

cost to Himself, we should not trivialise sin and fall back into slavery through our own ignorance, complacency, spiritual apathy or laziness. The Lord has done the 99.9%. Let us do the 0.1% with love, peace and joy!

Be happy and holy always

The Lord wants us to be happy (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:16) and holy (cf. Matthew 5:48) always. But how can we be really happy if we are not holy? How can we have real peace and joy if we separate ourselves from the Lord with our unrepented and unconfessed sins? How can we walk in the righteousness of the Lord and attain the fullest potential God plans for us if after all that our Lord has done for us, we remain in slavery to our own sins?

The choice is in our own hands

A victorious Christian living of a life of grace or a mediocre life that is not really different from that of the rest of the world?

Reference and recommended reading

How to Make a Good Confession – An Introduction to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation by Fr. Francisco Luna

Confession – A Personal Encounter with Jesus Christ, and Our Passport Heaven



Who does the sinner wound?

The sinner wounds God's honour and love, his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and the spiritual well-being of the Church, of which each Christian ought to be a living stone. (CCC 1487). To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world. (CCC 1488).

Failure to see ourselves as we really are – sinners in need of healing

For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them (Matthew 13:15).

Our human weaknesses, pride, self love, lack of sincerity, lack of desire to grow in personal holiness benumb our conscience, and lead to spiritual laziness and apathy in not fully understanding the gravity of sin and putting up with it.

Sin – a rejection of God's love

Sin is doing what God forbids. It is saying no to God and God's plan for us. It is wilful disobedience to God. This disobedience may be an action, a thought, a desire, an intention or an omission.

The essence of sin lies in the thought, desire or intention. As soon as we deliberately desire or intend to perform a sinful act, we have already offended God even if we do not have the opportunity to put the intention into action.

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

From the love perspective, sin is a disdainful rejection of God's love, what He has done for us and what He stands for. It means ignoring the immense love with which God, the Father created us, the high cost at which Jesus Christ, God the Son redeemed us and God's laws and commandments which He has given us to guide ourselves safely back to Himself. It means voluntarily putting a distance between ourselves and God.

For a sin to exist three conditions must be fulfilled: (1) that thought, word, desire, deed or omission is evil or believed to be evil; (2) to realize that it offends God and (3) to do it willingly, fully aware that one is committing evil. However, we should not conclude that it would be better not to know the laws of God at all. Though the gravity of a sin committed in ignorance is lesser, we still will be responsible for our ignorance and the sins committed as a result of it.

What is mortal sin?

Mortal sin is sin whose object is (i) grave matter; (ii) committed with full knowledge and (iii) deliberate consent. (CCC 1857). Mortal sin is a serious offence against God.

Mortal sin results in loss of sanctifying grace, i.e. loss of the state of grace. It destroys our divine life of sanctifying grace and consequently God no longer lives in us. If not repented of, mortal sin causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal punishment of hell after death.

What does Jesus say about sin?

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." (John 8:34).

Why do so few of us recognize the gravity of sin?

We see in our churches today lines and lines of the faithful receiving Holy Communion but oftentimes hardly a line forms outside a Confessional. The reason so few of us recognize the gravity of sin lies in the yardstick that we use to assess gravity of sin. We choose to look at it in relation to how we feel about it instead of to God. In our eyes a fault is serious or small depending on the personal impression that this fault produces in us.

King David has set a good example. He praised God seven times a day (cf. Psalm 119:164). No wonder the Lord said that David is a man after His own Heart (cf. 1 Samuel 13:14). Let us praise the Lord continually for all the good He has done for us, is doing for us and will do for us!

Sin separates us from God. The only thing that separates us from God is our own unrepented and unconfessed sins. In the face of the infinite love that God has for each of us and the great sacrifice Christ made in conquering sin and death in our behalf, we should never grow presumptuous and take sin lightly. Trivialising our sins, numbing our conscience and hardening our hearts build a high wall between God and our souls, destroy our Christian ideals, put out the desire for holiness, and prevent us from becoming our full potential that God made us to be, and result in lives that are not fully happy or fulfilled.

Striving for holiness. Frequent confession is needed for growth in personal holiness. The soul that is dead through sin will again be brought back to fullness of life by the sanctifying grace that is poured into the soul during Confession. Additionally we also receive sacramental grace which helps us in the process of personal sanctification and fight against evil. Thus, it is important that we make frequent Confessions at least once a month or more frequently as needed. Confessions made with the right dispositions will never become a routine but will always constitute a joyful encounter with the Lord.

The spiritual effects of the Sacrament of Penance are: (CCC 1496)

- reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace;
- reconciliation with the Church;
- remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins;
- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin;
- peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation;
- an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

Satan would very much like us to think that sin is trivial and he has already won half the battle if we do not attach importance to Confession as a great and necessary help in our growth in personal holiness. Not availing of frequent Confessions results in us being slaves to sin, as the Lord has warned us (cf. John 8:34). Since the Lord has already won freedom for us at great price and

What is a bad Confession? A bad Confession is one in which the penitent deliberately conceals a mortal sin. This renders the Confession invalid and sinful and all future confessions invalid and sinful until the sin is confessed (cf. Life in Christ, Revised Edition, Foundation for Adult Catechetical Teaching Aids, pg 195). A bad confession, the abuse of a sacrament, is a grave sin.

It would be a good practice to start with confessing the sins which we find most difficult to tell. We could also tell the Confessor of our difficulty regarding this and he will help us through with some leading questions.

Fulfilling the Penance. Through His death on the Cross and resurrection, Jesus has, on our behalf, overcome Satan, sin and death, paid in full for our sins, and opened the gates of heaven for us to live an eternal life of grace with God. However, we have to do our part. We have to make atonement for our sins which have been confessed and forgiven. This is why the Confessor will give some form of penance at the end of the Confession for us to make some form of reparation to the Lord for our sins.

Simple sacrifices with love. How much punishment due to our sins after we confessed and fulfilled the penance for them depends on the dispositions with which we approach Confession. When our sorrow and love for God have not attained the necessary level of purity, not all punishment due to our sins is remitted. We should try to offer simple sacrifices on a daily basis to the Lord for reparation of our sins and sins of the world. A simple act offered up in love to the Lord is a sacrifice. There are numerous opportunities for mortifying ourselves and offering some small suffering to our Lord: acts of kindness, control our tongue, accept criticism, put better efforts into our work, get up/go to bed on time if we don't have the habit, fast from favourite food, take a cold shower, walk the stairs, control our anger, be considerate to others, reduce hours of entertainment for quiet time, visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, meditate on the Passion of the Lord, spend more time on Scripture and prayer, say our prayers with more love and devotion, attending daily Mass, etc.

Praise is an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord (cf. Hebrews 13:15). Praising the Lord with the correct attitudes of reverence, humility, obedience and love helps us stay focussed on God and open our eyes to God's attributes.

Thus, we use a personal standard established by our pride by which to judge the gravity of a sin against God. We forget that the seriousness of a sin does not depend on our feelings or lack of feelings regarding it but how far such an offence against God's infinite goodness and love takes us away from Him, the One who worked so hard to redeem us from our sins, and the only One who can truly make us happy.

We forget that our sins wound not only ourselves but also the mystical body of Christ, His Church and the world. The poor state of the world today is the result of a collective effect of the sins of humankind as people choose to concentrate on themselves and ignore God, thus opening themselves to evil.

A person inured to sin has a conscience that is numbed to sin. Consider the case of a person who for the first time missed a Mass on a day of obligation. At first he will feel greatly disturbed. But if he falls into the unfortunate habit of missing Masses on days of obligation, then he will feel less and less disturbed. However, his subsequent lack of disturbed feelings does not take out even an iota of gravity from this offence. This leads to the question of whether our consciences are properly formed and delicate enough to provide us with the proper alert and warning against sins.

Saints wept for their sins. Saints due to their closeness to God, had a good understanding of God's divine love, and frequently wept for their sins. They understood how even a venial sin offends against God's infinite goodness and love. When we offend a person whom we love, the greater the love that person holds for us, the greater the gravity of our offense. Many saints felt the need to make frequent Confessions. Among the many that confessed weekly are Mother Theresa and our beloved Pope John Paul II. The saints went way out to remove whatever that stood in the way of their relationship with God. We should emulate the saints in their sincerity of their relationship with God.

Jesus gave power to His apostles to forgive sins

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:22-23).

Jesus was so concerned about our human frailty that the first thing He did after resurrection was to give power to His apostles to forgive sins – the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Such a wondrous gift! This is the route Jesus points out to those of us who are already baptised, for seeking forgiveness of our sins. Confessing one's sins to another mortal requires humility that Jesus wants to see in our hearts. Telling our sins to the Confessor allows time for gravity of the sins to sink in and to confront our sins squarely in the presence of the Lord in the Confessor. The joy of actually hearing that one's sins are forgiven and thus certainty of pardon by God can only be experienced by those who take this route in seeking forgiveness from God.

Examination of Conscience. Adequate time is to be allowed for a proper examination of conscience. A person who makes his/her Confession twice a year will obviously need more time than another who confessed weekly. To make a good Confession we should recourse to our Blessed Mother Mary for help in getting light from the Holy Spirit so that the faults which we consciously or unconsciously try to hide or have forgotten or are unaware of, which could nonetheless be very harmful for our souls, will be brought to our knowledge.

Repentance. True sorrow for our sins should be in relation to the Lord's goodness and love for us, and should result in our detesting of our sins because of the Lord's goodness. We should be on guard against sorrow of pride which is rooted in self-love and caused by feelings of humiliation and woundedness at the discovery of one's imperfections. With this type of false sorrow, we cannot make a good Confession as the soul seeks to satisfy the needs of its own vainglory and not to reconcile itself with God.

St. John Vianney on repentance:

My children, we must ask earnestly for repentance. After confession, we must plant a thorn in our heart, and never lose sight of our sins. We must do as the angel did to Saint Francis of Assisi; he fixed in him five darts, which never came out again.

Purpose of amendment. Sorrow for sins without accompaniment of the resolution never to commit them again will not be sincere. The many falls suffered by a poor soul even after a good resolution is made, do not render the resolution insincere. What is important is to rise up again and turn to God, trusting in God's love and mercy and never be overcome by despair or hopelessness in one's weaknesses. We can totally trust God to forgive our sins no matter how many or great they are, provided we have real repentance for them. God's mercy is unfathomable for the repentant sinner, and our sins are but a drop in the ocean of His mercy.

Jesus to St. Faustina on Divine Mercy:

"Write of My Mercy. Tell all souls that in the court of the mercy (i.e. the Confessional) is where they should look for consolation; there the greatest miracles take place constantly and they are repeated incessantly. In order to obtain this miracle it is not necessary to make a pilgrimage to a distant place nor to celebrate some other rites, all you need is to approach with faith My representative and to confess to him with faith its misery; and the miracle of the Mercy of God will become evident. Even if a soul was like a corpse in such a way that from the human viewpoint everything was lost and nothing could be done. It is not thus for God. The miracle of the Divine Mercy restores that soul in all its fullness. Oh unfortunate souls that do not enjoy this miracle of the Divine Mercy; they will request it in vain when it is too late."

Telling our sins to the Confessor. Our Confession is to be very sincere. We should confess all our mortal sins: their number, their kind and their circumstances. Mortal sin is not to be glossed over since its gravity also depends on its situation. For example, in the case of a sin of adultery, with whom and where the sin is committed will also affect its gravity. Since we want ALL our sins to be forgiven, it is useless to try to hide some of our faults which we find embarrassing to tell. These are usually the serious faults. In so doing, we run the risk of adding a new sin, the abuse of a sacrament which is also a serious offence against God.