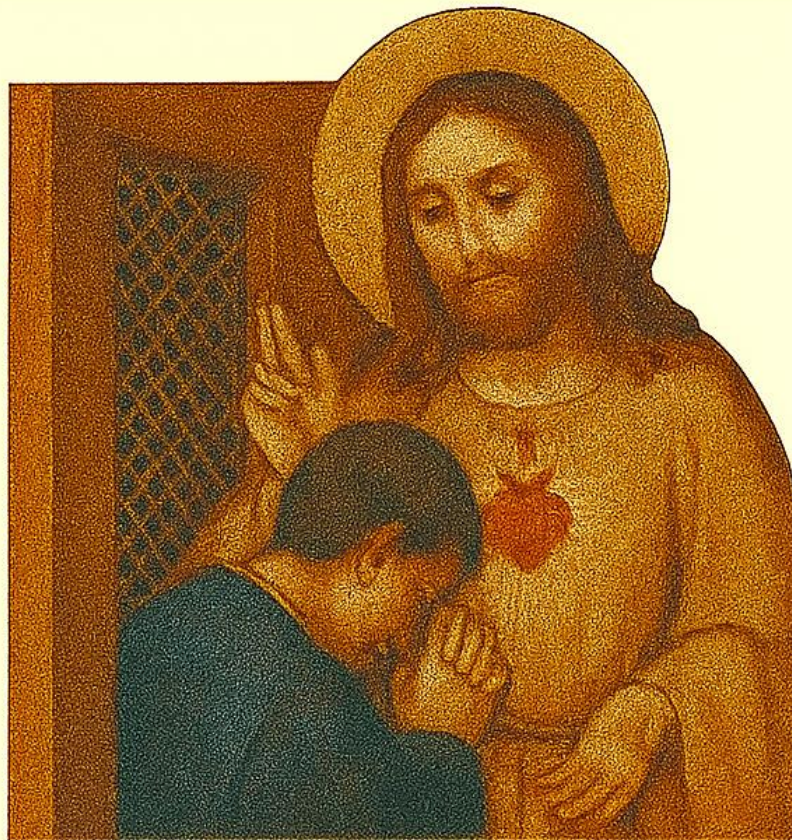


# THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Short reflections, eternal truths



## SIN AND CONFESSION

The Sacrament of  
God's Mercy

FR LUKE GOYMOUR

## **Confession, Mercy, and the Healing Power of Grace**

### **Introduction: Why Forgiveness Matters**

We often call Jesus our Saviour - and rightly so. But what does He save us from? The heart of the Christian message is this: Jesus saves us from sin. Yet many people today are unsure what sin really is, or how forgiveness works. Is it just a feeling? A private moment? A vague hope?

In truth, sin and forgiveness are not abstract ideas. They are real, personal, and deeply woven into the story of every human life. Sin affects not only individuals, but the whole of creation. And forgiveness - God's mercy poured out through Jesus - is the healing that restores us to life.

### **What Is Sin?**

To understand sin, we must begin at the beginning. Scripture tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This isn't just about personal mistakes - it's about a shared human condition. The first sin of Adam and Eve introduced a spiritual wound into humanity, often called Original Sin. Baptism washes away this original sin, but its effects linger. We remain vulnerable, prone to fall short even when we know what is right.

St Paul described this struggle perfectly:

“For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do.” (Romans 7:15)

Sin is not part of God's original plan. When God created humanity, He made us good. Sin entered through our misuse of free will. It distorts who

we are and makes us less than we were created to be. To sin is, in a sense, to become less human.

But the Church also helps us understand that not all sins are equal. Catholic teaching draws an important distinction between venial sin and mortal sin. Both harm our relationship with God, but in different ways.

Venial sin is a lesser offence. It wounds our friendship with God, but does not destroy it. These are the “everyday” sins - like impatience, unkindness, or minor dishonesty. Venial sins do not cut us off from God's grace, but they do weaken us spiritually, making it easier to fall again. Left unchecked they can become extremely serious and damaging to our lives, so we shouldn't treat any sin lightly. Therefore, the Church strongly encourages us to bring even our venial sins before God, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, so we can be strengthened and healed.

Mortal sin, on the other hand, is much more serious. It is called “mortal” because it kills the life of grace in our souls. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be met: it must be a grave matter, committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent. In other words, the action must be seriously wrong, we must know it is wrong, and freely choose to do it anyway. Mortal sin breaks our relationship with God entirely - yet even here, God's mercy is greater. Through sincere repentance and the Sacrament of Confession, even mortal sins can be forgiven and our friendship with God restored.

And the consequences are serious. Scripture tells us:

“The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

But it also proclaims the good news:

“The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, sin no longer has the final word. We can be forgiven. Whether our wounds are deep or more superficial, God offers us the chance to begin again - restored, healed, and made new.

### **Forgiveness in the Christian Creed**

In the Apostles' Creed, we profess belief in “the forgiveness of sins.” This follows immediately after our belief in the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Communion of Saints. That order matters. Forgiveness is not a vague feeling - it is a work of the Holy Spirit, entrusted to the Church, and lived out in community.

Jesus Himself gave this ministry to His apostles after the resurrection:

“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:22-23)

Forgiveness is always rooted in Jesus' saving death and resurrection. The Church does not forgive in its own name, but as the visible Body of Christ on earth. Mercy is real, and it is mediated to us through real people, real sacraments, and real grace.

### **The Sacraments of Forgiveness**

God's mercy reaches us through the sacraments:

- **Baptism:** Our first and foundational cleansing. In baptism, we die with Christ and rise to new life.

- **The Eucharist:** A sacrament of healing. Because it is the re-presentation of Christ's saving death, it strengthens us and frees us from venial sin.
- **Confession (Reconciliation):** The sacrament most closely associated with forgiveness. Here, we encounter the mercy of Christ directly and personally.

Confession is not just a ritual - it is a meeting with Jesus. Jesus is the one who forgives, Jesus is the one who is confessed to. Through the priest, who acts in the person of Christ and as a representative of the Church, we hear the words of absolution and receive grace.

### **Why Confession Matters**

In recent years, many Catholics have found themselves drifting away from the practice of confession. This isn't simply a matter of dwindling numbers - it points to something deeper: a fading sense of what sin really means in our lives. If we don't recognise our need for forgiveness, how can we truly welcome the Saviour into our hearts?

Sometimes, people say that a private prayer to God is enough—that we can simply express our sorrow silently and move on. While heartfelt personal prayer is vital, it's important to remember that Jesus Himself chose to work through the Church. As we have noted, after His resurrection, He appeared to His apostles and entrusted the apostles - and through them, their successors (Bishops) and coworkers (Priests) - with the authority to forgive sins. Confession, then, is not just a human tradition or an optional extra. It is a divine gift, a channel of mercy chosen by Christ Himself.

There's also something quietly powerful about speaking our sins aloud. We're not meant to shoulder shame in isolation, struggling quietly with burdens we can't bear alone. In confession, we find a safe space - a moment of honesty and vulnerability - where shame can be set down, wounds can be healed, and a new beginning can unfold. The grace we receive is real and personal, helping us to move forward with hope. It's not only a spiritual renewal, but often a psychological release as well, lifting the weight of guilt and offering fresh strength for the journey ahead.

Confession, then, is more than a ritual - it's an encounter with Christ's mercy, a chance to begin again, and an embrace of the healing love that God wants for each of us. In opening our hearts, we allow God to restore us, not just for our own sake, but for the good of the whole Church family.

### **Sin and Communion**

Sin doesn't just affect our relationship with God - it affects our relationship with others. When we sin, especially in serious ways, it's as though we drive a wedge not only between ourselves and God, but also between ourselves and the wider Christian family. Serious sin, what the Church calls 'mortal sin', doesn't just hurt us on a personal level - it wounds our communion with the whole Church. Imagine a stone dropped into a pond: the ripples spread out, touching every part of the water. In the same way, our actions have consequences that reach far beyond ourselves.

That's why reconciliation is not only personal, but communal. When we seek forgiveness, we aren't simply patching things up with God in isolation. We are also mending the ties that bind us to our brothers and sisters in

faith. The Church isn't just a collection of individuals - it's a living body, and every one of us is a part of it. When one member suffers, all are affected in some way. Sin isolates, but grace gathers. Reconciliation, therefore, is about restoring unity, healing rifts, and rebuilding the bridges that sin has damaged.

When we come to confession, it is not only our relationship with God that is gently restored, but also our bond with the loving community of believers. In this sacred encounter, the priest stands as a compassionate representative of Christ and the Church, welcoming us with warmth and understanding. Through his presence, we are reassured of Christ's endless mercy and lovingly reminded that the whole Church family rejoices in our return.

While confession itself is a deeply personal and confidential moment - shared quietly between you, God, and the priest - the grace that flows from it is far-reaching. The healing we receive touches more than just our own hearts; it brings fresh hope and renewed unity to the entire community. Each act of reconciliation helps to mend what has been broken, drawing us all closer together as the body of Christ. In this way, each person's forgiveness strengthens the Church, allowing us to reflect God's love more fully to the world around us.

If we recognise that we are carrying the burden of serious sin, it is an act of honesty and care to refrain from approaching Holy Communion, seeking first the gentle healing of confession. Receiving the Eucharist is a beautiful sign of our closeness with God and with one another. By taking the step to be reconciled beforehand, we approach the altar with sincerity and an open

heart, making our participation in Holy Communion a true reflection of our faith and our longing to live in harmony with God and the Church.

Approaching the sacrament of reconciliation is never just a solitary act. It is a tender moment that connects us more deeply with God, with our community, and with the entire Church. In receiving forgiveness, we are welcomed back into a deeper sense of belonging, invited to once again take our place within the family of faith, and encouraged to share the mercy we have received with others. In this way, reconciliation becomes a gentle embrace, restoring us and drawing us all closer together in love.

### **A Living Hope**

When we say in our Creed, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins,” we are making a profound act of faith. We are acknowledging our need for mercy, and proclaiming our trust in the healing power of Christ.

We are saying:

- I believe that sin is real—but mercy is stronger.
- I believe that Jesus saves—and that He continues to save through His Church.
- I believe that I can be reborn, reconciled, and restored.

In professing the forgiveness of sins, we are not just reciting a doctrine. We are opening our hearts to grace. We are choosing hope. We are saying yes to the God who never tires of forgiving.

## **Appendix: Going to Confession A Simple Guide to Encountering God's Mercy**

Confession is not about guilt - it's about grace. It's not a test - it's a gift. In this beautiful sacrament, we meet Jesus not simply as judge, but as healer. He listens, forgives, and restores us to peace.

Whether it's been a week or many years, here's a simple guide to help you approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation with confidence and trust.

### **Step 1: Prepare Your Heart**

Begin with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see your life clearly and honestly. You might say:

*Come, Holy Spirit, help me to know my sins and trust in your mercy.*

Then take a few quiet moments to reflect. What has drawn you closer to God recently? What has pulled you away? Think about your thoughts, words, actions, and omissions - especially in your relationships with God, others, and yourself.

You may find it helpful to use a short examination of conscience. Many parishes offer printed guides, or you can reflect using the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes.

### **Step 2: Go to the Priest**

When you arrive, the priest will welcome you. You can sit face-to-face or kneel behind a screen—whichever helps you feel most at ease.

Begin by saying:

*Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been [length of time] since my last confession.*

Then simply share your sins. Speak honestly and briefly. Do not deliberately omit any sin but at the same time you don't need to explain every detail - just name what's on your heart. If you forget something, don't worry. God knows your heart, and you can always mention it at future confession.

When you've finished, say:

*I am sorry for these and all my sins.*

### **Step 3: Receive Guidance and Penance**

The priest may offer a few words of encouragement or advice. He will then give you a penance - usually a short prayer or act of kindness - to help you respond to God's mercy.

### **Step 4: Pray the Act of Contrition**

Before absolution, the priest will invite you to express your sorrow. You may use your own words, or pray the traditional Act of Contrition:

*O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you,  
and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments,  
but most of all because they offend you, my God,  
who are all good and deserving of all my love.*

*I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace,  
to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.*

### **Step 5: Receive Absolution**

Now comes the moment of grace. The priest will pray the words of absolution:

*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins;*

*through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Make the Sign of the Cross and respond:

*Amen.*

### **Step 6: Live in Peace**

After confession, spend a few moments in quiet thanksgiving. You might pray:

*Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and love. Help me to walk in your ways and grow in holiness.*

Then go and live your penance with joy. You are forgiven. You are free. You are loved.

### **A Final Word**

Confession is not about being perfect - it's about being honest. It's not about shame - it's about healing. Jesus longs to meet you in this sacrament. He is waiting, not with condemnation, but with compassion. So come as you are. Come with trust. Come and be made new.



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## **Sin and Confession: The Sacrament of God's Mercy**

In a world that often avoids the language of sin, this gentle reflection invites us to rediscover the healing power of God's mercy. With clarity and compassion, Fr Luke explores the reality of sin - not to condemn, but to illuminate our need for grace.

Rooted in Scripture, tradition, and the Apostles' Creed, this booklet explains how Jesus saves us from sin and how that salvation is tangibly offered through the Church, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It guides readers through the meaning of confession, the role of the priest, and the communal dimension of forgiveness.

Whether you're returning after years away or simply seeking a deeper understanding, this is an invitation to begin again - to encounter Christ's mercy, be reconciled, and walk in peace.

*"The Shepherd's Voice", pamphlets, booklets and devotional resources from  
Fr Luke Goymour*

**Fr Luke Goymour** was ordained to the priesthood in 2010. He completed his studies at St Mary's College, Oscott, earning a Bachelor's degree in Applied Theology with Catholic Philosophy from Birmingham University, as well as a *Sacrae Theologiae Baccalaureum* (STB) in Catholic Theology from the *Université Catholique de Louvain*. Following ordination, he furthered his education at Heythrop College, obtaining a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology from the University of London. He currently serves as Parish Priest of St Mark's with Holy Family Brantham and St Mary Magdalen, Ipswich. He is dedicated to teaching and preaching the gospel, with a strong commitment to helping others come to know Jesus Christ in the fullness of the Catholic Faith.