

6A 2023 SML  
MT 5:17-27

It is almost impossible to call our souls our own, given the explosion of social media.

- ✓ Every sin and failure of a soul,
- ✓ every crime and secret passion of the heart,
- ✓ every unholy falling from a holy purpose

is broadcasted to a world too ready to find a justification for its own wrongs by gladly revealing the sins of others.

To face these conditions, the world need something like what flourished in the Middle Ages, namely, the “Right of Sanctuary.” This right was based upon the holiness attached to sacred things. A fugitive guilty of felony was considered immune from persecution by law, provided he entered the sanctuary of a church. The principle behind this right was any criminal who entered the sanctuary had equivalently cast his lot with God, and therefore was immune for a certain period of time and from the searchings of men.

The world today needs:

- ✓ some haven of rest where we might be alone with ourselves and our God, and not have our sins plastered to the world;

- ✓ some place of shelter from the curious eyes of those who would not wrap our wounds, but salt them;
- ✓ some solitary harbor where we might escape those who reveal us, but who never stop to heal us;
- ✓ some sanctuary where our sins would not be told to the world, nor allowed to fester unspoken within our heart.

The world has such a sanctuary which respects the holiness of the human person, wherein a soul can cast its lot not before inquiring men but before a forgiving God, and that sanctuary is the confessional.

What does confession demand? It demands two things: a confessor and penitent, and only God can find both. First of all, it demands a confessor, a man who will:

- ✓ look kindly on the denying Peters,
- ✓ speak words of forgiveness to penitential Mary Magdalenes,
- ✓ and offer a gesture of brotherhood to betraying Judases;

a man signed and sealed with Christ; who, in the words of Lacordaire:

- ✓ has a heart of fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity;
- ✓ a man with discretion, and a mind without curiosity, vanity or fear;

- ✓ and finally, a man with a heart like a well into which sins, like stones, drop, but the well is so deep that no sound comes back to an ear which might be bent to hear.

But immediately we hear it said: “But why should I confess my sins to a man; for the priest is a man? Why should I not tell them directly to God? Why should a confessor stand between God and me?”

As God has given the leaders of governments the power of just consequence, and share God’s justice by punishing, why should not others share God’s mercy by forgiveness? The very order of life has:

- ✓ the doctor for our body,
- ✓ the teacher for our mind,
- ✓ the president for our government

Why then, should we not have confessors for our souls?

Confession demands not only a confessor, but also a penitent, and here too the wisdom of God is supreme. The penitent must be created by God as the confessor was created by God. God takes a man in his pride, and the cold silence which envelops his soul, and says to him: “Come, sit with a man who may be no better than you are, but who is

nevertheless an ambassador of Christ, and to that man you shall reveal:

- ✓ what you hide from your friends and relatives,
- ✓ what makes you blush when alone,
- ✓ what you lock in the storehouse of your memory;

and, as you confess these secrets to him, you shall say to that man: “Bless me Father, for I have sinned.”

As difficult as it is, confessing your sins, and I confessing mine, answers a need of the human heart. How often history reveals that a guilty man, pressed by conscience alone, refuses the immunity which silence promises, and confesses the very sin which will bring the punishment he sought to avoid. In moments when man fears neither witnesses nor punishment, he admits: “I did it.” There is something even in the most hardened criminals which makes him turn himself in, by an admitting his guilt in order that he might have peace in his soul.

And even those who have no great crimes upon their souls but are weighed down by a heart which seems not right with God, crave some confidant to whom they can unpack their heart with words. In joy and in sorrow, every heart needs someone to listen to him, who will drop his own cares to take in

the burden of the penitent. The most unfortunate are those who shed their tears in silence because there is no one to wipe them away. How many men and women there are in the world who, through sin, have felt themselves alone, cast off from everyone, and who in their inmost heart have felt the need of some sanctuary to console and direct! The world is full of those who are constantly crying out, "What can I do?" and to those who yearn for someone to understand and pardon as Christ understood and pardoned the Penitent Thief hanging to His right on the Friday called Good, the confessional is the answer.

Mindful of the words of Our Lord in today's gospel:

- ✓ Christ does not wait until a man commits adultery, but seeks that man who commits adultery even in his heart.
- ✓ Christ does not wait until the anger boils to the point of doing serious harm to someone, but nips the anger in the bud at the first feelings of anger.
- ✓ Christ does not wait until someone tells a lie. He nips the lie in the bud at the very thought of lying.

If the world had never known the Sacrament of Penance, and someone proposed it, there would be a universal cry saying, "humanity is too proud" and hence there will never be penitents. There would be a universal cry saying, "humanity is too indiscreet" and hence there will never be confessors. But

the fact is and here I speak as your priest, that the world comes to our confessionals:

- ✓ children of seven years
- ✓ and their grandparents of seventy,
- ✓ hearts of sixteen years,
- ✓ hearts of sixty years;
- ✓ the mother with her daughter,
- ✓ the father with his son,
- ✓ the venial sinner and the mortal sinner,

and the fact that all these come, proves to the doubting world that there are penitents because there are confessors, and there are confessors because there are penitents, and there are both because Jesus Christ came to forgive sins.