

How to Allow Love to Conquer in Your Life

With every prayer, every good work, every sincere Confession, every time we assist at Holy Mass, every act of charity toward our neighbor—with every one of these the Mystical Body receives an influx of life, another outpouring of the Holy Spirit and divine charity in her members, and consequently a closer union with Christ the Head of the Mystical Body. In fact, a holy Carmelite theologian once said that every Mass is like another beat of our Lord's Heart, pumping life blood through His Mystical Body.

As a priest, one remark I often hear is that God does not seem to care about us, that He is too aloof and watches us wallow in trials without lending a hand to help us. Well, it is precisely in the sacraments of the Church that He reaches out to us. In fact, one Swiss Cardinal, Cardinal Charles Journet, once said that the 7 sacraments of the Church are like God's hands reaching out to us across space and time, in order to touch us and heal us, to communicate His love to us. So, if we come with humility and faith to receive the sacraments, Christ will shed His grace and love on us through material realities: water, oil, wine, bread. We have no excuse not to come.

That being said, seeing that so many today neglect one of the greatest sacraments God has given us, the Sacrament of Confession, and seeing that so many Catholics, even practicing Catholics, do not know how to make a good Confession, it's not a bad idea to take a minute and simply review how to make a good Confession.

1. Go at least once a month; once a week is better. We need God's forgiveness, but also the grace to grow in holiness. The sacraments are the best source of God's grace.
2. Prepare well with a good examination of conscience. If you need to, write your sins down on a piece of paper. Priests are used to this and will not think you're strange if you come to Confession with your sins written down. But do not begin to think about what you have done wrong only after you enter the confessional.
3. Begin with the Sign of the Cross and the words, *Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been _____ since my last Confession.* It is better to stick to the formula; those who don't often forget to mention how long it has been since their last Confession. The priest needs to know this, even though it is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament.
4. Mention all mortal sins first. You must say how many times you have committed the

mortal sin, to the best of your ability. Do not make the priest have to ask you how many times. This just adds extra embarrassment for you. Failure to mention the amount of times a mortal sin has been committed can make the sacrament invalid. This is the most common mistake made in Confession. It happens very often.

5. Be straightforward in confessing your sins. Say what you have done. Do not say things like, *I'm struggling with this or that.* or *I need to work more on something.* This means nothing to the priest! Be precise. Mention any circumstances which affect the sin. For instance, to say that you sinned against charity could mean many different things. Did you say an unkind word or did you mow down 30 people on the way home from work? Don't make the priest ask questions. If you do not know if something is a mortal sin, ask the priest.
6. If you have no mortal sins to confess, thanks be to God! Confess then at least one venial sin. Remember, all venial sins are forgiven in a Confession, even the ones you do not mention. So you do not have to mention all venial sins.
7. When confessing your sins, don't get sidetracked with other things. If you want in-depth spiritual direction, ask if you can talk to the priest after he gives you absolution and the confession ends. Do not put the priest in a possible awkward position by placing an hour of spiritual direction under the sacramental seal. Certainly, you can be sure that all priests respect the confidentiality of even spiritual direction; but the sacramental seal is supposed to be for the sacramental Confession alone. Do not abuse it.
8. Once you have confessed, listen to any words of advice the priest may want to give. Accept the penance humbly, and perform it as soon as possible so you don't forget to do it. Performing the penance is an essential part of the sacrament and must be done in order to receive forgiveness.

Remember, we are called to something quite extraordinary, to be united to God in a intimate union of love, starting here below at the moment of our baptism and coming to complete fruition in heaven. And the only thing standing in our way is sin and Satan. So make use of every means that God has given us through His Church. God loves us very much and has done and will do anything it takes to bring us home to Himself. If you start to forget this fact, just look at a crucifix; but more about that tomorrow.