

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

John Paul Speaks

*Notable quotations from Pope John Paul II and
official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church*

“ESSENTIAL AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED”

Down through history in the constant practice of the Church, the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5: 18), conferred through the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance, has always been seen as an essential and highly esteemed pastoral duty of the priestly ministry...

“SAME BASIC STRUCTURE”

Through the centuries, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, has developed in different forms, but it has always kept the same basic structure: it necessarily entails not only the action of the minister — ... who judges and absolves, tends and heals in the name of Christ — but also the actions of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction.

“RENEWED PASTORAL COURAGE”

“I am asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.” (*Novo Millennio ineunte*)

“REDISCOVERY OF CHRIST”

In 1984 ..., my invitation ... was to make every effort to face the crisis of ‘the sense of sin’ apparent in today’s culture. But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ ... as the One in Whom God shows us His compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with Himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance...

“AN ENCOURAGING MESSAGE”

The Jubilee Year, which has been particularly marked by a return to the Sacrament of Penance, has given us an encouraging message, which should not be ignored: if many people, and among them also many young people, have benefited from approaching this Sacrament, it is probably necessary that pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it.

“VIGOROUS REVITALIZATION”

I ... encourage my brother bishops and earnestly appeal to them — and through them to all priests — to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice ..., and we should remember that the faithful, when they have the proper interior dispositions, have the right to receive personally the sacramental gift.

CONFESSION OF SINS

In order that the minister of the Sacrament may know the dispositions of penitents with a view to granting or withholding absolution and imposing a suitable penance, it is necessary that the faithful, as well as being aware of the sins they have committed, of being sorry for them and resolved not to fall into them again ..., should also confess their sins. In this sense, the Council of Trent declared that it is necessary “by divine decree to confess each and every mortal sin.”

“GREATEST POSSIBLE PROVISION”

Local ordinaries, and parish priests and rectors of churches and shrines, should periodically verify that the greatest possible provision is in fact being made for the faithful to confess their sins. It is particularly recommended that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertised times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses...

(Source: Apostolic Letter in the form of *Moto Proprio, Misericordia Dei*, dated 4/7/02)

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