

"I BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS"

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Why is this statement of our Creed so important? Why is the forgiveness of our sins so crucial? In the words of St. Augustine, "were there no forgiveness of sins in the Church, there would be no hope of life to come or eternal liberation." And as Scripture reveals in Revelation, chapter 21, nothing "unclean" will enter heaven. We must believe in the forgiveness of our sins in order to receive that forgiveness and come to the eternal beatitude of heaven, which we all desire. But in order to seek and receive that forgiveness, we must first recognize our sinfulness. "If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing." (1 John 1:9) This seems to be a problem in the relativistic society in which we find ourselves. Sins that at one time were commonly recognized as mortal or grave are no longer considered serious by many. Even though the teaching of the Church has not changed regarding the gravity of such sins as intentionally missing Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation, fornication (sex outside of marriage) or artificial contraception, many who commit these and other sins fail to see the gravity of their actions. We need to ask ourselves, what exactly is

this *sin* that needs to be forgiven and how do we come to a state of realization of our personal sin; a realization that will lead us to repentance. The Catechism tells us that "sin is an offense against God: 'Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight.' (Ps 51:4)...Like the first sin, it is disobedience, a revolt against God..." (CCC 1850). Scripture reveals, as well, that "there is such a thing as deadly sin...All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly" (1 John 5:16,17). The Church names the less serious sin "venial" and the deadly sin as "mortal, grave, or serious" sin. It is mortal sin that breaks our relationship with God, removes us from the state of grace, and if unrepented, could deprive us of the glory of heaven. To be guilty of this "mortal" sin, one must commit a sin of grave matter (meaning it must be serious) as identified by Scripture or the teachings of the Church, have knowledge that it is a grave sin and intend to commit the sin even with this knowledge. The normal means for the forgiveness of mortal sin is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament instituted by Christ when he said to his apostles "... If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22, 23). Jesus gave this authority for a purpose! We must show contrition and confess our sins to a priest who has been given the

amazing authority to offer God's forgiveness to us! But, even if our conscience does not accuse us of serious sin, we may still be guilty of not making an effort to form and inform our conscience. This is so important, and so neglected. It is why so many do not recognize their sin. Our conscience must be formed according to Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church, rather than the spirit of the day and what is politically correct. The truth that is Jesus does not change. It is the same as "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever". (Heb 13:8) We must commit our lives to seeking that truth that is Jesus and allowing Him to form our conscience in that truth. Only then will we truly come to know our sin and be led to a contrition and repentance that will bring us forgiveness. The "forgiveness of sins" that we profess each time we pray our Creed. The "forgiveness of sins" that our Savior, Jesus, hung on a cross and died to offer each one of us. The "forgiveness of sins" that will fulfill our hearts greatest desire; eternal life in heaven!

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SACRED SCRIPTURE



"From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matt 4:17)

"Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal 5:19-21)

"Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor 6:9,10)

"Therefore, sin must not reign over your mortal bodies so that you obey their desires.

And do not present the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons for wickedness, but present yourselves to God as raised from the dead to life and the parts of your bodies to God as weapons for righteousness. For sin is not to have any power over you, since you are not under the law but under grace."

(Rom 6:12-14)

"And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

(Luke 24:46,47)

SACRED TRADITION

"After his Resurrection, Christ sent his apostles " so that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations." The apostles and their successors carry out this "ministry of reconciliation," not only by announcing to men God's forgiveness merited for us by Christ, and calling them to conversion and faith; but also by communicating to them the forgiveness of sins in Baptism, and reconciling them with God and with the Church through the power of the keys, received from Christ..." (CCC 981)

"There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive. 'There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope

for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest.' Christ who died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness should always be open to anyone who turns away from sin. (CCC 982)

"Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of the forgiveness of sins: it unites us to Christ, who died and rose, and gives us the Holy Spirit." (CCC 985)

"By Christ's will, the Church possesses the power to forgive the sins of the baptized and exercises it through bishops and priests normally in the sacrament of Penance." (CCC 986)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

- **Do I make a serious effort to form my conscience according to Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church?**
- **Do I examine my conscience regularly, repent, and receive the sacrament of Penance for the forgiveness of my sins?**