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# CONFESSION: THE SACRAMENT OF FREEDOM

ST. BENEDICT ORTHODOX CHURCH  
3808 Old Seymour Rd ✕ 940-692-3392  
Rev. Fr. Peter Kavanaugh

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## WEEK 7~ A LIFE GROUNDED IN CONFESSION

### I. Finding a Confessor

- **One that Knows you**
  - A good confessor is not hard to find
  - Usually, the best confessor is the person who is most likely to know you
  - Proximity, honesty; that way you can't HIDE
  - "Do not be put off by your awareness of what you perceive as his relative youth, his personal shortcomings, or the probability that he possesses no rare spiritual gifts. Keep in mind that each priest goes to confession himself and may have more to confess than you do. You confess, not to him, but to Christ in his presence. He is the *witness* of your confession. You do not require and will never find a sinless person to be that witness." ~ *Jim Forest*
- **A good confessor**
  - Simply one to witness your sins and be able to repent with you
- **Regarding Advice**
  - Doesn't need to be profound – just LISTEN
  - The important thing is for the person confessing to have open ears
- **Confessor's are rarely put off**
  - "A Russian priest who is spiritual father to many people once told me about the joy he often feels hearing confessions. "It is not that I am glad anyone has sins to confess, but when you come to confession it means these sins are in your past, not your future. Confession marks a turning point, and I am the lucky one who gets to watch people making that turn!" ~ *Jim Forest*
- **Avoid "Shopping Confessors"**
  - "Stick with the priest or confessor who really knows you. Spiritual transformation takes time and changing confessors inhibits growth, since you waste time letting the new priest get to know you. You wouldn't consider changing medical doctors every few years, not when your doctor knows your health history and is watching out for changes in your body that need attention. How much more the soul needs the guidance of a priest or abbot who really knows us, having established a relationship of trust. We all need the guidance of one who doesn't allow us to avoid working on that which inhibits growth in our relationship with God. Stability can be for us the vehicle by which we are able to confront the habits, sins and vices that inhibit God from transforming our lives and making us whole. Constant movement allows us to hide from ourselves." ~ *Abbot Tryphon*

## II. Preparation: Getting Ready for the Journey

- **Watchfulness**
  - Keep a journal; notepad, etc.
- **Focus on patterns not details**
  - Don't obsess (pride)
  - Focus on the habits/pathologies that keep you from God
- **How many details**
  - Include details when they're important for revealing nature of sin
  - "For example, a man confesses that he broke a vase. He then confesses that he was very angry and broke a vase. Finally, he confesses that he got angry and broke a vase...over the head of his wife! Breaking a vase is not really sinful in and of itself. Anger is a sin. Anger acted out in an act of violence against a spouse is a completely different story. It is not important whether the vase was blue or green." ([www.peterandpaul.net](http://www.peterandpaul.net))
- **Try to remember all your sins**
  - Look at specific sins (anger, grumbling, judging, pride)
- **Be aware of the temptation to justify – "But everyone does that..."**
  - You can't judge the gravity of a sin according to how common it is
  - Confess fully and concisely
  - You don't need to confess long stories or explanations
  - Leave out the justifications – but look at the pathologies
  - "What is behind that sin?"

## III. Tools of Self-Examination

- **Learning to confess is a life time**
  - This is what our entire walk in Christ is about
  - Learning to give more and more of YOU to Jesus
- **But, meanwhile, the Church has tools that help us to prepare**
  - Below...

## IV. How Often Should I Confess?

- **What's the *least* I need to do??**
  - "This is a very legitimate question. But sometimes it is asked in the spirit of the Lawyer who asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven?" Underlying his question seems to be: "What is the LEAST I must do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?" The man left disappointed, precisely because the Lord gave him a maximalistic answer: "Sell all that you have, distribute to the poor, and come, follow Me."

Since the Christian life is a life of repentance, and since Confession brings reservoirs of Grace to assist us in the spiritual life and bring healing to the passions of our soul, we should avail ourselves of it often. We should avoid thinking in terms of the "minimum requirements." We reap what we sow. If we confess minimally, we will grow minimally. Long periods between confessions present the danger of the accumulation of "little" or habitual sins without intervention. We may also forget many of our sins over an extended time period between confessions. A good minimal rule is four times a year, during the four fasting seasons of the Church. However, as a way of avoiding the pitfalls mentioned above, once each month will serve our spiritual lives much better. Otherwise, we should come any time there is need or desire. While we should prepare sincerely for Confession, we must be careful not to use the need for preparation as an excuse for procrastination. Preparation (or the thought of preparation) for Confession should not be an overwhelming or exhausting experience. It may happen that we suddenly become aware of a particular sinfulness during prayer, or at a Church service. Rather than waiting a week or month for Great Lent, and bringing a comprehensive "list" of sins, why not bring this illness to the Doctor of our souls immediately if possible? Would we procrastinate if it were an earthly pain and an earthly doctor?" ([www.saintpeterandpaul.com](http://www.saintpeterandpaul.com))

- **General Advice**
  - Metropolitan Joseph sets a minimum requirement of 4x per year
  - Fr. Ed Hughes recommends about 1x a month
  - More than that leads to scrupulosity

## V. Following Up: Advice and Penance

- **Regarding Advice**
  - Listen
  - God can speak to you through a donkey
- **Regarding Penance**
  - Therapeutic – treatment meant for healing
  - Notice St. Paul's excommunication of a Christian of the Church of Corinth for incest. This was a penance and we see that it led to the person repenting (II Cor 2:6-8).
  - Purpose is not to pay something back to God—but rather to heal something broken – okay the sin is forgiven, but what was broken inside you that led you to commit it in the first place? That's what needs healing.

## VI. Keep on Going

- MOST IMPORTANT PART
- *Stability! Stability! Stability!*
- Keep your eyes forward and your hands on the plow.

## VII. A Guide for Examining One's Conscience Based on the Beatitudes

- 1. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.
  - We are bombarded by advertisements, constantly reminded of the possibility of having things and of indulging all sorts of curiosities and temptations...Do I keep the Church fasts that would help strengthen my capacity to live this Beatitude? Do I really seek to know and embrace God's will in my life?
- 2. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.
  - Do I weep with those who weep? Have I mourned those in my own family who have died? Do I open my thoughts and feelings to the suffering and losses of others?
- 3. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH.
  - When I read the Bible or writings of the saints, do I consider the implications for my own life? When I find what I read at odds with the way I live, do I allow the text to challenge me? Do I pray for God's guidance? Do I seek help with urgent questions in confession?
- 4. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS...
  - Does it disturb me that I live in a world that in many ways is the opposite of the Kingdom of heaven?
- 5. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY
  - When I see a stranger in need, how do I respond? Is Christ's mercy evident in my life? Am I willing to extend forgiveness to those who seek it? Am I generous in sharing my time and material possessions with those in need? Do I pray for my enemies? Do I try to assist them if they are in need?
- 6. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD
  - Do I take care not to read or look at things that stir up lust? Do I avoid using words that soil my mouth? Am I attentive to beauty in people, nature, and the arts?
- 7. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.
  - In my family, in my parish, and among my coworkers, am I guilty of sins which cause or deepen division and conflict? Do I ask forgiveness when I realize I am in the wrong? Or am I always justifying what I do, no matter what pain or harm it causes others?
- 8. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE...
  - Does fear play a bigger role in my life than love? Do I hide my faith or live it in a timid, half-hearted way? When I am ordered to do something that conflicts with Christ's teaching, whom do I obey?