

- This is a wonderful Gospel for Divine Mercy Sunday, because relates that the first thing that Jesus tells the apostles to do is to go out and forgive sins...to hear confessions—one of the great sacraments of mercy.
- Confession is such a wonderful sacrament. Just a few minutes of sincere confession, and the absolution of a priest, and you may very well go from being in mortal danger of eternal damnation to the assurance of eternal life...simply by this little act of humility.
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- But, of course, we hear all the time from our non-Catholic brethren (and even some Catholics): *“I don’t have to confess my sins to a man. I can confess directly to God!”*
- Well...that’s would be fine...IF that was the way the God wanted us to do it. But if it is NOT, then it is arrogant presumption.
- It would basically be saying to Him: *“I have decided that THIS is the way you will forgive sins, Lord; therefore, that is what you have to do.”*
- I just imagine God saying: *“Oh...really?”* Can we be any more arrogant than trying to tell God what He must accept from US?
- And some say: *“I’m not going to that priest; he’s at least as sinful as I am!”*
- Well...maybe so. But it is the sweeper’s action which cleans the floor...and he can do it with a dirty broom as easily as with a clean one.
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- So...is confession just a novelty made up by the mean ol’ Catholic Church...simply so priests can get some sort of depraved thrill by hearing other people’s sins? Well...it doesn’t work, I can tell you. If it wasn’t a sacrament, I can think of lots of things I’d rather do.

- But let's look at history. Even in the time of Moses, the Israelites confessed their sins as they offered a sin offering:
- Leviticus 5: “*When a man is guilty...he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD for the sin which he has committed...*” (Leviticus 5:5-6)
- And who, by the way, was there to receive the penitent's offering? The priest. A man. The designated representative of God.
- Leviticus 26: “*...you shall perish...but if they confess their iniquity ...if then their...heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant...*” (Leviticus 26:38-45)
- Numbers 5: “*When a man or woman commits any of the sins that men commit by breaking faith with the LORD...he shall confess his sin which he has committed; and he shall make full restitution for his wrong...*” (Numbers 5:6-7)

- So...confession of sins continued all throughout the history of Israel since at least the time of Moses.
- Psalm 32...500 years after Moses: “*I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; then thou didst forgive [my] guilt...*” (Psalms 32:5)
- Proverbs 28: “*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*” (Proverbs 28:13)
- The book of Nehemiah: “*...the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, ... and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.*” (Nehemiah 9:1-2)
- God speaking through the prophet Ezekiel: “*...I will let a few of them escape...that they may confess all their abominations...*” (Ezekiel 12:16)
- The book of Sirach...only a hundred years or so before Jesus: “*Do not be ashamed to confess your sins...*” (Sirach 4:26).

- And that’s just some of the Old Testament references to confession of sins.
- In the New Testament, we see John the Baptist: *“Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea...and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”* (Matthew 3:5-6)
- In the early Church we read in the Acts of the Apostles: *“Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.”* (Acts 19:18)
- The letter of James: *“...confess your sins to one another...”* (James 5:16)
- 1 John: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1John 1:9)

- And now today we have this Gospel passage...the words of Jesus Himself to the Apostles: *“Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”*
- So to say that confession is unbiblical or that the Church just “made it up” is ridiculous; it has been a foundational point of the worship of God since the time of Moses.
- Jesus simply endowed it with grace to become a sacrament.
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- So when challenged by non-Catholics, you can ask them about this history of confession, and then ask them: *“With all that, why do you think confession of sins is NOT needed?”*
- People often challenge Catholics; well...challenge them back!...but with kindness and gentleness.
- After all...St. Peter tell us: *“Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you...”* (1Peter 3:15)
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- As far as confession—or any teaching of the Church—always remember that the Holy Spirit guides her by Jesus own promise, and what did Jesus tell Peter, the first Pope, and the apostle-bishops in union with him? *“What you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and what you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.”*
- So...what the Church teaches is what we follow...because of that power of binding and loosing, and most of all because of Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the Church until His second coming.
- And the Church teaches that confession is the ONLY regular way that mortal sins may be forgiven. In other words, missing Mass on Sundays, sex outside of a Catholic marriage (for us Catholics), stealing, adultery, using the Lord’s name in vain...serious violations of the 10 commandments...all require confession to be forgiven.
- Venial sins do not HAVE to be confessed, but can be. However, venial sins are forgiven in the introductory rites of the Mass.
- But...when in doubt...be sure, and confess!
- And remember not to receive communion while in a state of unconfessed mortal sin; that is a sacrilege, and adding sin upon sin.
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- So...on this feast of Divine Mercy, know that the fountains of God’s mercy and grace are prevented from reaching us only by our own sinfulness...and stubbornness.
- Confession is so simple...and yet so essential. It is NOT something new, but ancient for those who love God...this act of humility which banishes sin.
- And, as the prophet Micah says: *“...what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:8 RSV)

Reading 1

[Acts 4:32-35](#)

The community of believers was of one heart and mind,
and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,
but they had everything in common.

With great power the apostles bore witness
to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,
and great favor was accorded them all.

There was no needy person among them,
for those who owned property or houses would sell them,
bring the proceeds of the sale,
and put them at the feet of the apostles,
and they were distributed to each according to need.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24](#)

R. (1) Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Let the house of Israel say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say,
"His mercy endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say,
"His mercy endures forever."

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

I was hard pressed and was falling,
but the LORD helped me.

My strength and my courage is the LORD,
and he has been my savior.

The joyful shout of victory
in the tents of the just:

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;
it is wonderful in our eyes.

This is the day the LORD has made;

let us be glad and rejoice in it.

R. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading II

[1 Jn 5:1-6](#)

Beloved:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God,
and everyone who loves the Father
loves also the one begotten by him.

In this way we know that we love the children of God
when we love God and obey his commandments.

For the love of God is this,
that we keep his commandments.
And his commandments are not burdensome,
for whoever is begotten by God conquers the world.
And the victory that conquers the world is our faith.
Who indeed is the victor over the world
but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ,
not by water alone, but by water and blood.

The Spirit is the one that testifies,
and the Spirit is truth.

Gospel

[Jn 20:19-31](#)

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."

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve,
was not with them when Jesus came.
So the other disciples said to him, "We have seen the Lord."
But he said to them,
"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands
and put my finger into the nailmarks
and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Now a week later his disciples were again inside
and Thomas was with them.
Jesus came, although the doors were locked,
and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."
Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands,
and bring your hand and put it into my side,
and do not be unbelieving, but believe."
Thomas answered and said to him, "My Lord and my God!"
Jesus said to him, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?
Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples
that are not written in this book.
But these are written that you may come to believe
that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that through this belief you may have life in his name.