

- “...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.’”
- So...to forgive or to retain sins implies telling OF those sins...and thus the Church’s sacrament of confession. This Gospel we just heard is one of the most powerful scriptural bases for that sacrament that we have.
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- We hear all the time from non-Catholics, and even from some Catholics: “I don’t have to confess my sins to a man. I can confess directly to God!”
- Well...that would be okay...IF that was the way the God wanted us to do it. But, if it is NOT, then it is arrogance to presume to tell God how He will forgive sins.
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- So...a bit of scriptural history, which will show us that confession of sins has always been part of the act of repenting.
- Even in the time of Moses, the Israelites had to confess their sins and offer sacrifice. In 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...*” (Lev 5:5-6 RSV)
- Interestingly, who received the penitent’s guilt offering? The priest. A man. And, yet, he is the designated representative of God.
- And Leviticus 26: “...[they] 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 with Jacob...” (Lev 26:38-45 RSV)
- Or 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...*” (Num 5:6-7 RSV)

- And confession of sins in some form continued all throughout the history of Israel up to, and including, the time of Jesus.
- Proverbs 28: “*He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*” (Pro 28:13 RSV)
- In the book of Nehemiah, after the return from the Babylonian exile around 500 BC: “*...the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, ... and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.*” (Neh 9:1-2 RSV)
- The book of Sirach...just a couple of hundred years before Jesus: “*Do not be ashamed to confess your sins...*” (Sir 4:26 RSV).
- In the New Testament, we see of those flocking to John the Baptist: “*... they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*” (Matt 3:5-6 RSV)
- 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 RSV)
- The letter of James: “*...confess your sins to one another...*” (James 5:16 RSV)
- And, again, today’s Gospel passage...the words of Jesus Himself to the Apostles: “*‘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.’*”
- Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit—foreshadowing the fullness of the Holy Spirit to come at Pentecost—and directly afterward tells them to go out and forgive sins...to hear confessions! Giving them the Holy Spirit empowers them to act in his name, and forgiveness of sins was a vital part of their role of sanctifying the people.

- So to say that confession is unbiblical or that the Church just “made it up” is simply wrong; it has been a foundational act of the worship of God since at least the time of Moses.
- Jesus graced it to become a sacrament—which it could not be until His sacrifice on the cross.
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- Knowing these things...when people challenge you on your faith... well...challenge them back!...but with kindness and gentleness.
- Know your faith and the reasons for our Catholic ways. 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 RSV)
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- As far as confession goes—or any teaching of the Church—simply remember that Jesus gave authority and the Holy Spirit—the “keys to the kingdom”—to the Apostles, who were the first bishops...and that authority has passed down from them to the bishops, and, from the bishops, to the priests.
- Yes, we are just men...but we are just the brooms; God is the one who sweeps the house.
- Jesus told Peter, the first Pope: *“What you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and what you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.”* (Matthew 16:19)
- So...when questioning a teaching of the Church, ask yourself: “What authority do I have? What theological knowledge do I possess that should negate 2000 years of theological debate and guidance of the Holy Spirit of the Church?”
- The Church teaches that confession is the ONLY regular way that mortal sins may be forgiven...such as missing Mass on Sundays unnecessarily, sex outside of a Catholic marriage (for we Catholics), stealing, adultery,

using the Lord's name in vain...serious violations of the 10 commandments...all require confession for forgiveness.

- Venial sins do not HAVE to be confessed, but can be; they are forgiven through the penitential rite at the beginning of the Mass.
- And also refrain from receiving communion while in a state of unconfessed mortal sin, for such sin makes us “out of union” with Christ and His Church. This teaching is based on St. Paul when he writes: *“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.”* (1Cor 11:27 RSV)
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- But confession is the great sacrament of mercy...the mercy which God longs to give to us. So never fear confession.
- On this feast of Divine Mercy, know that the limitless fountains of God's mercy and grace are prevented from reaching us only by our own stubbornness. The reservoir is limitless...but we must come to it.
- The all-loving Father waits for His prodigal child in the confessional. So make the resolution to actively seek God's mercy there, for this is the act of humility God establishes for the forgiveness of sin...
- For, as the prophet Micah tells us: *“...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."

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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.