

Making a Better Confession

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*“It’s a long time since
my last confession.”*

*“I can never think of
anything much to tell.”*

*“I always seem to say
the same old things.”*

*“I don’t really feel
any better afterward.”*

“It’s just become routine.”

*“I wish I could find a way
of making a better confession.”*

Many of us are unhappy about confession. And it doesn’t seem to have much to do with giving the sacrament other names, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does (CCC 1423-1424), with being able to choose between the traditional confessional and face to face, or with celebrating this sacrament individually or in common with others (CCC 1480-1484).

One big stumbling block is the way we examine our conscience. Very often we don't seem to be able to find anything worth confessing; or we come up with the same old faults time after time. The root of the problem is that we think we have to examine our conscience on our own instead of with the help of our Lord Jesus and his Holy Spirit.

We don't really know ourselves very well. We all have blind spots. We are all forgetful. But our Lord Jesus knows each one of us through and through. He loves us as we are: not as we could be or as we might be some day, but as we are now.

If we try to examine our conscience on our own, we run the risk of seeing things only from our own point of view. We misjudge our faults and weaknesses and even ignore some of them altogether. We can also get sick and tired of seeing the same old bad habits still there after all our good resolutions, and there is a strong temptation just to give up. Or we can go to the other extreme. Because we're only skimming the surface, we can kid ourselves that we're not really too bad after

all. So we become complacent and rather pleased with ourselves.

Surely, then, it's common sense always to examine our conscience in our Lord's presence and under his direction (CCC 1454).

Going it alone leads to another reason for disappointing confessions: telling the symptoms instead of the sin. If we felt feverish and had a skin rash and a coated tongue, we'd expect the doctor to diagnose what was causing these symptoms and to treat the underlying sickness. When we examine our conscience on our own, we often don't go far enough in our diagnosis. We only look at the symptoms. We confess as sins what are really the symptoms of a deep and hidden soul-sickness: a constant attitude of self-interest that has trapped us in habits of self-centered behavior or a persistent weakness (CCC 1849–1850, 1505).

It is these deep-down attitudes that lie at the root of our symptoms—sins that we must ask Jesus to unmask. It is these we should bring before him and his Spirit in confession (CCC 1420-21, 1425-1433, 1440-1448).

Some wise person has said, “You’ll never get the right answers if you’re asking the wrong questions.” How can we ask the right questions on our own? When we open the eyes of our mind to Jesus present in us and put ourselves in his care and under his direction, he will examine our conscience with us. He and the Holy Spirit will lead us to the right questions and the right answers.

The Lord be with you.

In the Lord's presence

(CCC 2665-68, 2670)

Jesus is with you.

Enter into the still center of yourself.

Become aware of him there.

Center your attention and your love on him.

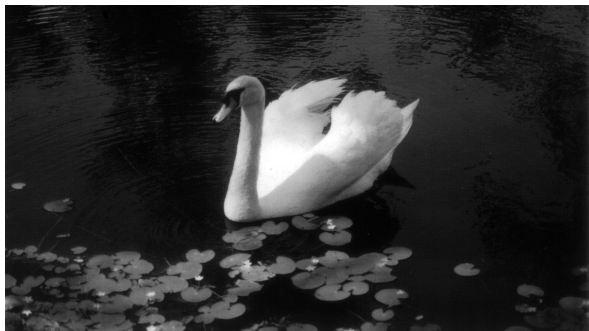
Never mind about distracting sounds or feelings or thoughts; keep coming back to him.

Your attention may wander but your love for him stays.

Let your mind be in tune with his mind.

Take time to be calm and still in his company

(CCC 2709-2712).



Prayerfully ponder the psalmist's words:

O LORD, you search me and you know me, / you know my resting and my rising, you discern my purpose from afar. / You mark when I walk or lie down, all my ways lie open to you.

Before ever a word is on my tongue / you know it, O LORD, through and through. Behind and before you besiege me, / your hand ever laid upon me. Too wonderful for me, this knowledge, / too high, beyond my reach.

O where can I go from your spirit, / or where can I flee from your face? If I climb the heavens, you are there. / If I lie in the grave, you are there.

If I take the wings of the dawn / and dwell at the sea's furthest end, even there your hand...would hold me fast.