**Confession Reflections**

**Wounded by Sin**

*If we say, ‘We are without sin,’ we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, ‘We have not sinned,’ we make him a liar, and his word is not in us* *(1 John 1:8-10)*

As the Apostle John writes, we are all stained by sin. This should be obvious to us if we look honestly at our lives; if we do not deceive ourselves we know that we have failed to live the way we should. Yet there is still hope, for God is faithful and forgiving, if we would acknowledge our sins and ask forgiveness.

**Forgiven by Christ, and by His Priests**

How do we ask forgiveness? Not in a vague or generic way, but we say we are sorry and ask forgiveness for each one of our sins in confession. We confess to a priest, because Jesus Christ has given the priest in his office and ministry the authority to forgive sins.

Jesus Christ shed his precious blood in order that we might be redeemed. Only God can forgive sins, and yet he has chosen to share this authority with his priests in order to show his mercy to all men. This is a great gift, for it means that we can always find forgiveness, no matter where we live or what age we live in. We need only look for a priest.

**A Second Plank**

Baptism is the sacrament in which sin is first washed clean. Yet we sin again, and find ourselves in need of washing again. This is the purpose of Confession. Our sins have done so much damage, to ourselves, to our relationships, and to those around us. Sin causes a great wound in our hearts that is beyond our capacity to heal. Only Christ can heal this wound, and he gives us his mercy and healing grace in confession. In Jesus Christ we find the way which we lost.

That is why the Church Fathers in the second century described Baptism as a plank to which we cling after the shipwreck which is sin and the loss of grace. When we heedlessly toss aside that first plank of baptism by sinning again we will drown, unless we cling to the second plank which is Confession.

**Penance, by the Sinner and by the Priest**

Confession is the way in which Christ has chosen to distribute his forgiveness to Christians. This forgiveness is given incredibly freely, all you have to do is ask! *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed (James 5:16)*

It is a little known fact, but most priests will do a penance (that is, prayers or fasting) for each person whose confession they hear. They will pray for you, they do not sit as harsh judges but patiently wait to give you absolution and forgive your sins. And when they act as priests of Christ to forgive your sins, these are the beautiful words you will hear:

*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and the resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*