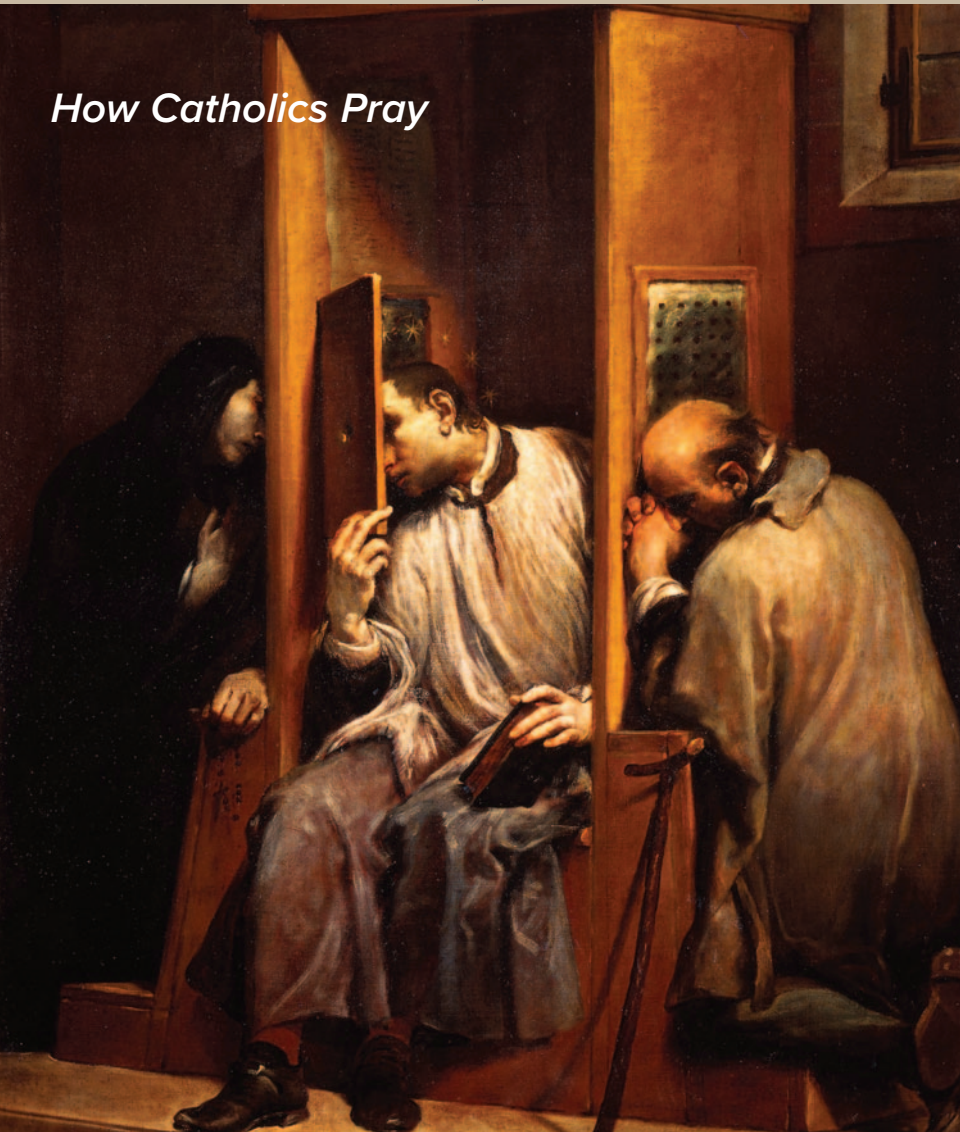




How Catholics Pray



Section 5:

Penance



To Luke E. Hart, exemplary evangelizer and Supreme Knight from 1953-64, the Knights of Columbus dedicates this Series with affection and gratitude.

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

PENANCE

PART TWO • SECTION FIVE OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

*by
Peter Kreeft*

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Nihil obstat

Reverend Alfred McBride, O.Praem.

Imprimatur

Bernard Cardinal Law

December 19, 2000

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Printed in the United States of America

A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith.

The Catholic Information Service recommends reading at least one Hart series booklet each month to gain a deeper, more mature understanding of the Faith.

PART II: HOW CATHOLICS PRAY
(WORSHIP)

SECTION 5: THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

1. *Its presupposition: sin*

The sacrament of the forgiveness of sins presupposes sins to be forgiven. What is sin? The meaning is quite simple.

Sin is not something vague like “forgetting God’s love” or “not appreciating God’s gifts.” Sin means something specific and concrete: *disobedience to God’s commandments*. It is not a lapse of feeling, like unappreciativeness, or a mental lapse, like forgetfulness; it is a moral lapse, a free choice of the will.

Sin must be admitted, if it is to be forgiven. We cannot be forgiven for sins we do not confess and repent of.

“When Christ’s faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission...‘for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know’”⁵⁵ (Saint Jerome; Council of Trent in the sixteenth century; CCC 1456).

*CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Sin is in the soul what disease is in the body. A healing operation, on body or soul, requires light. Forgiveness is a healing operation, a real spiritual change. It requires the light of truth to shine on it, by confession. Only then can we find peace. There is no other way to peace. For we cannot be at war and at peace at the same time, and sin is like being at war with God, while repentance, confession, and penance bring peace with God.

The “good news” of our reconciliation with God presupposes the “bad news” of our separation from God; the very idea of “salvation” presupposes the idea of sin, for that’s what we’re saved from!

This is not “gloom and doom.” As C. S. Lewis noted, “humility, after the first shock, is a *cheerful* virtue.” The greatest saints have always had the greatest joy – indeed, one of the things the Church looks for in canonizing saints is heroic joy in their lives, for joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Yet these same saints also are the most emphatic about their being sinners. The greatest saints see themselves as the greatest sinners. And the greatest saints are *not* the greatest fools.

Or are they? Either they are wrong or they are right. If they are wrong, then sanctity is the way to self-deception, not self-knowledge; and if that is so, then the human heart is so divided against itself that its two deepest demands – for goodness and truth, for sanctity and knowledge – contradict each other. On the other hand, if they are right, then we who are less saintly must have less knowledge of ourselves and of our sins.

Pascal said that there are only two kinds of people: saints, who know they are sinners, and sinners, who think they are saints. Socrates said something similar: the wise are those who know they are fools, and the fools are those who think they are wise.

2. *Our society's denial of sin*

Today, we frequently hear of the value of positive self-esteem and confessing our worth, but hardly ever of the value of confessing our *sins*. In fact, there has been a radical decline in the sense of sin, and even in the understanding of the meaning of the very concept of sin. There has also been a radical decline in the use of the sacrament of Penance among Catholics. Obviously these two phenomena are related as cause and effect. Those who think they are well do not go to the doctor (see Matthew 9:12-13).

There are two extremes here: we can be over-scrupulous or unscrupulous. If previous eras were sometimes over-sensitive to sin, this era is insensitive to it, as few times or cultures have ever been. One extreme does not justify the opposite.

We should have great “self-esteem,” for we are the King’s kids! We are wholly good in our *being*, our God-created essence. But we are not wholly good in our lives and choices and actions. We are made in God’s image, but we have marred that image. We are ontologically good – “good stuff” – but not morally good. In fact, we are far better than we think ontologically, and worse than we think morally. If we take God’s Word as our index of truth rather than our fallen human nature and feelings, we accept a double surprise: we are so good that God thought us worth dying for, and so bad that God had to die to save us.

We usually think we are morally pretty good, because we measure ourselves not against the standards of our Lord but against the standards of our society – a society that is fallen not only from Eden and innocence but also from religious faith and the admission of guilt. Modern Western society is not even pagan, that is, pre-Christian; it is secularistic, or post-Christian.

The difference between the two is like the difference between a virgin and a divorcee.

Many people today are suspicious of talk about sin because of negative stereotypes from the secular media. But even if these were wholly true, although the sense of sin and guilt may have been overemphasized and misused in the past, the error of the present is more dangerous: it is living in denial. Rejecting one extreme does not justify embracing the other.

One powerful antidote to denial is the realization that we must die. Dr. Johnson says: “I know no thought that more wonderfully clarifies a man’s mind than the thought that he will hang tomorrow morning.” “In this sacrament [Penance], the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way *the judgment* to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life” (CCC 1470).

Satan tempts us to deny responsibility for our sins. Our only defense is to take responsibility for them. The only weapon that can defeat the Prince of Darkness is light. That is the purpose of the sacrament of Penance. The priest in the confessional is a more formidable foe to the devil than an exorcist.

3. *The deeper meaning of sin*

Sin means disobedience to God’s law. But it has a deeper meaning. For God’s *law* (the Commandments) expresses and defines his *covenant* with man – the marriage-like relationship of personal intimacy that is his goal for us and the ultimate meaning of our lives. When we sin against God’s law we sin against God’s love and against our own final end and happiness. We also harm all others who are organically united with us in Christ’s Body, by weakening that Body. Thus “[t]he sinner

wounds [1] God's honor and love, [2] his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and [3] the spiritual well-being of the Church..." (CCC 1487).

4. *The communal dimension of sin*

"Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion [repentance from sin] entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation"³⁸ (CCC 1440).

Even when our sins do not directly and visibly harm our neighbor, they do so indirectly and invisibly. All sins harm all men. For "no man is an island": we are connected with each other not only visibly, for instance by physical gravity, but also invisibly, by a kind of spiritual gravity. For the Church is not just an *organization* but a living *organism*. We are "members" of the Body of Christ, not as individual workers are "members" of a trade union, but as our individual organs are "members" of our bodies. In a body, "if one member suffers, all suffer" (1 Corinthians 12:26; read the whole chapter!). When one part of a body is wounded, the whole body suffers. We cannot sin without harming all, including those we love the most. There are no private sins, no victimless crimes.

5. *The horror of sin*

"Horror" is not too strong a word. All the saints teach that "no evil is graver than sin" (CCC 1488). That's why saints choose torture and death rather than even small compromises with sin. For saints see things as they really are, and what saints see above all is that which *is* above all: the love of God. "It is in discovering

the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced"²⁷ (CCC 1432).

6. *How to regain the lost sense of sin?*

The answer to this question is very simple and concrete: contemplate a crucifix. To know Christ on the Cross is to know two things: the depth of God's love and the depth of our sin. When, after seeing Christ perform a miracle, Peter realized who he was, his natural reaction was to confess to him: "I am a sinful man, Lord" (Luke 5:8).

Only God can convict and convert the human heart; we cannot. David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10), using the unique Hebrew verb *bara* for "create" – something only God can do. "God must give man a new heart."²⁵ Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him" (CCC 1432). And he does this not by force or power, but by truth: by revealing his Son.

Nor can we judge which persons need conversion, for all persons do, beginning with ourselves.

7. *The meaning of conversion and repentance*

"Conversion" and "repentance" mean essentially the same thing. "Conversion" does not mean merely changing religious affiliations. It means literally a "turn-around" – turning one's heart and will and life over to God. And "repentance" does not mean merely feeling sorry, or remorseful. "Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a conversion to God...a turning away from evil...the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in his grace" (CCC 1431).

8. *The need for continual conversion*

Jesus' message is summarized in two words: repent and believe (Mark 1:15). These are the two parts of conversion, the negative and the positive.

Conversion begins in Baptism. "Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is...by Baptism¹⁷ that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life" (CCC 1427).

But conversion does not end with Baptism. It is an ongoing process because it is an ongoing need. "Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, 'clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification...'"¹⁸ (CCC 1428).

"Saint Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, 'there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance'"²² (CCC 1429).

9. *The psychological need for confession*

"The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church..." (CCC 1455).

Many Protestants are increasingly realizing the need for confession. For not only is it needed objectively – to live in the truth – but also subjectively, on the level of human psychology. Everyone needs to "let it out," to "unload." Even more, everyone needs to hear and know that they are forgiven – ideally, by the

authoritative word of the priest of the Church of the Christ against whom they have sinned.

The healing words are not “forget it,” but “forgive it.” We need our sins forgiven, not just forgotten; admitted, not denied. Pardon and peace come from confession.

10. *The names of this sacrament*

There are at least five names for this sacrament, each of which corresponds to an essential aspect of it.

- 1) “It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin” (CCC 1423).
- 2) “It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament” (CCC 1424).
- 3) “It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*” (CCC 1424) because penitents “...obtain pardon from God’s mercy for the offense committed against him and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church, which they have wounded by their sins...”⁴ (CCC 1422).

“...[T]his reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation”⁷⁸ (John Paul II; CCC 1469).

4) “It is called the *sacrament of Penance*” (CCC 1423) because we must not only internally turn from our sins but also externally do something to repair the damage our sins have done.

“Many sins wrong or harm our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself... Absolution takes away sin but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.⁶² Raised up from sin, the sinner must still...make amends for the sin: he must ‘make satisfaction for’ or ‘expiate’ his sins. This satisfaction is also called ‘penance’” (CCC 1459).

“The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*,³¹ which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others” (CCC 1434). All three are forms of self-denial, movements against the selfishness or egotism that is the heart of all sin.

“[P]enances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all...“The satisfaction that we make for our sins, however, is not...ours as though it were not done through Jesus Christ. We who can do nothing ourselves,...can do all things with [him]...”⁶⁴ (CCC 1460).

5) “It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest’s sacramental absolution God grants the penitent ‘pardon and peace’”⁶ (CCC 1424).

“For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart...reconciliation ‘is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation’”⁷⁴ (CCC 1468). This is “the peace that the world cannot give” (John 14:27). It is *shalom* – a concept too rich to be translated by a single word. It is a “peace” that includes wholeness, oneness, harmony, and right relationships with God, self, and others. It is an echo from Eden and a foretaste of Heaven.

11. *Perfect and imperfect contrition*

“Contrition” is another term for “repentance.” “Contrition is ‘[1] sorrow of the soul and [2] detestation for the sin committed, together with [3] the resolution not to sin again’”⁵⁰ (CCC 1451).

“When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called ‘perfect’ (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible”⁵¹ (CCC 1452).

“The contrition called ‘imperfect’ (or ‘attrition’) is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin’s ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear)... [I]mperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave [“mortal”] sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance”⁵² (CCC 1453).

12. *The need to confess sins to a priest*

The question is often asked by Protestants: Why must we confess to a priest, and not just to God? What is questioned here is not so much the sacrament of Penance as the sacrament of Holy Orders. And the answer is that throughout Scripture, God’s

forgiveness is always mediated. In the Old Testament, God's forgiveness was mediated by the high priest and the scapegoat on the Hebrew feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. In the New Testament, it was mediated by Christ on the cross (the fulfillment of all these Old Testament symbols), and then it was mediated by his commission to his apostles: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). "Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation,⁶⁵ bishops, who are their successors, and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed, bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'" (CCC 1461).

The fact that Christ made forgiveness available to us so concretely through confession to a priest is a sacramental sign of his concrete presence. He – the one who alone forgives sins – is just as really present as his priest is.

And the privacy and individuality of the one-to-one encounter between priest and penitent is a sacramental sign of Christ's love for each of us as individuals.

We should never fear going to confession, for when we do we are not going to a mere man, but to Christ. The priest is only his instrument. "The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant" (CCC 1466).

13. The authority of the priest to forgive sins

"Only God forgives sins [cf. Mark 2:7].³⁹ Since he is the Son of God, Jesus...exercises this divine power.... Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name"⁴¹ (cf. John 20:21-23; CCC 1441).

“In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. This ecclesial dimension of their task is expressed most notably in Christ’s solemn words to Simon Peter: ‘I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’”⁴⁵ (Matthew 16:19; CCC 1444). “The words *bind and loose* mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. *Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God*” (CCC 1445).

14. *How this sacrament has changed*

“Over the centuries the concrete form in which the Church has exercised this power [to forgive sins] received from the Lord has varied considerably. During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism (for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery) was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this ‘order of penitents’ (which concerned only certain grave sins), one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century the Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the ‘private’ practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest” (CCC 1447).

15. *How this sacrament has not changed*

“Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same *fundamental structure* is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of...contrition, confession, and satisfaction [atonement]; on the other, God’s action through the intervention of the Church” (CCC 1448).

Today, “[t]he elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: [1] a greeting and blessing from the priest, [2] reading the word of God to illuminate the conscience and elicit contrition, and an exhortation to repentance; [3] the confession, which acknowledges sins and makes them known to the priest; [4] the imposition and acceptance of a penance; [5] the priest’s absolution; [6] a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and dismissal with the blessing of the priest” (CCC 1480).

The penitent usually begins: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” tells the priest how long it has been since his last confession, and then simply and directly confesses any sins he is aware of having committed during that time, including all grave sins. When the priest asks him to say an “act of contrition,” he may use his own words or a traditional formula such as the following:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all my sins, because I fear your just punishments, but most of all because my sins offend you, who are all good and worthy of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the aid of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin.

16. *Who must confess?*

- 1) “According to the Church’s command, ‘after having attained to the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year’”⁵⁶ (CCC 1457).

This is the bare and absolute minimum, not the norm. “Without being strictly necessary...the regular confession of venial sins...is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church”⁵⁹ (CCC 1458). “Priests must encourage the faithful to come to the sacrament of Penance and must make themselves available to celebrate this sacrament each time Christians reasonably ask for it”⁷⁰ (CCC 1464). For there is simply nothing that more quickly and effectively strengthens the average Catholic’s moral and spiritual life than frequent and regular confession.

- 2) “Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession”⁵⁷ (CCC 1457).
- 3) “Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time”⁵⁸ (CCC 1457).

17. *General absolution*

“In case of grave necessity recourse may be had to a *communal celebration of reconciliation with general confession and general absolution*. Grave necessity of this sort can arise when there is

imminent danger of death without sufficient time for the priest or priests to hear each penitent's confession. Grave necessity can also exist when, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors to hear individual confessions properly in a reasonable time, so that the penitents through no fault of their own would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In this case, for the absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of individually confessing their sins in the time required"⁹² (CCC 1483). General absolution is not designed as something normal, an alternative to private confession, but for emergencies ("grave necessities"), such as battlefield combat situations.

18. *The seal of the confessional*

"Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents' lives."⁷² This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the 'sacramental seal,' because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains 'sealed' by the sacrament" (CCC 1467).

19. *Indulgences*

The scandalous *sale* of indulgences for money was the abuse that sparked the Protestant Reformation. But the theology behind the Church's practice of *granting* indulgences is beautiful and profound.

What is an indulgence? It is *not* a permission to sin but a forgiveness of punishment. "An indulgence is a remission before

God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven...”⁸¹ (CCC 1471).

“To understand this doctrine and practice of the Church, it is necessary to understand that sin has *a double consequence*. Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the ‘eternal punishment’ of sin. On the other hand, every sin, even venial,...must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the ‘temporal punishment’ of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin....”⁸⁴ (CCC 1472) – as a stomach ache naturally follows from overeating, or broken bones from a fall.

The doctrine of indulgences is based on the doctrine of the communion of saints: “The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God’s grace is not alone. ‘The life of each of God’s children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ...”⁸⁶ (CCC 1474).

“In the communion of saints, ‘a perennial link of charity exists between the faithful who have already reached their heavenly home, those who are expiating their sins in purgatory and those who are still pilgrims on earth. Between them there is, too, an abundant exchange of all good things.’⁸⁷ In this wonderful exchange, the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others [good is far stronger than evil!]. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the

contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin” (CCC 1475).

We also call these spiritual goods of the communion of saints the *Church's treasury*.... “[T]he ‘treasury of the Church’ is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ’s merits have before God....”⁸⁸ (CCC 1476) “This treasury includes as well the prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense.... In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have...attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body”⁸⁹ (CCC 1476-77).

God – the God who *is* a Trinitarian society of charity – has arranged for even our forgiveness and salvation to be communal and social, not isolated and individual. We “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), even to the extent of aiding one another’s salvation.

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

⁵⁵ Council of Trent (1551): DS 1680 (ND 1626); cf. St. Jerome, *In Eccl.* 10, 11: PL 23:1096.

³⁸ Cf. *LG* 11.

²⁷ Cf. *Jn* 19:37; *Zec* 12:10.

²⁵ Cf. *Ez* 36:26-27.

¹⁷ Cf. *Acts* 2:38.

¹⁸ *LG* 8 § 3.

²² St. Ambrose, *ep.* 41, 12: PL 16, 1116.

⁴ *LG* 11 § 2.

⁷⁸ John Paul II, *RP* 31, 5.

- ⁶² Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712.
- ³¹ Cf. *Tob* 12:8; *Mt* 6:1-18.
- ⁶⁴ Council of Trent (1551): DS 1691; cf. *Phil* 4:13; *1 Cor* 1:31; *2 Cor* 10:17; *Gal* 6:14; *Lk* 3:8.
- ⁶ OP 46: formula of absolution.
- ⁷⁴ Council of Trent (1551): DS 1674.
- ⁵⁰ Council of Trent (1551): DS 1676.
- ⁵¹ Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1677.
- ⁵² Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1678; 1705.
- ⁶⁵ Cf. *Jn* 20:23; *2 Cor* 5:18.
- ³⁹ Cf. *Mk* 2:7.
- ⁴¹ Cf. *Jn* 20:21-23.
- ⁴⁵ *Mt* 16:19; cf. *Mt* 18:18; 28:16-20.
- ⁵⁶ Cf. CIC, can. 989; Council of Trent (1551): DS 1683; DS 1708.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1680; CIC, can. 988 § 2.
- ⁷⁰ Cf. CIC, can. 986; CCEO, can. 735; *PO* 13.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1647; 1661; CIC, can. 916; CCEO, can. 711.
- ⁵⁸ Cf. CIC, can. 914.
- ⁹² Cf. CIC, can. 962 § 1.
- ⁷² Cf. CIC, can. 1388 § 1; CCEO, can. 1456.
- ⁸¹ Paul VI, apostolic constitution, *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, Norm 1.
- ⁸⁴ Cf. Council of Trent (1551): DS 1712-1713; (1563): 1820.
- ⁸⁶ *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
- ⁸⁷ *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
- ⁸⁸ *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.
- ⁸⁹ *Indulgentiarum doctrina*, 5.

“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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In the case of coming generations, the lay faithful must offer the very valuable contribution, more necessary than ever, of a systematic work in catechesis. The Synod Fathers have gratefully taken note of the work of catechists, acknowledging that they “have a task that carries great importance in animating ecclesial communities.” It goes without saying that Christian parents are the primary and irreplaceable catechists of their children...; however, we all ought to be aware of the “rights” that each baptized person has to being instructed, educated and supported in the faith and the Christian life.

Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

About the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by Blessed Michael McGivney, is the world’s largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 1.9 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The Knights support each other and their community, contributing millions of volunteer hours to charitable causes each year. The Knights were the first to financially support the families of law enforcement and fire department personnel killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and to work closely with Catholic bishops to protect innocent human life and traditional marriage. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit www.kofc.org.

Whether you have a specific question or desire a broader, deeper knowledge of the Catholic faith, CIS can help. Contact us at:

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