

Dear Padre,

Is it a sin to break the law? It is illegal to use fireworks in my city, but every year I do it anyway. Should I mention this in confession?

Strictly speaking, to break a government law does not automatically constitute the definition of sin, so it needn't be mentioned in the sacrament of penance. By definition, sin damages (or, with grave sin, destroys) communion with God and the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1472). Some actions may not be objectively destructive to our relationship with God and Church—and therefore are not sinful—but they may affect others. Church members are part of society, which depends on its citizens to abide by the laws. Saint Paul encouraged everyone to obey the authorities, for all authority that exists is established by God (see Romans 13:1–7).

Not all sins are equally offensive to God; similarly, not all civil laws are equal in their gravity. To knowingly travel a few miles over the posted speed limit isn't the same as intentionally starting a fire in a posted area of a forest. The danger is in thinking one's actions are without consequence. Sensible civil laws are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of citizens, and many municipalities outlaw fireworks because of the hazards they pose.

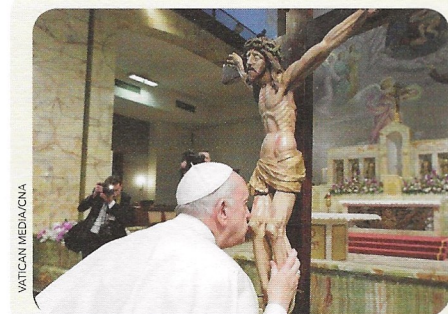
When any civil law is broken for mere self-indulgence or when breaking the law places others at risk, the act has the potential of constituting the definition of sin. In that case, it would rightfully warrant sacramental reconciliation. ●

Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR / DearPadre.org

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MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
October 23 <i>Weekday</i> Rom 4:20–25 Lk 12:13–21	October 24 <i>Weekday</i> Rom 5:12, 15b, 17–19, 20b–21 Lk 12:35–38	October 25 <i>Weekday</i> Rom 6:12–18 Lk 12:39–48	October 26 <i>Weekday</i> Rom 6:19–23 Lk 12:49–53	October 27 <i>Weekday</i> Rom 7:18–25a Lk 12:54–59	October 28 <i>Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles</i> Eph 2:19–22 Lk 6:12–16	October 29 <i>Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time</i> Ex 22:20–26 1 Thes 1:5c–10 Mt 22:34–40



A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

[Jesus] acknowledges that the tribute to Caesar must be paid—for all of us, too, taxes must be paid—because the image on the coin is his; but above all he recalls that each person carries within him another image, that of God, and therefore it is to him alone that each person owes his own existence, his own life.

ANGELUS, ROME, OCTOBER 18, 2020