



On Divine Mercy Sunday I spoke about "perfect contrition" because our bishop has told the faithful that the Sacrament of Confession will not be available for the near future... and that a good act of contrition and a wish to avoid sin in the future will be good enough for Catholics to receive what they need from God.

That conflicts with my theological training, understanding and practice in regard to mortal sin... but he is bishop and as chief shepherd, God will hold him (and me) responsible for the guidance we give God's flock.

Theoretically, I know our bishop is correct. This release of grace occurs when contrition arises from a love by which God is loved above all else and this type of contrition is called 'perfect. Perfect contrition "remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins." I freely and willingly committed the sin. I deeply regret my decision, the act and its consequences which now disgust me. I have learned from my betrayal. To the core of my being, I will never intentionally do this act again. "I would rather die than commit that sin again." Murder, adultery, and apostasy (public denial of the faith) are the more common sins I am aware of that may lead a person to perfect contrition. This type of contrition usually relates to an exception to our normal behavior (an anomaly) and others would be surprised to learn of it because it isn't something they would expect from the "me" they know.

The Catholic Catechism amended "perfect contrition" to include the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible. So, if you are forgiven and graced... but still need to go to confession to be absolved and graced... then something must be imperfect in most self-declared perfect contrition?

Imperfect contrition, also known as attrition— sorrow for one's sins based upon a lukewarm love of God (despite my words, my choices in this area show I desire other things more... but a part of me does want to love God more) or that I got caught and fear punishment (I am truly sorry that I got caught will my hand in

the cookie jar.), and perhaps even the punishment of hell — is sufficient for a priest to absolve you in the confessional, but not enough to obtain the forgiveness of mortal sin without sacramental confession. Evidence of imperfect contrition is that you keep on being attracted to this temptation, you place yourself in a near occasion of sin and may commit the sin again.

So, this is why I can only personally testify to having done 3 acts of perfect contrition in my life. Unfortunately, my "usual" and "habitual sins" as well as other sins which I avoid but am still attracted by their Siren's voices and require greater prudence and attentiveness... are not yet at the level of perfect contrition. For if I have perfect contrition, I will never freely and willingly commit that sin again. For clarity, the thought or crossing my mind is not enough to show imperfection... but choosing to fuel the fire of my imagination and collaborating with the temptation is.

This is why I don't consider Confession a non-essential. It is an amazing resource for people committed to living in the Spirit of Jesus and becoming more Christ-like. I've never heard of a successful "do-it-yourself" heart surgery or transplant. We need some one to help hold us accountable. (such as going to a weigh-in as part of a program or having an exercise partner) We tend to have distorted views of ourselves. We may deceive ourselves and think we are doing great ("not even your best friend will tell you") or that we are a failure when we might be blind to gradual improvement ("You've grown so much!").

St. Paul needed Ananias and Barnabas assistance in helping "put on Christ." And did you notice that Jesus generally sent his disciples out in pairs? (How might things have been different if Judas had been sent with someone else?) Disciples need other disciples to ensure that we are following "Christ's Way" and not a self-justifying "my way."

Perfect contrition is possible, but rare. As Jesus breathed on His Apostles and gave them the power to forgive or not forgive, I would rather trust in the resource Jesus has given us to allow us to accept His mercy and grace, than be arrogant enough to believe I can do it without the Sacrament of Reconciliation Jesus has given to us. That peace Jesus breathed on them I have only found through the Sacrament of Confession.

A good act of contrition and a wish to avoid sin in the future is a good start but lacks the power of Christ's sacrament. Maybe this is a Corona lesson all Catholics should remember or learn regarding sin and the outward sign instituted by Christ to give the grace of absolution and reconciliation with God and His Church.



