



Encounter Christ in the Sacrament

A Confessional Surprise

We receive some pretty amazing gifts in confession, including peace, joy, and true sorrow for our sins even if we don't initially start out feeling sorry.

One time, when I was going to confession, I had more time than usual to prepare because there were a few people in line before me. As I waited, I was struggling to think of any of my sins. Thankfully, I had a simple guide for confession with me which stated that the Holy Spirit will always gently remind us of our sins if we ask. So, I whispered a short prayer in that regard.

As I continued to wait in line, the Holy Spirit brought to mind my sins, and one of those caught me by surprise. I realized that there was a person in my life that I really disliked. In fact, I could probably say that I hated her. As I was thinking this over, it was also obvious to me that it felt good to hate her. So, what was I to do with those feelings?

The thought came to me that I could not confess this sin of hatred toward another person if I was not really sorry for it. It made sense to me that without true sorrow, there would not be a willingness on my part, even with God's help, to change my behavior. So I made an attempt to make myself feel sorry but that didn't work. Fortunately, another thought came, which I would presume was from the Holy Spirit because I was at a loss on how to proceed. The thought was to ask Jesus for the grace to be sorry. So that is what I did in a brief prayer, using those very words.

After confessing my sins to the priest, I went to a pew to pray the penance that he gave me. I tried to focus on the words I was praying while pushing

aside distracting thoughts about what I was going to be doing later that day. Then all of a sudden I noticed that tears were coming to my eyes. I had to do a reality check because, at first, I wasn't even sure of the reason for the tears. Then it became obvious that I was being given the grace that I had prayed for, true sorrow for my sins. My heart was being softened toward the woman that I hated, and I started to see that it was my selfishness that was also contributing to the situation of our disliking each other.

The other interesting thing was that after this confession, I was able to view this person differently, and by simply smiling at her the next time that I saw her, the door was opened to begin a friendship.

In light of this experience of receiving true sorrow for my sins, I now understand better that God pours forth His grace abundantly to strengthen us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. With His gift of grace, we are able to break sinful habits; habits that are harmful for us, including spiritually, emotionally, and in some cases even physically.

Who doesn't like gifts? During Lent, make it a point to open yourself to these incredible gifts from God in the Sacrament of Mercy. You won't regret it!

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