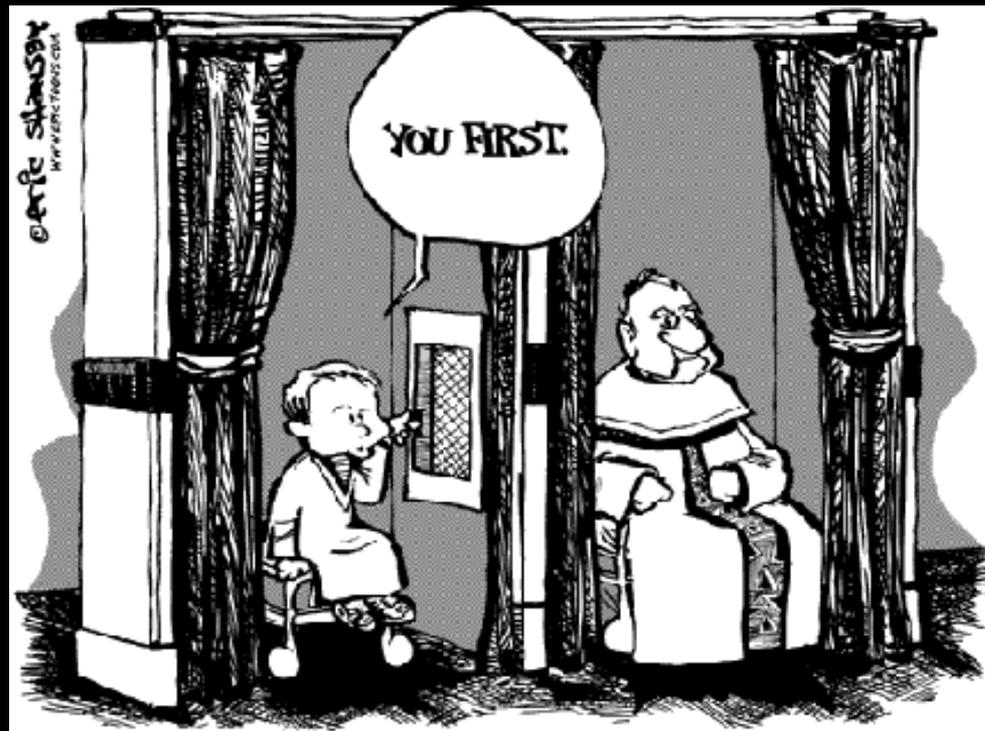


A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CONFESSION



WHAT IS IT?

If sin is separation from God then:

- Repentance → returning to God
- Confession → means of receiving absolution through a priest

- Repentance is **ADMITTING** the need to change and **REALISING** change is needed
- Confession is **MAKING** the change

STEPS INVOLVED

Confession between me and:

- Myself (repentance)
- Priest (confession)
- God (absolution)

ELEMENTS OF CONFESSION

(H.H. Pope Shenouda III)

1. Confession to God Himself:

- As in Psalm 51 when David says *'against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight.'* In this confession we ask God for forgiveness as is in the Lord's Prayer *'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.'*
- Finally, ask God to remove His anger from you as it is said in Psalms *'Lord do not rebuke me in your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak'.*

2. As we confess to God, we also confess to our confession father:

- We confess to a priest so God may grant us absolution and give us spiritual guidance, as he will guide you and help you overcome your problems. It is also practical as you feel ashamed which will help you not to commit the sin again.

- The absolution is very powerful and has the following meanings:
 - Signifies compassionate fatherhood of God accepting us
 - Symbolises the hand of God
 - God controls our movements and thoughts, and is able to sanctify and guide us to the right direction

3. Confess to the one against whom you have trespassed with all offences done against him:

- This is to wipe away any anger you might feel or sadness because of your offence so you can have communion with a pure heart. Just as God taught, *'Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.'* (Matthew 5:23-24).

4. Confessing to yourself that you have sinned:

- If you do not confess within your heart and your thoughts, you will never confess properly before God.
- You must have an inner feeling that you have sinned and feel the necessity of confessing it in order to receive forgiveness and achieve reconciliation with God and with people.

- Many go to confession with no regret and no feeling of embarrassment, shame or disgrace because of their sins.
- Therefore they do not benefit from their confession. It becomes a mere talk, with no spirit.
- We need to feel regret and know that we have sinned against God himself.

BEFORE CONFESSION

- The period of confession should not exceed 4-6 weeks. Delaying it allows us to be negligent with certain matters and forgetful of certain sins
- Sit down quietly with yourself and examine yourself carefully. Start by a short prayer asking God's help to reveal your sins
- Write down your sins on a small paper (so you do not forget anything) and in a way that is only understood by you (and dispose of it carefully!).
- Pray from the Agbia (prayer before confession)

DURING CONFESSION

- Be totally honest! Just like a patient going to a doctor and giving them all your symptoms so they can diagnose you properly to give you the appropriate medicine. You need to be honest so that the priest can give you the spiritual medicine you need
- Reveal your sins, reveal your thoughts and feelings and ask questions about your spiritual life
- Know that your spiritual benefit will be as much as you are open and honest during confession
- Do not use confession time as an opportunity to complain about others or to talk about their mistakes. Concentrate on your own mistakes.

AFTER CONFESSION

- Bow your head before God, say a prayer and read the Agpia (prayer after confession)
- Contemplate on how you will be watchful over your spiritual life and what practical steps you need to take
- Be obedient to what your confession Father has said and let it be wise obedience.

DESPAIR

(the enemy of true repentance)

- *“Know that if you despair from repentance, that this is more dangerous than falling into sin”* Pope Shenouda III
- Satan’s biggest trick to steer us away from repentance

WHAT IS TRUE REPENTANCE?

- True repentance for the love of God (not for fear of penalty or consequence)
- To be honest with oneself and have true intentions
- To examine ones conscience and self carefully
- To be truthful in confession (lying to your confession Father is lying to the Holy Spirit)
- Not to hide any secrets or thoughts
- Not to excuse oneself (and blame others for their sins)
- Be fair with oneself (do not sympathise)

CONFESSION AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

- In the OT the sinner used to bring his trespass sacrifice (an animal) to the Lord for the sin which he had committed, put his hand on the head of the sacrifice and confess his sins. He would fully understand that this offering would die instead of him.
- The placement of the sinners hand on the animal means the sin is being transferred from him to the animal.
- This is symbolic of the sin being transferred from us to Christ, to be blotted out by His blood.

- So, through confession, we are asking Christ to carry our sins on our behalf. From this we should feel and understand the meaning of forgiveness.
- Christ carries our sins and blots it out by His Blood as is said in Isaiah, *'All we like sheep have gone astray...And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all...'* *'But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.'* (Isaiah 53).
- With this correct understanding, our feelings should be towards confession and its seriousness; forgiveness and how it is achieved.

Sayings on confession...

- *“Repentance is a medicine which destroys sin. It is a heavenly gift, a marvellous force which through the grace of God conquers the might and strictness of the laws. It accepts all and transforms all. It does not reject the fornicator, does not send away the adulterer, is not disgusted with the drunkard, does not loathe the idolater, does not neglect the slanderer, does not persecute the reviler, nor the haughty man; it regenerates everybody because it is a furnace for purification from sin. The wound and the medicine, these are sin and repentance” –St John Chrysostom-*

- *“The evidence of true repentance is joy. If we do not come out of confession joyful, we have not truly repented.” –Fr Jacob-*
- *“In all your doing and thinking you should act on the assumption that you are going to die today” (The Imitation of Christ)*
- *“Fire and water do not mix, neither can you mix judgement of others with the desire to repent... it has happened that men have sinned greatly in the open but have done greater deeds in secret, so that those who would disparage them have been fooled.”(Flames of Wisdom)*

- *“Years of repentance are necessary in order to blot out a sin in the eyes of men, but one tear of repentance suffices with God” (French Proverb)*
- *“Happy is he who has learned that he himself is to blame for his own sins. This realisation will lead him to repentance; the repentance- to humility; the humility- to endurance; and the endurance to salvation.” (The Meaning of Suffering, Strife and Reconciliation)*