an objectively evil act? (CCC 1859)

c. Complete Consent: did the person commit the sin freely, or was he under constraint? (The Catechism says that “feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish but rather increase the voluntary nature of sin” CCC 1859)

d. All three of these components must be met for the sin to be mortal

e. The sin is not the same as the moral evil committed!

2. Venial Sin - when one, in a less serious matter, does not observe exactly the standard prescribed by the moral law, or when he disobeys the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge of complete consent

a. Venial sin weakens charity;

b. it manifests a disordered affection for created goods

c. it impedes the soul’s progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good

d. it merits temporal punishment.

e. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not set us in direct opposition to the will and friendship of God; it does not break the covenant with God. With God’s grace, it is humanly reparable.”

f. Overcoming venial sin is the true struggle for Christian perfection, and many manuals have been written by great saints to help us overcome the hold of venial sin

3. Accessory to Sin - nine ways we can be guilty for another’s sin

a. By counsel

b. By command

c. By consent

d. By provocation

e. By praise or flattery

f. By concealment

g. By partaking

h. By silence

i. By defense of the ill done

4. The exact degree to which an accessory is culpable depends, like other sins, on circumstances. It is possible to be guilty of mortal sin even if you did not commit the sin

III. The seven deadly sins are:

A. Envy: a sadness or anger at another’s prosperity (different from jealousy).

B. Sloth: refusal to exert oneself to do the things necessary to attain salvation (acedia).

C. Gluttony: use of created goods to excess (immoderation).

D. Wrath: a desire for vengeance in order to do evil to someone.

E. Pride: excessive belief in one’s own abilities that does not recognize the grace of God.

F. Lust: an inordinate craving for physical pleasure.

G. Greed: a rapacious desire to increase in material wealth or gain.

H. According to long-standing belief, it is pride that is the root of all sin and the source of envy, the cause of the Devil’s fall from grace (Wis. 2:24)

IV Punishment for Sin (consequences)

A. If sin is mortal, it incurs and eternal punishment

1. Eternal punishment consists of eternal separation from God (hell)

2. those who die in a state of unrepentant mortal sin are eternally lost

B. if the sin is venial, a temporal punishment suffices

1. Those who die in venial sin must have the effects of the sin effaced off their soul before entry into heaven

2. This can be accomplished either on earth or in purgatory.

C. Temporal punishment due to sin can be expiated by prayers, good deeds, almsgiving, attendance at Mass, etc.

1. One must be in a state of grace to merit this because none of these deeds are meritorious apart from God’s grace

2. Thus, the prime importance is to confess your mortal sins, then do penance for the temporal punishment due to sin

V. The Sacrament of Penance (Confession and Reconciliation)

A. The form of this sacrament is the absolving words of the priest, “I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

B. The matter is the penitent (you) – your contrition (repentance)

C. Scriptural Basis

1. Matthew 16:19, 18:18: The power of the Keys is granted to Peter personally and to the Apostles in communion with him: “Whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The power of binding and loosing from sin is included in the power of the Keys.

2. John 20:21-23: After He had risen from the dead, Christ appeared to his disciples and told them, “Peace be to you. As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. When He had said this, He breathed on them, saying: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.’”

D. Parts of the sacrament

1. Contrition: Contrition means sorrow for sin and is essential for any confession to be valid

a. Perfect contrition is sorrow for sin because it offends God

b. Imperfect contrition consists in sorrow for sin because we fear the loss of heaven and the pains of hell

2. Confession: Confession refers to the actual, auricular confession made to a validly ordained priest in the confessional

a. Sins must be confessed in kind (what you did)

b. and number (how many times you did it)

c. Knowingly withholding a sin from your confessor is itself a sin that must be confessed

3. Absolution: Absolution is pronounced in the name of Jesus Christ and accomplished by His power, exercised in persona Christi by the priest

4. Satisfaction: Satisfaction refers to a penance, prayer or good work assigned to you by the priest as a means of expiating the effects of the sin and/or making right the disorder caused by the sin

E. Current canon law requires that all mortal sin be confessed once a year at least, preferably at Easter. However, this is a bare minimum and is not recommended for those making any serious attempt at holiness. Remember a few things: just because you may forget about a sin does not mean that it is automatically forgiven. Can you keep track of all your sins for a whole year? Also, what if some disaster or calamity overtakes you before you get to confession? Intentionally putting off confession is not healthy for the soul.

VI. Anointing of the sick (Last rites, extreme unction)

A. biblical references include:

1. James 5:14-15 “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, 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 man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

2. Mark 6:13 “And [the disciples] cast out many demons and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them.”

B. Since Old Testament times, oil has been a symbol of the overflow of the Holy Spirit upon an individual (I Sam. 10:1-13, 16:12-13), of abundance of joy (Deut. 11:14, Ps. 23:5, 104:14-15, 133:1-2, Isa. 61:3, Heb. 1:9) and a sign of healing, for “it makes radiant with beauty, health and strength” (CCC 1293, Luke 10:34). Athletes in the ancient world made use of oil to limber up and cleanse themselves. Oil symbolizes health and soundness.

C. Christ cared profoundly for the well-being of the sick. The healing of the sick was a messianic symbol of the coming of the Messiah, a sign that “God has visited His people” (Luke 7:16). In their suffering, Christ identifies Himself with the sick (“I was sick and you visited Me”, Matt. 25:36) and took special compassion on the sick; the New Testament is replete with examples of Christ’s healings of sick persons.

D. The healing of the body is not the ultimate end, but the healing of the soul.

E. The matter of the sacrament is two-fold: the remote matter is the consecrated oil itself, while the proximate matter is, of course, the act of anointing with the consecrated oil. In the old days, this anointing was done over the head, hands, feet, ears, noses, eyes and various other parts of the body. Now, it is standard to anoint only the head of the sick person, though the unction of other body parts may still be appropriate.

F. The form of the sacrament is the words “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in His love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord Who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”

G. Proper Minister is Bishop or Priest; no others can do it

H. Effects of the Sacrament

1. The first grace of this sacrament is one of strengthening, peace and courage to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of serious illness or the frailty of old age.

2. Union with the passion of Christ. By the grace of this sacrament the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion: in a certain way he is consecrated to bear fruit by configuration to the Savior's redemptive Passion. Suffering, a consequence of original sin, acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus.

3. An ecclesial grace. The sick who receive this sacrament, "by freely uniting themselves to the passion and death of Christ," "contribute to the good of the People of God."

4. A preparation for the final journey. If the sacrament of anointing of the sick is given to all who suffer from serious illness and infirmity, even more rightly is it given to those at the point of departing this life; so it is also called sacramentum exeuntium (the sacrament of those departing).The Anointing of the Sick completes our conformity to the death and Resurrection of Christ, just as Baptism began it.

5. the sacrament of anointing has from apostolic times included an absolution from sin. This absolution consists in a remission of all venial sin and as much of the temporal punishment due to sin as corresponds to the intensity of charity and penance in the recipient.

6. This forgiveness of sins is actuated by two principles:

a. The will of Christ to prepare His people for death by cleansing their soul and making it fit for heaven.

b. The participation of the recipient in the communion of saints, where the Church Triumphant offers prayers for his soul.

I. Viaticum – Food for the journey

1. Early in the Church, the practice developed of giving those on the verge of death access to three sacraments to prepare them for their final journey: anointing, penance and Eucharist.

2. All of these in general took the name Viaticum, which loosely translated from Latin means “provisions for the journey.” By the Middle Ages, this word came to refer to the Eucharist explicitly