

My Father's House

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The Three Miracles of Confession

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Every orthodox Christian admits that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Redeemer of the world. But only Catholic Christians admit that one of the great means of salvation is the Sacrament of Confession, of Reconciliation that He gave to the Church on Easter Sunday evening after His horrendous death on the cross by which He won our salvation. On Easter Sunday evening, He came through closed doors, appeared to His priests, His apostles, showed them the wounds of His passion and gave them the power to forgive sins. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you ... receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven" (*Jn 20:21-23*).

Three Great Miracles

So that every time a person goes to confession, three awesome, tremendous, mighty miracles of grace take place. First, every bit of sin and guilt on a person's soul is washed clean through the Blood of Jesus administered by Christ working through His priests. Second, all bitterness, hatred and anger is let go of. And third, we are given the awesome power to totally forgive ourselves, realizing at that instant that we cannot be holier, more cleansed and more forgiven than we were at that moment.

St. John taught, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness," (*1 Jn 1:9*). Minor or venial sins, the Church teaches, can be confessed directly to God. Mortal and grave sins which crush the spiritual life out of the soul must be confessed to a validly ordained priest in the sacrament of penance. The sacrament is rooted in the mission God gave to Christ in His capacity as a son of man on earth to go and forgive sins (*cf. Mt 9:6*). Thus, the crowds that witnessed this new power "glorified God, who had given such authority to men" (*Mt 9:8*).

Outward Form Changes Over Time

Over time, the forms in which the sacrament has been administered have changed. In the early Church, publicly known sins (such as apostasy) were often confessed openly in church (See the *Didache* A.D. 70). Penances also tended to be performed before rather than after absolution. They were much more strict than those of today. Ten years penance for abortion, for example, was common in the Church.

But the basics of the sacrament have always been there, as the following quotations reveal. Of special significance is their recognition that confession and absolution must be received by a sinner before receiving Holy Communion, for "[w]hether... eats the bread to drinks

the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27).

The Didache

“Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life... On the Lord’s Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confession your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure” (*Didache* 4:14, 14:1 [A.D. 70]).

The Letter of Barnabas

“You shall judge righteously. You shall not make a schism, but you shall pacify those that contend by bringing them together. You shall confess your sins. You shall not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light” (*Letter of Barnabas* 19 [A.D. 73]).

Ignatius of Antioch

“For as many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop. And as many as shall, in the exercise of penance, return into the unity of the Church, these, too, shall belong to God, that they may live according to Jesus Christ” (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 3 [A.D. 110]).