

## Preparation for Our Lenten Penance Services

### How the Sin Force within us impacts our lives.

In a famous passage in Romans 7:14-21, St. Paul speaks about the mysterious force of sin and how it causes him to do the evil he hates and fails to do the good he desires to do.

As we prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it might be good for us to reflect on this mysterious sin force within us and how it impacts our lives. As I think about it, I become aware of the following negative effects of the 'sin-force' within me.

- It causes me, as St. Paul says, to do the evil I hate (e.g. say/do nasty things to another) and causes me to fail to do the good I want to do (e.g. fail to reach out to someone in need).
- The sin-force causes me to blame others for my wrongdoing. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the devil. Neither were willing to accept responsibility.
- The sin-force gradually dulls my sense of right and wrong. It becomes easier for me to do wrong and not see sin as sin. I miss Mass for no good reason and think 'God doesn't expect me to go to Mass every Sunday.' I steal and say "everyone is doing it".
- The sin-force in me makes it difficult for me to face my sin and be honest with myself. If I have a problem with drink, I deny it and say "I could quit any time." If I look at pornography, I say "it doesn't hurt any body."
- The sin-force in me steals my inner peace and causes lots of inner turmoil. I try to rationalize wrongdoing, but if we are open even a little bit to the Holy Spirit, he will convict us of our wrongdoing.
- The sin-force in me keeps God at a comfortable distance. I do my religious things but I keep God at a distance in case I loose control of my life.
- The sin-force in me creates a big wall around my heart keeping me from feeling the pain of others. As a result, I don't need to respond. I can keep going with my comfortable existence.
- The sin-force in me impacts my relationships in many ways. It causes me to be stubborn, insensitive to others, unforgiving, and unwilling to try and work through difficulties that happen in relationships. It seems to me that this is one area where Satan has many victories since so many people, including many church going people, refuse to do anything to bring God's peace into relationships where a rift occurs. (I'm not talking here about the huge hurts that would take a big miracle of grace to fix.)

On the other hand, the Holy spirit or the 'grace-force' in me is always nudging me to resist the 'sin-force' and to behave in a way that reflects the ways of God - love, peace, joy, mercy, justice, truthfulness etc.

I am sure this 'mystery of iniquity' at work in us causes us to do other things. Feel free to share.

Let us all pray for the honesty to face our sin, to name it, to own it, confess it and seek the grace to be sorry for it.

### Seven Things to Remember About Sin & Confession

1. Remember sin will never diminish *God's* love for us. God's love for us is not dependent on our good/bad behavior. On the other hand, sin will most likely distance us from God. When Adam/Eve sinned they hid from God. Sin will dull our conscience to what is good and bad. A

person who steals and steals and steals will gradually come to a point where he/she no longer thinks he/she is doing wrong. This can happen to the best of us. We may be very sensitized, even scrupulous about some sins (e.g. sexual sins) and have little or no conscience about another area (justice issues, responsibility to the poor).

2. Remember most people do not enjoy going to confession but we do it because we believe it is good medicine for our soul, just as we believe going to our doctor for regular check ups is good for our body. A good confession frees us from the burdens of guilt and restores peace to the soul. It also gives us the grace to fight temptation.

3. Remember God wants to use our sins to draw us closer to him. The devil wants to use our sin to distance us from God. Peter's sin of denial drew him closer to Jesus, Judas' sin of betrayal led him to despair.

4. Remember a sense of sin keeps us humble and reminds us of our need for God. The absence of the sense of sin can make us proud, self-sufficient and self-righteous.

5. *Repentance* is *God's* medicine for sin, just like forgiveness is his medicine for healing life's hurts. The words "I'm sorry, please forgive me" are the most healing words in the English language. All of our relationships would be enriched and more peaceful if we co-operated more with God's grace of repentance. Just think about it: how many relationships are diminished and hurt because one or both people are stubborn, unforgiving, revengeful, say/do hurtful things. If we could recognize such behaviors, be truly repentant of them and say 'we are sorry' – much healing would happen and many couples could be saved thousands of dollars in counseling fees.

6. Remember in confession *all* sins are forgiven except any *serious* sins that we *intentionally* fail to confess.

7. Remember it is good to try to get at the root cause of a sin that we commit time after time. For example, the root cause of a bad temper is probably our need to control others and their behavior. The root cause for lack of prayer might be loss of faith in God's care for us.