



Confession

Session 6 – 18th March 2018

Bible Readings

Psalm 51; Luke 19:1-10; James 4: 8-10

Sermon Notes

One danger with a church is that we think if we admitted what we were like people would judge us, laugh at us, be embarrassed by us, so we remain alone with our sin.

But the truth is, we all have things we regret in the wakeful, cold hours of the night where we wish we could go back and relive those haunting moments; those bad choices.

But God freely forgives, and to help us fully appreciate what Jesus has done, he has given us the Holy Habit of confession.

We are not confessing for God's benefit. We are not trying to pry forgiveness from his fingers like his last 'Rolo'. No, we need to confess so we can be healed, to begin the process of transformation that ends up with forgiveness. Confession enables us to experience, in our very soul, the power of God's forgiveness.

When we practice confession, we are liberated from guilt and we become at least a little less likely to sin in the same way in the future. Sin will look and feel less attractive.

To practice confession we start by placing ourselves into the care of God's Holy Spirit and asking for His help. We can't do this alone. *"But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults,"* writes the psalmist. (Psalm 19:12). Help Me Holy Spirit.

In God's Spirit, we are now ready to reflect on our thoughts, words, and deeds. Ignatians call this the "prayer of examen," maybe in the light of the Ten Commandments, identifying *specific* trouble spots in our lives ready for confession. We are taking responsibility for what we have done. No excuses.

Every sin is a denial and our perspective is distorted. How many times have we heard "the accused showed no remorse". So we ask God to help us see ourselves from His perspective, for we may have a log in our own eye. (Matthew 7: 1-5). But in the presence of Jesus – just like the thief on the cross – we find perspective.

In the presence of God's Spirit, in the Holy Habit of Confession, we can patiently reverse the motivation for our sin. The pain of contrition helps us to understand the cost of our sin. But remember the practice of Confession is an act of grace. We are not trying to punish ourselves. Godly sorrow leads us to seek restitution, it compels us to change and grow; it leads us to God's amazing grace, where we are released from our burden – just study the story of Zacchaeus in our Luke reading.

Key Quotes

"He who is alone with his sins is utterly alone." DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

"The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin, feared it, fled from it, grieved over it." CORNELIUS PLANTINGA

“Why should you expect anyone to take your confession seriously unless you promise that you do not intend again to foul your relationship with still more of the same unfair pain?” LEWIS SMEDES

“We can ask for the gift of tears. Contrition is as useful to the soul as pain is to the body.” JOHN ORTBERG

Discussion Questions

Tell about a time you stood on the edge of confession, but just couldn't do it. What makes confession so hard and painful for us?

What are some of the euphemisms for sin that help us deny it? Why is it so important that we learn to identify sin in ourselves and call it sin?

How have you experienced the liberating power of confession? Where has confession reduced your desire to continue a practice in your life?

What are the consequences of confessing but refusing to take responsibility for the impact of our sinful choices? How can taking responsibility help us repent and walk in deeper places of holiness?

Why is it essential for us to learn to see our sin through the eyes of those we have sinned against and through the eyes of God? How can God use tears, mourning, and brokenness over our sins as a tool for his will to be done in our lives?

We heard about the “gift of tears.” Have you ever experienced this and how did this gift make you more the person God wants you to be?

Describe a time when you hurt someone through a sinful choice, humbly confessed, and saw God bring healing and restoration. How did this experience act as a catalyst for future obedience and willingness to confess when you recognized your sins?

Why is it so critical for us to seek the filling and leading of the Holy Spirit as we grow in our understanding of confession? What possible extremes might we face if we confess on our own without the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Read: Psalm 51: 3. What do you learn about the heart of true confession from David's prayer?

What does Zacchaeus teach us about the importance of restitution in the confession and healing process? Luke 19:1-10

Prayer

Read: James 5:16. Spend time offering prayers of confession. If you are doing this in a group it is important that group members understand that all that is communicated, including in prayer, is confidential.

Living the Life

Identify where you might need to confess sin using the Ten Commandments to help you. *These can be found in Exodus 20.*

Personal Reflection

Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to examine your life. Ask Him to reveal to you exactly where there needs to be confession and repentant action.

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Please visit the Holy Habits pages on the St Mary's website. stmarysely.org and join the conversation on our [Facebook Group "Ely Team Holy Habits"](#)