

Day 157 – Sunday, August 24

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

GATHERING We enter the reconciliation chapel and we exchange a greeting with the priest. We can sit face-to-face with the priest or remain anonymous behind a screen. Many people worry about what the priest thinks of them when they tell him their sins. They imagine that in confessing their sins the priest sees them at their worst. Actually the very opposite is true. Everybody sins; however, only some sinners are moved to do penance. When you tell your sins to the priest and express your desire to repent, the priest sees you at your best. The priest sees you, not in your sinning, but in your repentance. As a priest I have found that many Catholics, once they have tried the face-to-face option, prefer it. After saying hello we move to prayer. Even though there are only two people present, we are about to celebrate a sacrament of the Church, an act of worship. The whole Church is made present through the priest who is ordained to speak in the name of the Church and through the promise of Christ to be present where two or three are gathered in his name. We begin "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The priest will say a prayer and may invite us to pray.

STORYTELLING While in this atmosphere of prayer, we turn to Scripture (perhaps the Sunday Gospel) and hear again of God's faithful love. While the reading of Scripture is optional from a legal viewpoint, the rite recommends it, because it is very important for the meaning of the sacrament. Although some priests will have legitimate reasons not to do so, ideally the priest will invite you to read a passage from the Bible (or he himself will read a passage). Every sacramental action is a response to the Word of God. One of the blessings of the Second Vatican Council is the increasing importance that the sacred Scriptures play in my life and in the lives of most Catholics. "When the Scriptures are read in the church, it is Christ himself who speaks" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 7).

When I first started going to confession I was taught to examine my conscience in the light of the Ten Commandments. The whole moral life was divided and categorized under these 10 headings. [Today](#) I form my conscience not only from the Ten Commandments, but from all of Scripture, particularly the Gospels. I find this gives a rich variety to my "confessions" as I reflect on the Scriptures in the various seasons of my life and the life of the Church. As a child, I understood sin to be breaking the law. I learned about laws and obedience from my parents. When I went to school, I learned that sin was breaking God's law. As an adult, I realize that sin must be understood in relation to God's love. In the Scriptures and in the experiences of our daily lives, we see how much God has loved us and continues to care for us. When we examine our lives in the light of God's love, we come to realize that our love for God, our neighbor and ourselves falls far short of God's love for us. When we consider the difference between these two loves—how much God has loved us and how we have loved in return—we become aware of our sinfulness. Sin, in a sense, is basically ingratitude: our lack of response to the generosity of the loving creator. The creator calls us to life, growth and wholeness.

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