

## **HOLY AROMA**

I'd like to say a few words about Confession... the Sacrament of Reconciliation before I share a most unusual experience I had when visiting Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio just weeks ago in June. I don't want to tell you about the sins that I've confessed over the years... but I wonder if you can relate to what I'm going to share about preparing to go to Confession... Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It's been a month since my last Confession. I got angry and was rude with my wife twice... I had impure thoughts after watching a movie on TV... I neglected morning and evening prayer last week ... Now those are examples... just examples of the types of sins one might take into the Confessional. The point that I want to make is that I spend time preparing for Confession... I enter into the sacrament to tell KIND OF SIN and QUANTITY... We've been formed to do that... Kind of sins... quantity of sins...

But something happened to me the first night that I was at the priest/deacon retreat at Franciscan... The normal first night format is music... praise and worship... a welcome by the University President, Fr. Dave Pivonka and then... the invitation for us to go to Confession. Priests spread out in the large field house where we are assembled... and priests turn to priests and they to go to Confession to each other...

When they're done, then deacons and seminarians and featured speakers all line up for Confession. But what was different this time was that I didn't go to Confession to tell the KIND AND QUANTITY of my sins... I went to share areas of weakness in my faith life and in my faith practice. Let me give you some examples... these are only examples... Does anyone here have a continuing tendency to find fault with the pope or the Catholic Church? Anyone constantly align with people who feel like our government is hopelessly corrupt? Does anyone here refuse to accept certain areas of teaching of the Catholic Church like contraception or abortion? Do you look at others and judge their faith practice or their motives? There are dozens... dozens and dozens of these ways of daily life that don't lend themselves to a Confession of KIND AND QUANTITY...

And so... on that first night at Franciscan... I was given the grace to go to a priest and not confess KIND AND QUANTITY... but to confess areas of my life where I wasn't living Christ-like. The priest listened... gave words of counsel and gave me a penance. But why... why do I want to tell you of this experience? I believe I was given the grace and the inspiration to do this different form of Confession... and it may have been the first time I've ever done so. I felt cleansed... forgiven... and I felt like I had responded to the grace of a new approach to Confession. Well, then here's what happened...

We men are assigned individual, private dorm rooms... that evening when I entered into my room... there was a powerful aroma of what seemed like the smell of flowers. A holy aroma that repeated itself during my time at Franciscan. Just in my room. I was so curious about this that I meekly asked other priests and deacons if they had noticed any sweet aroma in their rooms... or elsewhere. NOPE! Now... let me issue an important note. This likely had nothing to do with me personally... I am not a saint... quite far from it. And who knows, there may have been a living saint that had been assigned to that dorm room during the recent school year...

My dear wife Dee — whom some believe must be a living saint for putting up with me... she says that she smelled flowers one time over at the other parish when there were no flowers in the Church...and when Dee was alone in prayer...

I wonder... and I hope you'll ponder whether God gives little 'gifts' in appreciation for trying to change our lives. Since I returned from Ohio with Covid I've done a bit of research on topics such as Holy Odor... Heavenly Perfume... The Catholic Answers website says 'The scent of flowers, particularly roses, has been associated with the presence of the Blessed Mother, e.g., when there was no natural explanation otherwise for the scent.

Today.. on this day when we honor the holy and beautiful innocence of St. Maria Goretti... and for those of us who love St. Therese, the Little Flower... let us seek ways to grow in our faith practice and not be bound to doing what we've always done... but seeking to grow in our faith and draw closer to Blessed Mother Mary... and to imitate her fiat.

What's most important is that we should remember that our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Lady, his Blessed Mother, are with us, even when we can't sense any accompanying wondrous signs.

But what I smelled was a really heavenly odor.

Blessings.

Deacon Tom