



The Seven Sacraments: Confession

1. Opening Prayer: *Begin with the sign of the cross. Then:*

V/ Come Holy Spirit,

R/ Fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love.

V/ Send forth your spirit and they shall be created;

R/ And you will renew the face of the earth.

V/ Let us pray:

Lord, by the light of the Holy Spirit you have taught the hearts of your faithful. In the same Spirit, help us to relish what is right and rejoice always in his consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

2. Reading and Discussing of the Scenario: *Go around the group having a different person read each paragraph out loud. Then read out loud the Applications. Then take some time to discuss them together, trying to go deep into the issues raised but staying as practical (i.e. having to do with how you live your daily life, not with abstract theory) as possible. This should take about half-an-hour.*

Scenario 38

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When Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray, one of the seven things he told them to ask for was, "lead us not into temptation," in other words, "don't let us give in to temptation." Certainly he would not have included that in the Our Father unless he thought we would face temptation. But if he is all-powerful, why didn't he just get rid of temptation? Why didn't he make it easy for us to lead perfect lives? Just as in baptism he cleanses our souls from the guilt of original sin, he could also free us from all attraction to evil. He could, but he doesn't.

God does not want to populate heaven with robots. If he were to make it impossible for us to sin, we would no longer be human beings, who, by definition, are morally free creatures, able to choose between good and evil. God wants to fill heaven with his friends, with people who stick by Christ's side because they choose to, because they recognize his greatness and want to be with him. Therefore, here on earth he allows us to face temptations as a way for us to show and grow in our loyalty to him, our love for him. He will not, however, let us be tempted unfairly: "No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it." (1Corinthians 10:13)

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Even so, sometimes we fall. The devil is real, as the New Testament makes clear. (In the Gospels alone, the word “demon” is used thirty-two times, “devil” and “Satan” both appear fourteen times, and the phrase “the evil one” appears five times.) Our own tendencies towards selfishness and evil (called concupiscence) are never thoroughly quenched until we die. And many of society’s influences tend to stir up our bad desires instead of our good ones. Life, for a Christian, is a difficult struggle, a hard battle in which sin and selfishness often get the better of us.

Knowing this, God came up with a way to turn even our sins and failings into opportunities for glory. When he rose from the dead, one of the first things Christ did was delegate his power of forgiving sins (a power that he had so frequently exercised during his public life) to the Twelve Apostles:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

Part of the peace that Christ’s victory brings is the knowledge that when we offend him, in small or large ways, we can experience his forgiveness in a tangible way. We can actually hear him tell us personally, through the voice of his ordained minister, the priest: “I absolve you from your sins...” The devil delights in reminding us of our sins, in convincing us that God does not love us, that he cannot forgive us, that he will not forgive such a sin as we have committed. But Jesus Christ is too wise for such deceptions, and left his Church with a sacrament of forgiveness, a tangible sign of the reconciliation that takes place when we sincerely repent and ask his pardon. The sacrament of confession is a great gift, an extension of Christ’s own incarnation, in a sense, so that we can experience the joy of renewing our friendship with him in as complete a way as we experience it with any real friend.

In addition to being the normal channel for administering God’s pardon of our serious sins, the sacrament of confession also applies his grace to our habitual weak spots. When we bring our frequent, lesser sins and failings to him in the confessional (losing our patience, giving in to laziness, avoiding opportunities to serve those around us...), he pours his grace directly upon those weaknesses, so that they are gradually strengthened, and we grow in our likeness to Christ.

Going regularly to confession not only puts us in touch with God’s grace, but it also makes us more open to that grace. Telling a priest about one’s humiliating sins and faults, especially if they happen to recur frequently, requires virtue – willpower, faith, humility, self-knowledge, courage, self-discipline... Giving these key virtues a regular workout through monthly or semimonthly confession builds them up; avoiding frequent confession, or going only the required minimum of once a year, lets them get flabby and weak.

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Baptism gives us divine life and makes us friends of God. Confirmation strengthens that friendship. The Eucharist keeps it strong. And confession renews it when we let our selfishness lead us away from it. And lest we think that we are free from sin, just consider that Mother Theresa of Calcutta went to confession weekly, and St Francis of Assisi was never ordained a priest, because he felt that his many sins made him unworthy of such an honor.

The more we love someone, the more quickly we ask his forgiveness when we hurt or offend him. Few acts of love can deepen our friendship with Christ more than regularly baring our heart to him in the sacrament of regained joy.

Application:

- When I go to confession, do I prepare well through a calm, prayerful examination of conscience?
 - Am I humble and sincere in my confessions, trusting that God himself works through the ministry of the priest?
 - What can we do to encourage one another to take better advantage of this great gift?
3. Brief Prayer: *When the discussion comes to an end, take a moment of prayer to thank God for the insights he has given you, and to ask him to help you love him more and grow closer to him every day. One member of the group can lead this prayer in his or her own words on behalf of the others.*
 4. Review of COMPASS Commitments: *(This should take about half-an-hour.) Read over the commitment card out loud together, each person reading one section.*

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You are a member of COMPASS. If you are being faithful to your commitments, you are giving new direction to college life and living your own life to the full, far from the false promises of the "easy path". Keep close to your heart these words of our Lord: As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. (John 15:9)

You are young. You are the Church of today and tomorrow. If you do not love Christ and spread Christ, who will? You are the hope of the Holy Father. Listen to his words for you:

You are also strong for the struggle: not for the struggle of one against another in the name of some ideology or practice separated from the very roots of the Gospel, but strong for the struggle against evil, against the real evil: against everything that offends God, against every injustice and exploitation, against every falsehood and deceit, against everything that insults and humiliates, against everything that profanes human society and human relationships, against every crime against life: against every sin. John Paul II, Letter to Youth, 1985

Your commitments as a COMPASS member are your secret to real success: if you keep them fresh in your mind, you will discover their true meaning, and they will be a trustworthy beacon throughout your college journey. In them you will find Christ, Christ will find you, and your life will be "the light of the world" and the "salt of the earth".

Remember that when you became a COMPASS member you committed, insofar as it is within your power, to...

Personal Formation:

- a) Never let a day go by without spending time in heartfelt prayer.
- b) Wholeheartedly seek to live out the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.
- c) Constantly strive for the holiness that Christ wants for you.

Personal Testimony:

- a) Defend the truths of the Catholic faith in word and deed, prudently, charitably, and firmly.
- b) Imitate Christ especially by being patient, respectful, and attentive to the needs of those around you.
- c) Imitate Christ especially by speaking well of others, avoiding destructive criticism, gossip, and useless complaining.

COMPASS Involvement:

- a) Participate generously in the planning, execution, and attendance of COMPASS activities and projects.
- b) Support and encourage your fellow COMPASS members, and work to increase the size of your COMPASS Chapter.
- c) Support and encourage the evangelizing efforts of the Catholic community on campus, and of other groups who share the goals of COMPASS.

Do your best to fulfill these noble commitments, and God will do the rest.

Consider together the following questions, in order to assist and encourage one another in the better living out of your COMPASS commitments:

- Which commitment has been giving me the most help in the past two weeks?
- Which commitment has been giving me particular difficulty in the past two weeks?
- Which commitment do I need to focus on especially in the coming two weeks?

5. *After reviewing the commitment card, share with one another any particular prayer intentions you may have.*
6. *Then one member of the group can lead everyone in a closing prayer, offering all the intentions to the Lord, and finishing up by praying in unison an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be. End with the sign of the cross.*

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