

O Mary Conceived W/o Original Sin, Pray for us Sinners who have recourse to Thee.

News Flash!

Confession:
Not Just
About Mortal
Sin Anymore

A Theology Night by Fr. Christopher Bernabe

A summary¹ of
Frequent Confession:
Its place in the spiritual life
by Dom Benedict Baur, O.S.B.
Originally “*Die haufige Beicht*” 1922.

What is the purpose of frequent confession?²

A person may receive the sacrament of Penance frequently for the reason that over and over again he falls into mortal sins and wants to obtain forgiveness for them from God. We are not speaking here of frequent Confession in this sense.

What we have in mind is the frequent and regular Confession of a person who in general does not commit mortal sin but rather lives a life of union with God and is bound to him by love.

Such a person may, nevertheless, be guilty of many disloyalties and failings. He may have various weaknesses and bad habits and perverse inclinations, and he may have to struggle hard with his inordinate desires and his self-love. It is not a matter of indifference to him that here and there he has acted against his conscience, even though it be in nonessential matters. He is anxious to purify his soul from every stain of sin and from every fault and to keep it pure and to keep his will steadfastly directed toward God. For this reason he goes frequently to Confession, possibly every week. He seeks inner purification and strength of will, new strength to strive after perfect union with God and with Christ. He knows well that he is in no way bound in conscience to confess the venial sins that he has committed. He knows-for it is the explicit teaching of the Church-that venial sins need not be told in Confession: and this because there are many other means by which they can be forgiven. Such means are all acts of true supernatural contrition, all petitions for the forgiveness of sin, all works undertaken and sufferings borne in a spirit of penance and atonement, all acts of perfect love of

¹ I stopped the summary at Ch 2.c because of lack of time realizing we would not be able to cover all the material in one night. I encourage you to read on. The book is gold.

² Nota Bene: I didn't do a good job distinguishing between my work and those of the Dom Baur. It should be assumed that the work is Dom Baur if not clearly my work or errors are made.

God, all works of Christian charity toward neighbor that spring from a supernatural motive-in a word, every work that is done and every sacrifice that is made out of supernatural love. Other means still are the right use of what we call sacramentals, for example, holy water and various liturgical prayers, such as the Confiteor. There is, especially, assistance at Holy Mass and the reception of Holy Communion: for, as the Council of Trent says, through Holy Communion we are "purified from our daily faults" (Session XIII, ch. 2). For the soul that is honestly striving, God's mercy has indeed made it very easy to atone for past faults and failings.

"Venial sins, which do not separate man from God and into which we frequently fall, are rightly and with profit accused in Confession, as is the practice of pious Christians" (Session XVII, ch. 5).

The Advantages of Frequent Confession

The "profit" of the confession of venial sins comes above all else from the fact that when we go to Confession, we receive a sacrament.... It should be noted too that it is not upon the sins committed themselves that the action of the sacrament falls but rather upon our **interior aversion of heart from sin**; it is this that the power of the sacrament **takes hold of**, as it were, and **elevates** in order to unite us to God through grace.

Frequent Confession is about the "it is the strengthening and deepening of the supernatural life already existing in the soul and an increase of the love of God." primarily positive in its effects: **it strengthens the supernatural life of the soul, increases sanctifying grace, and, along with this, gives actual grace, which stimulates our will to acts of love of God and of contrition for our sins.** Such sentiments of love tend to uproot venial sins and cast them out of the soul, just as light dispels and does away with darkness.

The value of the confession of venial sins lies furthermore in this: **that the power of the sacrament not merely blots out these sins but also undoes their evil consequences in the soul more fully than is the case when venial sins are forgiven outside Confession.** Thus, for instance, when venial sins are forgiven in Confession a greater part of the temporal punishment due to them is forgiven than would be outside the sacrament with the same sentiments of contrition.

But especially the sacrament of Penance cures the soul from the **weakness** that follows venial sin and from the **weariness** and **coldness** toward the things of God and the **inclination toward worldliness** that venial sin brings; it delivers the soul from its **reawakened inordinate inclinations** and **instincts** and from the domination of concupiscence: and all this by its sacramental power.

Moreover, the confession of venial sins gives the soul an **interior freshness**, a new aspiration and impetus toward **self-surrender to God** and toward the cultivation of the supernatural life: results that are not usually produced at all when venial sin is forgiven outside Confession.

What we call the sacramental grace of the sacrament of Penance-the grace that belongs to this sacrament and that is not given and cannot be given by any other sacrament: is sanctifying grace with the special power and function of remedying the debility of soul and the lack of vigor and courage and energy, caused by venial sin, and of strengthening the soul and removing the obstacles that the working of grace encounters in it.

Another important value and advantage of frequent Confession is that in it our venial sins are confessed to the priest as the representative of the Church and thus, in a sense, to the Church itself, to the Christian community. ... But by his venial sin... he has also acted against the interests of the Christian community, the Church. His sin is a spot and wrinkle (Eph 5: 27) on the garment of the Bride of Christ, an obstacle preventing the charity poured forth in the Church by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5: 5) from flowing freely in all the members.

What is the goal of Frequent Confession of Venial Sins? It looks to the future.

Precisely by its frequency it aims at an eminently positive goal: at strengthening and invigorating our will in the struggle to acquire true Christian virtue, to become perfectly pure and pleasing in God's sight, to put the supernatural man in full control, to make the spirit reign over the impulses and passions and weaknesses of the old man.

- Foster ever more within ourselves a Christlike disposition
- a Christian hatred of everything in us that displeases God.
- develop a spirit of Christian penance and atonement

- Increase the desire to make satisfaction for our own sins & for others'.
- Inculcates a readiness to engage sacrifices, sufferings, difficulties, & trials that the Lord may allow to come upon us.

What's the relationship between Frequent Confession and Spiritual Direction?

Today most people look to their confessor for their spiritual direction.

According to St. Alphonsus Liguori, one of the principal duties of a confessor is to give spiritual direction to his penitents. However, it would be a mistake to think that spiritual direction is essentially something connected with Confession or with frequent Confession. Nor is it correct to associate Confession with spiritual direction to the extent of almost overlooking the sacramental nature of Confession and putting its usefulness as a means of directing souls in the first place, as indeed sometimes happens.

2. Can a person confess again sins-mortal sins or venial sins-that he has already duly confessed?

Now, once a sin has been committed it remains a fact always that sin has been committed, even after it has been fully pardoned. And it is possible for a person again and again to turn away interiorly from such a sin, to condemn it, to be sorry for it, to resolve to avoid it for the future and to amend his life, to do acts of penance for it. **There is no reason why such interior dispositions, as often as they are present, should not be elevated by the power of Christ in the sacrament of Penance and made fruitful of grace.**

For also in this case, where sins that have already been confessed and forgiven are confessed again, the sacrament produces its essential effects: it increases sanctifying grace, which, from its very nature as the fruit of the sacrament of Penance, blots out sin if such happens to be on the soul. The grace produced by the sacrament of Penance cannot be conceived without reference to sin: to the sin it would take away were the soul in a state of sin. **Therefore, the words of the priest, "I absolve thee," have their full meaning even when they do nothing but increase grace and do not actually take away sin for the simple reason that there is no sin there to take away. Hence the Church teaches that sins that have already been confessed are "sufficient matter" for Confession (Code of Canon Law, 1917, canon 902). And Pope Benedict XI in 1304 declared that it is**

"salutary" to confess again sins that have been confessed previously (Denzinger, Enchirid. Symb., no. 470).

The 2 Goals of Frequent Confession: the purification of the soul from venial sin the confirmation of the will to attain perfection & union with God.

Frequent Confession presupposes and demands an earnest striving after purity of soul and virtue and after union with God and with Christ, in other words, a real interior life. The person who is satisfied with merely avoiding mortal sin, who cares nothing about and pays no attention to venial sin and definite unfaithfulness and failings, who has not made up his mind to struggle earnestly against these: such a person is not likely to profit by frequent Confession. In other words, **frequent Confession is incompatible with a life of tepidity**; indeed, from its very nature it is one of the most powerful means of overcoming tepidity and of keeping it far away. If it is properly practiced, it necessarily forces one to strive after virtue and perfection and to fight against even the smallest deliberate sin or unfaithfulness or negligence.

Perfect souls seek and find in frequent Confession the strength and the courage needed for the pursuit of virtue and for a life lived for God and in union with him. Such people seek before all else **perfect purity of soul**. They feel deeply sorry if they offend their loving Father by unfaithfulness of any kind. They have always before their eyes Christ, the Bridegroom of their souls, full of beauty and unspotted purity and holiness. They want to share his life, to live it with him, to continue it, to be other Christs. **Urged on by their love of the Father and by their love for Jesus, in whose likeness they wish to grow daily, they go frequently to Confession.** It is the holy love of Christ and of God that impels such souls to receive the sacrament of Penance frequently. Frequent Confession is, indeed, a necessity for them.

Less perfect souls seek and find in frequent Confession an excellent means to make effective their fight against **imperfections**, against **daily failings**, against **inordinate inclinations** and **practices**, and especially against **spiritual weariness** and the **danger of discouragement**.

Pope Pius XII *Mystici Corporis* (June 29, 1943):

"It is clear that in these deceptive doctrines [of unsound quietism] the mystery of which we are treating becomes directed, not to the spiritual profit of the faithful, but to their unhappy ruin. Equally disastrous in its effects is the false contention that the frequent confession of venial sins is not a practice to be greatly esteemed, and that preference is to be given to that general confession which the Bride of Christ, together with her children united to her in the Lord, makes daily through the priests who are about to go up to the altar of God. That there are many very laudable ways in which these sins can be expiated is perfectly true. But for a constant and speedy advancement in the paths of virtue, we highly recommend the pious practice of frequent Confession, introduced by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; for by this means we grow in a true knowledge of ourselves and in Christian humility, bad habits are uprooted, spiritual negligence and apathy are prevented, the conscience is purified and the will strengthened, salutary spiritual direction is obtained, and grace is increased by the efficacy of the sacrament itself. Therefore, those among the young clergy who are diminishing esteem for frequent Confession are to know that the enterprise upon which they have embarked is alien to the Spirit of Christ and most detrimental to the Mystical Body of our Savior."

How do we begin Making a Better Confession?

Of Central importance: Firm Purpose of Amendment

1. Inseparable from genuine contrition; is an essential and strictly necessary constituent part of Confession.
2. Minimum is wanting to better & **not actively desiring to do it again** w/ sorrow for having offended God or fear of eternal punishment.
3. To really grow we must have a "**horror of sin**" which means a resolve to avoid or at least to fight earnestly against this or that particular venial sin.
4. With venial sins we must try to **at least lessen their number/frequency** not to avoid absolutely, as it has to be with regard to mortal sins.
5. St. Francis de Sales calls it an **abuse to confess a sin in Confession unless one's mind is made up to avoid it** in the future or at least to strive earnestly against it (An Introduction to the Devout Life, part 2, ch. 19).

6. **Don't confess failings or unfaithfulness or sins of frailty that they are not fully resolved to avoid or at least to strive against.**
 - a. WHY? Because we only have so much internal bandwidth with which to fight against evil.
 - b. Our guiding principle: **a little, but well done; a little done earnestly and with purpose and perseverance. Divide and conquer!**
 - c. **Limit confession very few points**, often to one single failing against which they are determined to strive;
 - d. **1 thing to which you are resolved to pay special attention.**
 - e. Have a **positive purpose of amendment**: ie do a particular virtue.

7. Our purpose of amendment must always be something practical.
 - a. **Don't say,**
 - i. *"I will never again be distracted at prayer." Or*
 - ii. *"I will never again lose my temper";*
 - iii. *"I will never again be irritable";*
 - iv. *"I will never again entertain proud thoughts"; and so on.*
 - v. **These resolutions are impossible to do & increase distress.**
 - b. **Do say:** *"I will not deliberately give way to distractions or irritation,;"*
 - i. *"As soon as I recognize that I am distracted, I will recollect myself"; "As soon as I recognize that I am becoming irritated, I will make an act of patience or of conformity with God's will"; "Whenever I experience something unpleasant, pray 'Lord, help me,' or 'For love of you, Lord, I will bear this.'"*
 - ii. **If a person attempts more than this, his purpose of amendment is doomed to failure, and only disappointment and discouragement will result.**

8. Purpose of amendment must be adapted to actual circumstances/needs.
 - a. What can I do? What do I do? What is possible for me?
 - b. Don't change your plan in every Confession. Rather renew & make more firm and more solidly established in every Confession until the fault has been energetically attacked for some time and its dominance notably shaken.
 - c. It take a long time for a new virtuous habit to be made.
 - d. And for this the particular examination of conscience and our daily meditation can help a great deal too.

NB: We must always take into account the important truth of faith that, even when in the state of grace, **we cannot "avoid all venial sins during the whole of**

life, without a special privilege from God, such as the Church holds our Blessed Lady received" (Council of Trent, Session VI, ch. 23).

Better Confessing of Sins:

"Venial sins may rightly & with profit be told in Confession; but they can also be withheld without any fault & expiated by various other means" (Session XIV, ch. 5).

If there's no deliberation, Don't Confess it.

- The number and the aggravating circumstances of venial sins need not be confessed; but it is a good thing in the case of our more serious and deeply rooted faults to make such a reckoning about them and to include it in our accusation. An instance of exaggerating circumstances would be, for example, to show oneself uncharitable immediately after Holy Communion or to show oneself uncharitable toward a benefactor.

"Imperfections"- (When things could be done better) - **can** be confessed.

- They help give context. **But NOT indeliberate and involuntary distractions in prayer, manifestations of impatience, uncharitable thoughts and feelings, aversions, rash judgments, and such things, insofar as they are really indeliberate and involuntary, they are not matter for Confession.**

"We only substitute our own notions for the law of God insofar as we consider it our duty to recite a whole litany of venial sins with all particulars and details. To go into all these details is quite unnecessary. All that results from it is the anxiety and scruples that come entirely from having omitted, when it was impossible to do otherwise, something that could have been passed over without any fault whatsoever on our part" (Lehen, Weg zum inneren Frieden).

In the effort to confess all our venial sins, there is, besides much ignorance and lack of understanding, a good deal of self-seeking and pride.

- Knowledge of the root causes of venial sins, especially of one's predominant fault, and of the occasions of certain faults can be useful for the confessor.

Advanced Methods of Confessing

Center on one definite fault that has occurred since the previous Confession,

"I have deliberately judged and spoken uncharitably. During my whole past life I have sinned much against fraternal charity in thought and in word by uncharitable judgments and I now accuse myself of all these sins of my whole life. I accuse myself also of all the other sins and faults of which I have been guilty before God."

Clear and concrete purpose of amendment: "I am going to see to it that I overcome this habit of (deliberately) judging & speaking uncharitably and that I get rid of it altogether."

Center on one of the commandments or inordinate passion/inclination:

- *"I am easily irritated. I lose my temper quickly with other people over various things. I talk and criticize and allow aversions and bad humor to develop in me. I accuse myself also of having sinned often in this way in my past life. And I accuse myself of all the other sins and failings of which I have been guilty before God."*
- This makes the confessor's job easy.

Accusing oneself of all the sins of one's life, against a commandment,

- "I have sinned frequently through impatience, lack of self-control, sensuality, acting from caprice. I accuse myself also of all the other sins of my whole life, mortal and venial."

Examination of Conscience

As St. Pius X: "**What a pity if in this connection also the words of Christ were to the point: 'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light!' With what diligence do we see the latter attending to their affairs! How frequently they compare their profits and their losses! How exact and careful is their bookkeeping!**"

The examination of conscience is absolutely necessary for the purification of the soul and for progress in virtue. Without regular examination of conscience we never get to know our faults properly. Rather, they increase; evil inclinations and inordinate passions become stronger and may seriously threaten the life of grace. **The general examination of conscience** passes under review all the happenings of the day that has gone by: thought, feelings, words, and deeds. When this examination of conscience is made regularly it is not very difficult; a person

usually knows his customary failings, and so he discovers without much trouble whatever faults he may have committed in the course of the day.

- **Pay attention to any unusual lapse that has occurred to one who is earnestly striving after virtue.**

Particular examination of conscience is looking in depth at 1 particular sin. In selecting faults for attack, we ought to begin with faults that annoy or irritate others. Then we can proceed to interior faults: our own faults of character, the weak points in our makeup. **Look @ positive acts too, which is better b/c it helps us hit at what we are most focused. Excessive focus on failures result in spiritual diseases, scruples, dejection, spiritual depression, and abandonment of the spiritual life (despair)**

Ask the question: "Where is my heart?" What is the prevailing disposition that determines its attitude, the real mainspring that keeps all the rest of its movement going?"

- It may, perhaps, be some long-existent tendency: some attachment or bitterness or aversion. It may be just a momentary impression, but one so deep and strong that it has affected the heart for long afterward.
- **This shows us what is important or essential in our pursuit of perfection; it keeps us continually contrite; it fills us with thankfulness if we find that our interior dispositions are rightly ordered; it makes us pray for grace and strength.**

Don't look at all of your sins/faults since our last Confession.

- Did we carry out our resolutions well?
- Did anything unusual happen?
- **Confession's not a quest to find more sins to better beat one's breast; confession is a quest to find more Grace to better beat them Pearly Gates.**

Other points I will or should cover:

- **Begin Confession w/ your state in life** & always be very specific about it.
 - General Age/grade level, Sex, Vocational Status/Discernment, # of kids and general age spread, convey massive info to the confessor about how to best help you overcome the struggles you bring.
 - The Priest cannot always tell male/female patients apart. You don't have to say I am a boy/girl or male/female, which may be awkward for both sides, but other gendered identifiers husband/wife or

son/daughter etc. are very helpful. If you don't, don't be offended if the confessor misidentifies you.

- **Best practice: tell your Moral Sins 1st** w/ most embarrassing 1st.
 - This helps overcome pride/shame or the tendency to try to hide it.
- **If it is a former sin**, clearly indicate that fact in a summary at the end (or beginning if you have to do so).
 - It is best to group these former sins together for clarity's sake or the confessor will be confused and you will bog down the line by confessing in a meandering way.
- **The goal should be to make sure that the priest never needs to ask clarifying questions.**
 - State things so clearly he has all the information without giving him all the unnecessary narrative storytime better saved for your posthumous memoirs. He can ask pointed questions if need be. Your confessor knows what he needs to know to help you.
- **If you have a Question about Spiritual Matters – always and for the most part – Seek this outside of Confession.**
 - If the line is empty, maybe ask it in the confessional, but be brief.
 - State clearly that you have ___ # of questions at the beginning. If the priest deems he has time at the end he will ask what they are.
 - For the sake of the line, do not force the priest to engage in these things. His good heart will always be to help you here, but it is a selfish thing for you to rob others of this precious time, when there are so many souls falling into hell because of their Mortal Sins. You do not bear responsibility for their sins or failure to confess, but this is a serious lack of consideration.
 - To twist the knife a little bit... Remember what Our Lady of Fatima said to the Shepherd Children, "***You know that many souls go to hell because there is none who pray for them.***"
 - Kindly say a prayer in reparation, for all those souls you have delayed or prevented from confession by bogging down the line with your questions during confession that should have waited for a more opportune moment.

Fr Bernabe's 3 B's of Confession³

1. **Be Brief!** – give the kind, #, no narrative
2. **Be Brutal!** – Say the sin w/ generalities or euphemisms; No excuses; Clearly **Accuse** yourself; Say only the details that make it worse than the confessor would naturally comprehend.
 - a. **Ex. Don't say the general sin if it was**
 - i. adultery w/ a sister-in-law; murdering a father/child;
 - ii. cursing a priest/religious sister/pope;
 - iii. stealing from the church/beggar;
 - iv. giving a negative review of this Theology Night or not smashing the Like Button & sharing this video with all your friends and family, which was obviously really great, right?
3. **Be Gone!** – after confession don't dilly or dally or start a conversation w/ Fr.
 - a. Step out. Leave the door open. Go do your penance immediately.
 - b. Ask a question of Father only if 1) no one is around and 2) you're the last and 3) there is plenty of time left for confession.
 - c. Don't steal grace from others! Doing this is matter for confession... and you just done got all cleaned up squeaky clean. Now you're all sullied like a sow in her Sunday best. sad⁴.
 - d. Tell the priest if there is no one left in line if it is close to the start of the next Mass, benediction, or after the close of confession.
 - e. Yes, this is a reiteration of the 1st B because it really is that important.

³ NB: I mayn't have naming rights for this – maybe it's public domain – but the alliteration is beautiful.

⁴ NB: Alliteration is so much fun. Try it some time. Life is better this way.

Some 20 Confession Tips from FrZ

(From Fr. John Zhulsdorf's blog accessed many ages ago)

We should...

- 1) ... examine our consciences regularly and thoroughly;
- 2) ... wait our turn in line patiently;
- 3) ... come at the time confessions are scheduled, not a few minutes before they are to end;
- 4) ... speak distinctly but never so loudly that we might be overheard;
- 5) ... state our sins clearly and briefly without rambling;
- 6) ... confess all mortal sins in number and kind;
- 7) ... listen carefully to the advice the priest gives;
- 8) ... confess our own sins and not someone else's;
- 9) ... carefully listen to and remember the penance and be sure to understand it;
- 10) ... use a regular formula for confession so that it is familiar and comfortable;
- 11) ... never be afraid to say something "embarrassing" ... just say it;
- 12) ... never worry that the priest thinks we are jerks.... he is usually impressed by our courage;
- 13) ... never fear that the priest will not keep our confession secret... he is bound by the Seal;
- 14) ... never confess "tendencies" or "struggles" ... just sins;
- 15) ... never leave the confessional before the priest has finished giving absolution;
- 16) ... memorize an Act of Contrition;
- 17) ... answer the priest's questions briefly if he asks for a clarification;
- 18) ... ask questions if we can't understand what he means when he tells us something;
- 19) ... keep in mind that sometimes priests can have bad days just like we do;
- 20) ... remember that priests must go to confession too ... they know what we are going through.