



The Raising of a sinner, dead in mortal sin, to the life of sanctifying grace requires a miracle of grace equal to when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after four days in the grave.

On the Preparation We Ought to Make for Confession

by Richard Challoner, 1807

Consider that Confession, without due dispositions, will only serve for our greater condemnation: so that the great business of a sinner, that desires to receive such an absolution from his sins, as may be ratified in Heaven, must be to procure the necessary dispositions, by making a due preparation for confession. And as these dispositions must come from the Giver of all good gifts, and as the sinner has removed himself to a great distance from Him, amongst the husks of swine: the first part of his preparation must be to begin to turn to God, with a great sense of the misery of his present condition, by fervent prayer and desire. The raising up of a soul to life, which is dead to God by mortal sin, is, in effect no less a miracle of the divine power, than the calling of Lazarus out of his grave, after he had been four days dead and buried; there can be then no expectation of succeeding in so arduous an undertaking, without taking Him along with us, by earnest prayer, who alone can raise the dead. Now my soul, the most essential conditions of a good confession are, a change of heart, and a perfect sincerity in the accusation of Ourselves, even of those sins which we are most ashamed of; and who but God can change the heart of man, or bring him to overcome his pride, by a full confession of his shameful sins? Or how can so great a grace as this is, be procured without ardent prayer?

Consider that another necessary part of the preparation for confession is, to find out, by a serious examination, the true state of our interior. Alas! it is one of our greatest misfortunes not to know ourselves, and it is much to be feared, that many pass their whole lives under the guilt of mortal sin; pride, envy, hatred, detraction, of omissions of essential duties, &c., which for want of a serious and impartial examination of the true state of their consciences, they neither confess, nor repent of, nor amend. Hence their Confessions are null, their Communion sacrilegious; they go on all their lifetime in their sins, and they die in their sins. O my soul, see this be not thy case; see thou labor in earnest to know thyself; see thou examine seriously thy whole interior, that thou mayest be able, to discover, by the light of God, which thou must implore, those lurking evils, which thy busy self-love, or the false maxims and practices of deluded worldlings, may otherwise disguise under false pretenses, and hide from thy eyes.

Consider that the principal and most necessary preparation for a good Confession, is true Contrition; that is, a hearty sorrow and detestation for our sins, by which we have offended so good a God; with a firm resolution of a thorough amendment for the time to come, and of making the best satisfaction we can, for our past offenses. This is the most essential part, both of the virtue, and of the Sacrament of Penance. This we must take the most pains about, when we are to go to Confession. This we must abhor to procure by serious and deep considerations of the most moving truths, and by repeated and fervent prayer; and never leave off knocking at the door of the divine

mercy, till He is pleased to open to us, and to touch our hearts. Alas! none but He can bring forth the waters of true compunction out of these hard rocks.

Conclude to be diligent in every branch of this necessary preparation, as often as thou pretendest to make thy peace with God, by Confession: lest otherwise, instead of obtaining a discharge, thou increase thy debt.

On the Motives of Repentance

Consider the motives we have to repent for our sins, from the consideration of the filthiness of that ugly monster sin, and of its heinous enormity in the sight of God. Mortal sin is infinitely odious to Him, because infinitely opposite to His sovereign goodness, and to all his divine attributes. It is infinitely pernicious to our souls, it makes them like very devils in the eyes of God. It robs us of divine grace, which is the true life of the soul, and of all our good, it is a poison, which, in a moment, brings present death, and condemns us to a second and eternal death. It is an evil so black, so odious, so hideous, that hell itself has nothing worse. It leaves behind it a cursed stain, the perpetual fuel of the merciless flames of hell, which endless ages will never be able to efface. Alas! my poor soul, how wretched then has thy case been all this while thou hast been in sin! How ugly and abominable hast thou been in the sight of God and His angels! for the foulest creature upon earth is a beauty, in comparison with a soul in sin. Ah! couldst thou but see thyself as thou art, in this wretched state, the very sight would strike thee dead! O detest then this abominable monster, and spare no pains to get rid of it.

Consider the woes that are pronounced in Scripture against unrepentant sinners, and the judgments of God that are perpetually hanging over their heads and threatening them on all sides, both with temporal and eternal evils. Ah what good can they expect, who have made God their enemy, and are fighting against him! He holds the thread of their life in his hands, which they are provoking him to break: and if he breaks it, in that moment they drop into hell. They have made themselves slaves of the devil, they are possessed by him, and are at his mercy, who knows not what mercy is. Death is always following them at the heels, and a sudden, or, at least an unprovided death, is commonly the reward of their presumption. Hell below opens wide her jaws, and is gaping to swallow them up, and thousands of them are daily going down into that bottomless pit, “where the worm never dies, and the fire is never extinguished,” Mark ix. 43. Ah, who can bear everlasting fire! Who can endure to burn forever! Fly then, my soul, from sin. Detest that evil, which can, and will, without repentance, condemn thee to hell.

Consider that sin makes a dreadful separation between the soul and God, which is begun here, and extends to all eternity hereafter. “You are not my people,” says he, Osee. i. 9. “and I will not be yours.” Alas! the loss of God, which begins from mortal sin, is the very worst of all the ingredients of hell. Sin is a rebellion against this Sovereign Good, a blasphemous preference of Satan before Him, a sacrilegious attempt to rob Him of His glory, and to divest Him of His kingdom. It is murdering both the Son of God, and our own souls. The folly and madness of it, as well as the monstrous presumption and treason, is infinite. O how much then does that evil deserve to be detested, which robs us of an infinite good, which otherwise should have been ours for all eternity, and brings us nothing in exchange, but endless and infinite evils?

Conclude to labour, with all thy power, to drive away sin from thy soul by penance, and God will return to thee, and be thine forever.

Other Motives of Contrition

Consider the monstrous ingratitude that is found in sin. God is our first beginning and our last end, He has given us our whole being, out of pure love, having no need at all of us, He has made us, and made us for Himself, He has thought of us from all eternity, He has loved us from all eternity, and has prepared for us a happy eternity in the enjoyment of Himself. In the meantime He is ever loading us with His benefits, His eyes are always upon us, He preserves us from innumerable evils, all His other works are appointed to serve us, His very angels, by His orders, wait upon us, His own Son came down from heaven to redeem us. O reflect, my soul, on the particular obligations thou hast to His divine goodness! How He preserved thee in thy mother's womb, and brought thee safe to the water of baptism, where He washed thee from sin, made thee His child, and heir to His kingdom, how He gave thee an early knowledge of Himself, and of His heavenly truths, how He favoured thee with many graces, and opportunities of good, beyond thousands, how often He has admitted thee to His sacraments, how He has borne with thy repeated provocations and treasons, for so many years, and, notwithstanding all thy unworthiness and ingratitude, has been still thy constant benefactor. Alas! how many are now howling and burning in hell, for the like sins to those thou hast so often committed, and how mercifully has He all this while dealt with thee! O detest then this sinful life thou hast hitherto led, and all thy past ingratitude, and now at least, with thy whole heart, return to thy God.

Consider, my soul, what thy sins have cost thy dear Redeemer, the innocent Lamb of God. His whole life was a continual suffering, but what dreadful torments did He endure for thee in His Passion and Death! Call over in your mind the particulars of His sufferings, (which we have seen elsewhere) from His agony and bloody sweat, even to His expiring upon the cross, and learn from that multitude and variety of torments, willingly endured for thy sins, how much He abhors sin, and how much He loves thee. For he had thee in His heart all this while, and for thee He was weeping and praying, bleeding and dying, to teach thee to return love for love, and to detest thy sins, which have crucified thy God. See then what motives thou hast for contrition, from the remembrance of the Passion of thy Saviour.

Consider the innumerable motives we have to love God, and consequently to detest our sins, as infinitely opposite to His divine goodness. He is infinitely good in Himself, infinitely beautiful and charming, the overflowing ocean of all goodness and beauty, ravishing all that are so happy as to see Him, so that they can never cease to love Him. His mercy, His bounty, His wisdom, His truth, are infinitely charming, all perfections are infinite in Him. No tongue can express, no heart can conceive, the incomprehensible greatness and multitude of His attractions. All created beauty and perfection quite disappear, and dwindle away to a pure nothing, when compared with Him. He is infinitely good to us, the happiness of heaven consists in seeing, loving, and enjoying Him. All our good is from Him, and in Him; He is our sovereign and universal Good; the Being of our being, the life and the light of our souls. He is our Maker, our Redeemer, our Father, our Friend, our Spouse, our God and our All. To love Him is our greatest honour, our greatest interest, our greatest pleasure, it is the source of all our happiness, both here and hereafter. All these reasons oblige us to love God, all these motives strongly call upon us to detest and to repent of our sins, because by them we have offended so good a God.

Conclude, if thou wouldst secure to thy soul the remission of thy sins, to seek it by a repentance and contrition enlivened by love. Remember what our Lord said of that glorious penitent, (St. Luke vii. 47.) “Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.” Go thou, in like manner, to the feet of thy Saviour with penitential tears proceeding from love, and He will pronounce the like sentence in thy favour.

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