

LESSON FOUR



He Takes Away The Sins of the World

It is important to remember that Our Lord came not for the self righteous, but he came to call sinners. We who are called to be Catholics must therefore acknowledge that we are sinners, and that we fall short of the kingdom of God. This does not mean that we are miserable people. Catholics in general tend to be a fun loving people, enjoying the good things in life. Our Lord has even told us that we are to dress up and smile when we fast, because Catholicism isn't supposed to turn us into some puritanical killjoy. Nevertheless, the reality of sin is something we must take seriously, which is why any catechesis always includes lessons in morality and in the virtues.

And so I suppose on some level it may seem to those on the outside that Catholics are very strict. There was a time (for example) when all Christians were against abortion, but now it may seem like only Catholics are against it. There was a time not too long ago when all Christians stood firm against the use of artificial forms of birth control, but now the Catholic Church seems like the only voice that even talks about such things. There was a time when all Christian denominations would have rejected homosexuality as a sin, but now some of those same groups even ordain and marry practicing and professing homosexuals. There was a time when suicide would have been denounced by all Christians, but now certain Christian churches may even invite people in to speak on euthanasia. The more the world changes, and becomes less and less Christian, the more radical Catholic morality must seem, and yet Catholic moral teaching remains remarkably consistent and intact.

This isn't to say we don't sin in the Catholic Church, but rather that we *do* sin, and furthermore that we still see sin as sin. Someone choosing to enter into the Catholic Church must then approach these moral issues with serious discernment. If they do, they will find that these are not just a series of random "Thou shall nots" but rather that there is an integrity of thought behind these moral positions, and a deep interconnectedness to them as well. Learning to appreciate those connections will help us to recognize sin when it happens, and it will also help us avoid sin. Still, we Catholics sin, and if you want to be a Catholic, you're going to have to admit the fact that you sin as well.

Theology of the Body

Regarding sins of the flesh, let us be clear that the body is not bad, but good (which isn't to say we cannot sin, but rather that the body is made for virtue and for our good). The last pope of the twentieth century, Pope John Paul II, was the theologian whose task it was to try to articulate the interconnectedness of Catholic moral teaching when it comes to human sexuality, procreation, life and death, and the phrase that is coined to distinguish his excellent ideas is "The Theology of the Body." Already in this phrase we see that for Catholics the body is something holy, real, and revelatory of God's goodness. For those who still need convincing regarding Catholic moral teaching, looking into the Theology of the Body would be a good place to start. If you are a computer person, we'd like you to explore a number of websites regarding all of this.

First, go to the website Theology of the Body (www.theologyofthebody.net), and then check out the website for Mr. Christopher West (www.christopherwest.com). Another place you can check out is The Catholic Exchange (tob.catholicexchange.com) and the Catholic Education Resource Center (www.catholiceducation.org), which may also have an article on the Theology of the Body.

If you can't go online to explore these and other websites on the Theology of the Body, then you will need to purchase and read THEOLOGY OF THE BODY MADE SIMPLE by Anthony Percy. At just about 100 pages, it will help the student understand better the Catholic approach to sexual morality. You can get it a Barnes and Noble, but you could also order it through calling ChristianBooksBibles.com at 800-704-1428. For about \$25 you can also purchase online a 4 cd set on the INTRODUCTION TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY by Christopher West, and just listen to the material on your morning and evening commute (check out the website for www.crossroadsinitiative.com).

Going to Confession

One of the more difficult sacraments for non-Catholics to grasp is that of the sacrament of reconciliation (or confession). Like the Pharisees who chided the Lord, we still sometimes hear the argument *how can this man forgive sins ... only God can forgive sins*, but the fact is that Jesus charged the apostles to forgive sins, and the apostles did forgive sins, and they have passed down this responsibility (through the power of ordination) to Catholic bishops and priests after them, where a man, acting with authority and in the name of Jesus Christ, does declare a penitent's sins absolved. Being able to accept this power depends on our ability to accept the sacrament of Holy Orders, and to know what that means. Essentially it means that there is an unbroken reality of grace from man to man to man back to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Still, another difficulty with confession is just the act of confessing itself. Let's face it, we don't *like* having to confess our sins, because it is embarrassing, even though the priest to whom we are confessing to has heard it all before, and can't possibly be shocked, and even if we are confessing anonymously, it can still be an effort. But that is, after all, the point. Christians are supposed to confess our sins. That having been said, those of us who do go to confession can also report to you that it is a tremendous relief to have gone to confession,

so that we can speak out loud our sins, and leave that confessional knowing that the Lord has forgiven us.

Confessing is an art. Some confess rarely and poorly. Some confess often and beautifully. We can recommend that the faithful Catholic who is really enjoying the benefits and graces of this sacrament will confess anywhere from at least four or five times a year or even one or two times a month. Simply put the more we avail ourselves of this sacrament, the more we grow in the spiritual life. Those baptized individuals looking to enter into the Catholic Church or seeking confirmation are required to go to confession before they can proceed any further. One does not have to go to confession at this parish, but one needs to find a Catholic priest and make a confession. Just tell the priest you are making your first confession, and they will walk you through it.

Those of you who are already baptized, but who may be seeking confirmation will need to go to confession, and you may want to talk about going to confession with the priest before you do it, but it may be that you just begin. Wait till you're ready, and then follow these simple guidelines.

- Find the times for confession and go a few minutes early to spend time in prayer to prepare. If you can't make the parish scheduled times for confession, then make an appointment with the priest of your choice.
- Examine your conscience prior to going to confession (and prior to entering into the confessional)
- Begin by blessing yourself ☩, and saying *"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ... Bless me father, for I have sinned, this is my first confession (or my last confession was ...) These are my sins ..."*
- Now confess your sins, being as honest as possible regarding the nature of the sins, but also as far as to how often these sins may have been committed. You won't remember every sin you have ever committed, but the Lord is calling to mind the sins you need to confess. Once you have finished enumerating your sins, you can conclude by saying *"... for these and all the sins I cannot remember I beg pardon from God & absolution from you, father"*
- The priest will assign you a simple penance
- You will make your Act of Contrition before the priest by saying the following: *O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You, and I detest all my sins, because I fear Your just punishments, but most of all because I have offended You, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near*

occasion of sin. Amen. □

- The priest will pray over you, and you will receive your absolution
- You will leave the confessional to do your penance & to give thanks to God
- Congratulations, you are one step closer to becoming fully integrated into the Catholic Church

Homework Follows

- Either explore the above websites or read through the above mentioned book, and call your priest or catechist for your next chat. Even if you are older, and not so much plagued by these issues of sexual morality, we would like you to have a grasp on it, as it may help you in your confession, and it will certainly help you communicate the faith to others.
- If you are already baptized, and seeking confirmation, then you will need to go to confession. If you have never been baptized, you will not have to go to confession before your baptism.
- Fill out the following questionnaire, and bring it in with you when you come.

Fifth Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions, and return this information to us.

1. Have you looked into the Theology of the Body online or completed the book that was recommended by us on the subject of the Theology of the Body?
2. Do you have any questions regarding what you have learned? If so, turn this page over and put write down those questions so you can discuss them at our next meeting.
3. For those you have already been baptized, have you gone to confession before a priest either at this parish or at another parish?
4. Are you still attending weekly Sunday Mass at the parish?
5. If not, why not?
6. How is your discernment going? Are you even more determined to move towards deeper conversion and greater communion within the Catholic Church?
7. How are things at home? Are you finding some support by your family and friends, or are you finding this process somewhat alienating to them?
8. If you have not already, you need to join the parish by signing up.
9. You need to start to think about a Catholic sponsor who can act as a guide to help you in your walk, and who will give witness to and for you. This person will need to be a good and active Catholic who can act as a godfather or godmother, and who will take a deep interest in your own spiritual walk. We will need to talk more about this later, but begin to think about it now.
10. Are you ready to learn more about this faith you seek to embrace?