

Day 153 – Thursday, August 20 - Reconciliation - continued

How to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation Today by Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M., S.T.D.

What happened to confession? The lines of penitents waiting to enter the confessional on Saturday afternoon seem to have disappeared. Have Catholics simply stopped going to confession? How does one celebrate the sacrament [today](#)? When I was in grade school, each Saturday evening my mom and dad took me to church and we went to confession. I never questioned why we did this, it was simply something that good Catholics did. Now, I would explain the practice by saying that this was a way to assure that we would be in the state of sanctifying grace in order to receive holy Communion at Mass the following day, Sunday morning. Even for those of us without grave sin and who were already in the state of grace—and I certainly would place my parents in that category—Saturday confession was a way to prepare ourselves to be as holy as possible to receive the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.

[Today](#) two things have changed: The Eucharist itself is seen as a sacrament of forgiveness; and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not simply (or even primarily) a preparation for holy Communion. It has its own meaning as a wonderful sign of God's love and forgiveness.

When Mass was in Latin, I never really noticed how frequently the prayers spoke of the forgiveness of sins. Now, Sunday after Sunday, I (together with the whole Church) hear, "May almighty God...forgive us our sins" (Penitential Rite); "You take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us" (Glory to God); "Though we are sinners, we trust in your mercy and love. Do not consider what we truly deserve, but grant us your forgiveness" (Eucharistic Prayer I); "Our Father...forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Lord's Prayer); "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world....Lord, I am not worthy...but only say the word and I shall be healed" (Invitation to Communion).

At each Eucharist we hear Christ's command: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven." And in holy Communion, I am in com-union (union-with) Christ and the Church. As my sins distance me from Christ and the Church, holy Communion draws me back into intimate union with Christ and his members. Meals, especially ritual meals, have traditionally been times of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is not surprising, then, that for many Catholics the Sunday Eucharist has become the usual sacrament by which they experience the forgiveness of their sins.

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein