

Saints Peter & Paul  
Byzantine Catholic Church  
107 South Fourth Street  
Minersville, PA 17954

St. Mary's (Dormition of the Mother of God)  
Byzantine Catholic Church  
131 South Morris Street  
Saint Clair, PA 17970

Saints Peter & Paul Rectory: (570) 544-2074

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Served by: Very Reverend Gregory J. Noga, Pastor

SS. Peter & Paul Cantor: Mr. Paul Konkus      St. Mary Cantor: Dr. Peter Yasenchak

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**CONFESSIONS:** SS. Peter & Paul: Sunday One half hour prior to Divine Liturgy and Daily prior to Divine Liturgy

St. Mary's: Saturday 3:00 PM

**SICK CALLS:** As scheduled, or anytime in case of an emergency. If anyone is homebound or hospitalized, please call the rectory (544-2074)

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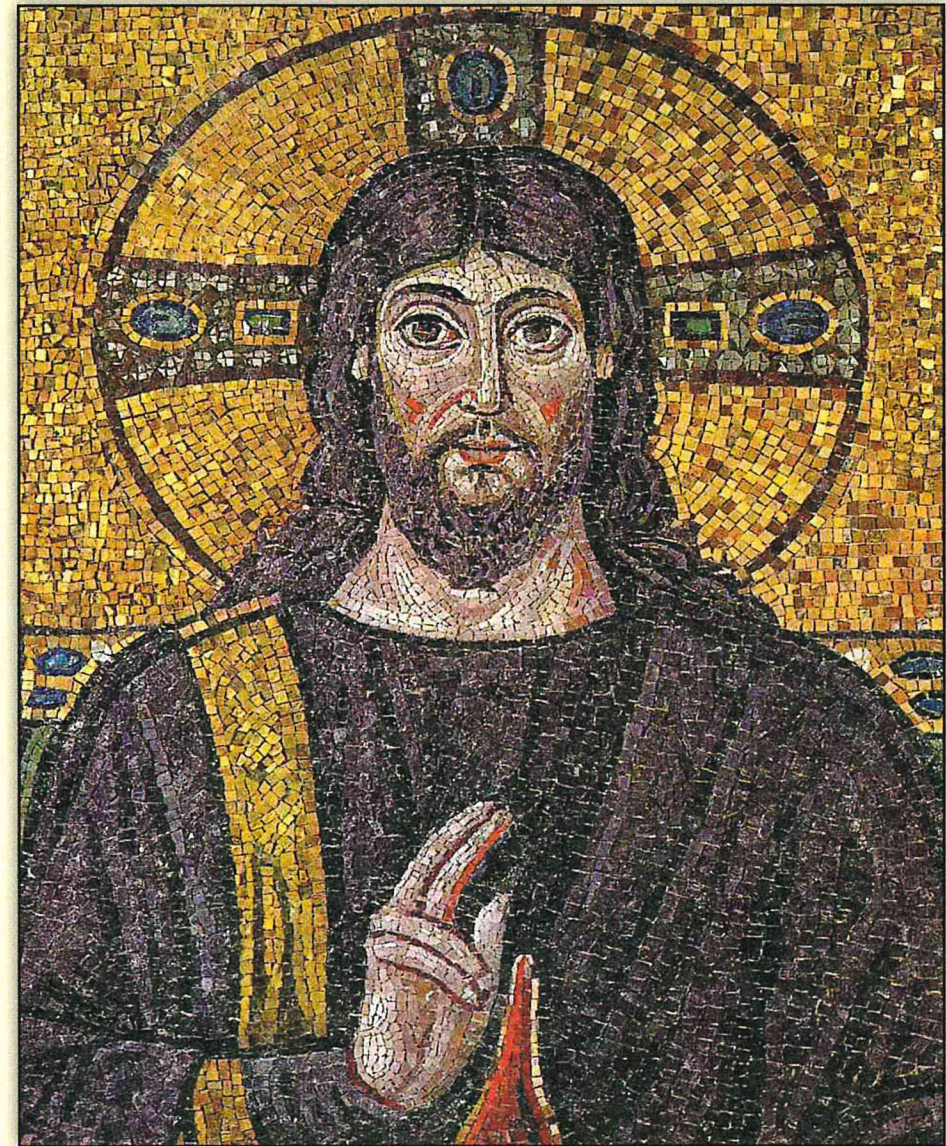
### *The True Light of Revelation to the Gentiles*

The Evangelist commemorates in this passage [today's Gospel] the prophet's words: "Beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." In what darkness? Certainly in the profound error of ignorance. What great light did they see? The light concerning which it is written: "He was the true light that illumines everyone who comes into this world." This was the light about which the just man Simeon in the Gospel declared, "A light of revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel." That light had arisen according to what David had announced, saying a light has arisen in the darkness to the upright of heart." Also, Isaiah demonstrated that light about to come for the enlightenment of the

Church when he said, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." Concerning that light also Daniel noted, "It reveals the profound and hidden things, knowing those things which are in darkness and the light is with it," that is, the Son with the Father, for even as the Father is light, so too is the Son light. And David also speaks in the psalm: "In your light shall we see light," for the Father is seen in the Son, as the Lord tells us in the Gospel: "Who sees me, sees the Father." From the true light, indeed, the true light proceeded, and from the invisible the visible. "He is the image of the invisible God," as the apostle notes.

*St. Chromatius*

## SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY



*Icon of Christ Pantocrator*



**Sunday after Theophany  
Festal Tone 6**

Welcome to the parish communities of SS. Peter and Paul and St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Churches of Minersville and Saint Clare, Pennsylvania. We greet and welcome you to our Church. Our Church is a holy place. Our Church is where we get together in Jesus' Name. It is holy because we come here to worship, to be nourished in faith through Sacred Scripture and preaching, to open our hearts and minds to celebrate the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ and to dedicate ourselves to a life of holiness and service to the Lord and others. The church building itself reflects this faith and calls us to enter into communion with God. We invite you to share our faith in Jesus Christ, to experience our worship and to live a life dedicated to the service of God and one another in Jesus' Name.

**January 8 – January 15, 2023**

**Saturday Vigil (at St. Mary)**

4:00 p.m. +**Bertha Petrishko** req. by Barbara & David Stepenosky

**Sunday**

9:00 a.m. **Health & Blessing of the Parish Families of SS. Peter & Paul**  
(Livestreamed)

**Tuesday**

8:00 a.m. +**Helen Platko** req. by Joe, Joel, Jenna, David & Jayden

**Wednesday**

8:00 a.m. +**Jeanette Lohin** req. by Joseph & Cheryl Gera

**Thursday**

8:00 a.m. + **Jeanette Lohin** req. by Joseph & Cheryl Gera

**Friday**

8:00 a.m. +**Mary Nagg** req. by Brian & Michele Hummer

**Saturday**

**Sunday Vigil (at St. Mary)**

4:00 p.m. +**Stephen Fedeles** req. by Al & Molly Tracey

**Next Sunday**

9:00 a.m. **Health & Blessings of the Parishioners** (at SS. Peter & Paul)

**Epistle Readers:** 1/1 – Madeline Dinich; 1/6 – Judy Kostura; 1/8 – Ellen Sinkovich; 1/15 – Laura Mitchell; 1/22 – Dolores Kramer; 1/29 – Marie Wanchick; 2/2 – Paulette Murphy; 2/5 – Beverley Kostishak.

**Sunday After Theophany**

OVERVIEW; Jesus waited until John's imprisonment to begin the preaching of repentance (CHRYSOSTOM). When John had brought the old covenant to conclusion, Jesus "began to preach" the new, being himself the beginning of it (ORIGEN). No one can receive the grace of God unless he or she has been cleansed of every stain of sin by the confession of repentance (CHROMATIUS).

In his withdrawal to Galilee, Jesus provided a pattern for us by which we are instructed not to look for temptations or persecutions (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA) but to withdraw ourselves from their sphere of influence (CHRYSOSTOM).

The great light is the gospel (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The light shines upon those sitting in the shadow of death, even when they were not looking for it (ORIGEN). Even as the Father is light, so too is the Son light. The region and shadow of death is the region of the infernal abode into which the Savior introduced the light of his majesty upon those who were shrouded in death (CHROMATIUS).

Upon being called by Jesus, the disciples left their nets immediately. Christ seeks this kind of immediate obedience from us (CHRYSOSTOM). You will leave behind much if you renounce earthly desires. The Lord looks to the heart and not at our material goods (GREGORY THE GREAT). The kingdom of God is worth sacrificing not only everything you have but all that you desire (GREGORY THE GREAT). Jesus neither resisted the disciples when they desired to withdraw from him, nor having withdrawn themselves, did he let them go altogether (CHRYSOSTOM). He chose illiterate, unskilled and untutored fishermen, that God's grace might be all the more apparent (CHROMATIUS).

**4:12) Jesus Withdraws to Galilee**

AVOIDING PERSECUTION. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: It was not out of fear that he withdrew. By doing the things he did, he taught us to escape from persecutors. He "withdrew" from Judea to the Gentiles. This showed that God removes himself to a remote part of the land of the Jews when they sin against the holy prophets and insult his deity. FRAGMENT 34.'

**4:13 Living in Capernaum**

Do NOT LOOK FOR TEMPTATIONS. CHRYSOSTOM: Why did he withdraw? He was serving as a pattern for us in instructing us not to seek out temptation but to withdraw ourselves from its sphere of influence. It is not a matter of reproach that one does not intentionally put oneself in danger. Yet one must stand nobly when one inadvertently falls into danger. So, to teach us this and to soothe the ire of the Jewish leaders, he withdrew to Capernaum, and in doing so he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, HOMILY 14:1



# WHY CONFESSION OF SINS?



*may be forgiven and admitted into Your everlasting friendship. Mary, Mother of God and all the Saints, intercede for me that I make a worthy confession.*

#### PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

*I a sinner, confess to Almighty God, One in the Holy Trinity, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to all the Saints, and to you, Father, all my sins. Bless me Father, for I have sinned. it has been .....since my last Confession. I accuse myself of the following sins...*

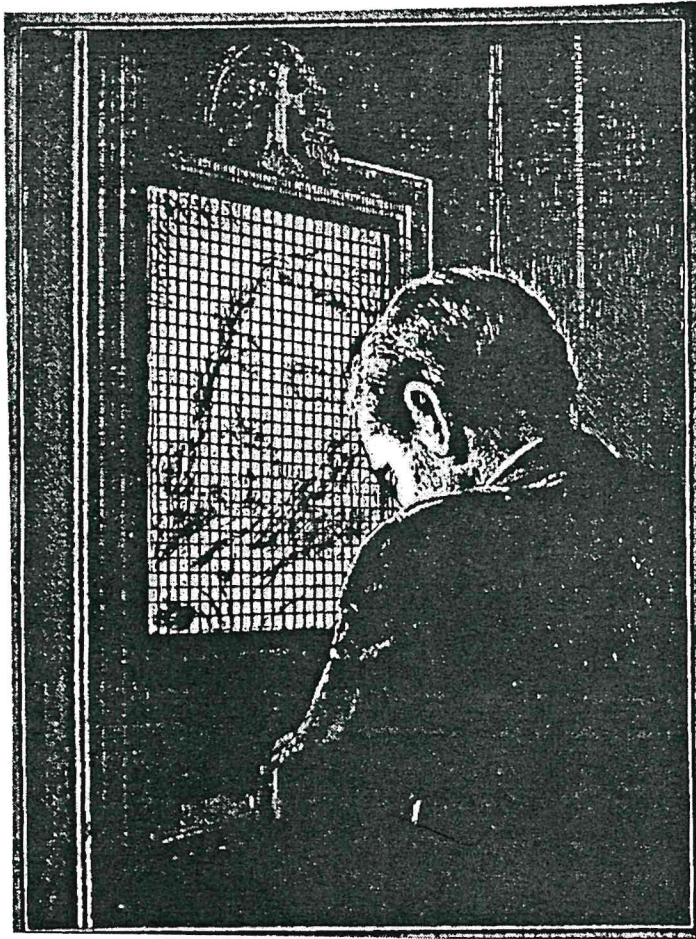
#### PRAYER AFTER CONFESSION

*For these and all my other sins, which I remember or cannot call to mind, I am very sorry that I have offended God and have angered Him against me. I am sincerely repentant and promise with the help of God to better my life. For this I humbly ask of you Father, salutary penance and absolution.*

Do not leave the confessional until you have heard the confessor: "Go in peace and sin no more."

#### PRAYER IN THE PEW AFTER CONFESSION

*O my God, from the depths of my heart and soul, I thank You for having forgiven me my sins. O Blessed Virgin Mother and all the saints, join with me in giving thanks to our Heavenly Father for His boundless mercy and washing away my sins. I deserve infinite punishment, but Your overwhelming mercy inspired me with the confident hope of salvation. You are my God of consolation, a true Comfort to sinners, Who from the brink and shades of death guides us to the possession of peace and joy in Your kingdom. Use me now as an instrument to praise You forever. Amen.*



Wasted time? Performed unnecessary acts to have an appearance of zeal?  
Refused to offer acts of self-sacrifice? How?  
Grumbled about little things?  
Not witnessed to the faith of Christ? Been ashamed of my religion?  
Not learned more about my faith even though I had the time?  
Not been zealous for the conversion of others to our Byzantine Catholic faith?  
Been unmindful of the suffering of the world?

#### EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE FOR CHILDREN

Have I

Wanted my own way too much?  
Been stubborn, disobedient, self-willed, selfish?  
Been angry, bad-tempered, Rude, sulky?  
Been cruel or quarreled with others?  
Neglected to participate in the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holydays of obligation?  
Neglected my daily prayers?  
Been irreverent?  
Told lies, cheated in school or in games, been deceitful?  
Stolen anything? What was it?  
Been greedy about my food?  
Given way to impure thoughts? Told or listened to impure stories? Done impure things alone or with others?  
Sworn? Cursed? Used bad language? Used God's Name in vain?  
Gone with evil friends? Led others to sin?  
Been lazy at my prayers, at my work at home or in school?  
Laughed at others for doing right? Laughed at sin?  
Been ashamed to do right? Ashamed of my parents or my religious faith?  
Been guilty of any other sin?

#### PRAYER IN THE PEW BEFORE CONFESSION

*Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who are everywhere present and fill all things, Treasury of blessings, and Giver of life, come and dwell within me, cleanse me of all stain, and save my soul, O Gracious Lord. Come to my assistance and enable me to make a good confession of my sins. Enlighten me and help me to know my sins as one day I shall be forced to recognize them before Christ's Judgement. Bring to my mind the evil I have done and the good which I neglected. Grant me heartfelt sorrow for my sins, and the grace of a sincere confession, so that I*

## WHY CONFESSION?

It was a bitter cold winter night some years ago. The Superior of one of our Byzantine Catholic monasteries was locking up and had just turned the key on the front door of the monastery when the bell rang, and out of the storm of wind and snow which was raging in the valley, a young man presented himself. He came from a nearby military installation. He had never been at the monastery before and was not acquainted with anyone who lived there. He only heard of the place as one where men could find the peace of God.

“I have just today received orders to sail for Europe and the war tomorrow. I have a twelve hour leave and I realize this is a crisis in my life. I do not know what lies in my future, but before I go, I know I must get right with God. Will you help me, Father?”

He was prepared for his first confession in a number of years. He received the forgiveness of God and the absolution of the confessor, and before dawn the next morning, received the Lord in Communion. And so, he was ready for the travel which was to carry him he knew not where. But the peace of God was in his heart and soul, and nothing else really mattered. The monks never heard from him afterwards. They continued to pray for him, living or departed, and they could not forget the joyous light that illumined his face as he said good-bye to them, starting out on a great adventure, with a hundred unknown perils in his path, but with a renewed heart because he had got right with God.

The young soldier's problem is everyone's problem. “How shall we get right with God?” The subject of reconciliation, confession and forgiveness is one which arouses many and widely varying reactions in people. The Church assumes the good will of each believer and proceeds to discuss in simple ways this question, the most important, perhaps, that could ever be proposed to the mind and soul of man. We all agree on its transcending seriousness. Perhaps we do not all agree as to the answer, but in the spirit of devout investigation, without preconceptions or prejudice, we must consider how important being right with our God is. Then, with a firm resolution, we accept humbly and wholeheartedly the conclusion to which the Holy Spirit leads us.

“How do we get right with God?” Generally speaking, the answer is that we receive God's forgiveness by placing ourselves in that condition and position where our God can act decisively in our lives. Our blessed faith teaches us that a “...broken and contrite heart...” (Psalm 50: 19), always wins the forgiveness and absolution of our God. God longs to forgive us,



but we must also do our part. *"My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it?"* (James 2: 14). God desires that all His children be united to Him, but we must also choose to come to Him of our own free will. *"You are my friends if you do what I command you"* (John 15: 14). That means we have a sincere and serious part to play, before we can receive His forgiveness. Our share is that we must be genuinely sorry for our sins, and we must use the means our God has appointed for the normal reception of His forgiveness. The particular answer is that "we must get right with God" by making our confession in the presence of a priest and from that priest confessor receive the forgiveness of God. Already in the Old Testament, we are reminded, *"...he shall confess the wrongs he has done..."* (Numbers 5: 7).

### WHY WE MAKE OUR CONFESSION

There is really only one important reason why we make our confession, and that is because we are quite convinced that our Creator and Maker wants us to do so. That is really what matters, God's will for our spiritual life. *"He who conceals his sins prospers not, but he who confesses and forsakes them, obtains mercy"* (Proverbs 28: 13).

One of the most prominent, but overlooked gifts of the Resurrection of our Lord to us who follow and believe in Him is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Because we celebrate with such festivity His descent upon the Apostles on Pentecost, many times believers overlook the fact that His first and very important coming took place in conjunction with this great feast day of joy and freedom.

*"On the evening of the first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced. 'Peace be with you,' he said again. 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' Then he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound'"* (John 20: 19-23).

After a very careful and prayerful study of this encounter, using the best commentaries of the Byzantine Fathers, the only conclusion we can infer is that these words witness to the institution by the newly Risen Saviour of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the Apostles, He came immediately to share the results of His Resurrection victory: the forgiveness of sin. Our Lord was lavish in His love, but He never gave useless instructions or directions. His provision is for all men, that they should confess their sins and receive forgiveness. It is always dangerous for any soul to count itself an exception to the general provision which our God has made for

### LUST

Have I  
Thought, looked at, said, read, or done anything impure? In what way? How many times?  
Associated with bad companions?  
Caused others to be impure?

### ANGER

Have I  
Been angry, impatient, peevish, discontented, sullen, sad?  
Sorry for myself? Dwelt on hurt feelings?  
Lost my temper? Nourished anger or resentment?  
Tried to irritate others? Ridiculed others maliciously?  
Been undisciplined in thought, word, or deed? How?  
Been guilty of unkindness, uncharity, disloyalty, treachery, violated confidences?  
Been guilty of any violent action? What was it?  
Sworn? Cursed? Used bad language? Used God's Name in vain?

### GLUTTONY

Have I  
Eaten or drunk to excess? Too fond of good eating?  
Over concerned about food, wasted food, spent too much money on food?  
Neglected the days of fasting and abstinence?  
Been spiritually gluttonous, desiring only sweetness and consolation in prayer?

### ENVY

Have I  
Been grieved at the prosperity or attainments of others?  
Been dejected because of the position, talents, or fortune of others?  
Delighted in the misfortune and failure of others?

### SLOTH

Have I  
Been lazy? How?  
Neglected my spiritual duties, or offered them unwillingly or without devotion?  
Neglected my family duties? Social duties?  
Neglected my business or employment duties?  
Tried to assure my own ease and comfort only? How?

## An Examination of Conscience for Adults

### Pride

Have I  
Made God the center of my life, or have I made 'self' the center? How?  
Acted from love of self? How?  
Been selfish, self-indulgent, self-seeking? How?  
Been stubborn, self-willed, self-seeking? How?  
Been disobedient to God, to my ideals, to my parents, to any obligations?  
Tried to dominate the lives of others? How?  
Talked too much, called attention to myself? How often?  
Been contemptuous of others or their devotion? Been unkind, or uncharitable? How?  
Gossiped, slandered, detracted, spoken cynically, criticized, disparaged? How often?  
Been sorry for myself, self-pitying, discouraged, depressed, despairing?  
Been self-conscious, self-conceited, self-sufficient, self-important?  
Refused to admit I was wrong? Refused to apologize?  
Allowed others to suffer for my faults?  
Been annoyed when I was corrected? Been supersensitive?  
Exaggerated, told lies, Been a hypocrite? Been deceitful? Been unfair? Cheated?  
Performed acts of sacrifice for selfish reasons?  
Done good things for bad reasons?  
Observed the laws of the Church concerning marriage? Have I been married in the Church?  
Been worried, afraid, allowed myself to go into frightful panic?  
Failed to participate in the worship of the Blessed Trinity every Sunday and holy day of obligation?  
Increased this sin because my family could not attend due to my neglect?  
Neglected my daily prayers or received Communion unworthily? How many times?  
Failed to seek guidance and grace from God in time of need?  
Received the Eucharist unworthily when I should have gone to confession first?  
Put my faith in mediums, fortune tellers, or attended spiritualistic meetings?  
Failed to rejoice in failures when they revealed my need of God?  
Thought God had been unfair to me? In what way?  
Presumed on the grace of God by sinning and thinking later I could ask His forgiveness?

### COVETOUSNESS

Have I  
Stolen, cheated, shared in stolen goods, used immoral investments?  
Paid my debts as promptly as possible? Contracted unnecessary debts?  
Been guilty of extravagance, used money wrongfully? How?  
Invested my money in an unchristian way?  
Sacrificially supported my parish Church with my time and treasure?

the welfare of His children. *"But if we confess our sins, He who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong"* (1 John 1: 9).

The liturgical life of our Church witnesses to the generosity of our God toward us, particularly as we celebrate the approach of the Great Fast, and the hymnology of the Great Fast itself, is uplifting and encouraging, finding as it does its completion and culmination in the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord. It is required that no believer should approach the Eucharist, except with full trust in God's loving mercy, and with a quiet conscience. Those who have need, and this means all of us, for healing separation by sin from our God, we must open our souls to the grief within that we receive Godly counsel and advice, and most importantly, receive a quieting of conscience through the absolution of our sins simply because we are sorry and contrite for having committed them.

All the sacramental Mysteries of the Church have as their objective the forgiveness of sins which we note when we carefully pay attention. But this is most obviated in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation after the penitent specifically makes known his sins and his sorrow for separation from God because of them. We are all eager to hear the blessed and assuring words of the priestly confessor to the genuinely penitent soul: "May our Lord and God Jesus Christ forgive you all your sins, and I by the authority granted to me, forgive and absolve you of all your sins in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in peace and sin no more."

On the day of their ordination, priests are commissioned to be dispensers of the Word of God, and of His sacramental Mysteries, so they take seriously their spiritual responsibilities. This means that souls entrusted to their care should also respond in the same serious and sincere manner to the cause of their own salvation. It stands to reason that priests should not be more zealous for the salvation of the souls of their parishioners than the parishioners themselves are!

The Byzantine Catholic, then, makes his confession of sins on a regular basis because he genuinely believes it is the way our Lord has appointed for the removal of sins committed after Baptism. In our Baptism, we were made children of God, adopted by our Heavenly Father into the Body of Christ, which is our blessed Church. One of the results of this Baptism was the forgiveness of our sin. But souls do not cease to sin after Baptism. One of the exhortations very frequent in the apostolic Church was to confession of sin. *"Many that believed came and confessed their sins and showed their deeds"* (Acts of the Apostles 19: 18). In later days, this exhortation was emphasized not only by the revelation of our God in Scripture, but also explicitly spelled out in the Canons of the Church. It is the obvious ancient custom that all believers must make a good and general confession at least once yearly, preferably during the season of the Great Fast, in preparation for the Resurrection feast day on which this



sacramental Mystery was instituted. Genuine believers recognize this is only a minimum requirement so that ~~our~~ our unity with the Body of Christ and other believers is not severed. It most certainly is not the ideal. Regular and frequent confession of sins ought to be the practice of every believer in Christ. *“Therefore repent of your sins that they be blotted out”* (Acts of the Apostles 3: 19). Each believer is the judge of his own conscience, taking into serious consideration the teaching of Christ and His Body, the Church. If we value pursuing holiness, we will confess regularly and frequently because we value and treasure our soul. Salvation is important to us and we recognize if we neglect confession for prolonged periods, we do forget our sins. If we forget our sins, how can we be sorry for them? Or, for what sins are we going to excite sorrow in our souls? And if we are not penitent, how can we expect forgiveness? The believer does not just confess or admit to “general” sinfulness because actual specific sins must be addressed and confessed. And we do not confess over again sins which already have been pardoned in previous confessions.

#### WE CONFESS OUR SINS TO REMAIN IN THE KINGDOM

But whatever the form of the exhortation to repentance, the real reason to make one’s confession of sins arises within the soul which has seen the glory of God and desires to possess it. We recall very fondly the admonition of St. Peter to his parishioners: *“As obedient sons, do not yield to the desires that once shaped you in your ignorance. Rather, become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy One who called you; remember, Scripture says, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’”* (1 Peter 1: 14-16). He tells us *“to strip away everything viscous, everything deceitful, pretenses, jealousies, and disparaging remarks of any kind. Be as eager for milk as newborn babies - pure milk of the spirit to make you grow into salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good”* (1 Peter 2: 1, 2). And the entire purpose for these admonitions and reminders is because *“you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own to proclaim the glorious works of the One who called you from darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God’s people; once there was no mercy for you, but now you have found mercy”* (1 Peter 2: 9).

St. Peter wishes to raise the spiritual awareness of his listeners to know that they live in the eternal dimension, actually aware the kingdom of God is already here because of Christ’s testimony. *“The kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4: 17), *“The reign of God is at hand”* (Luke 10: 9), *“...the kingdom of God has overtaken you”* (Matthew 12: 28), *“This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand”* (Mark 1: 15), *The kingdom of God is already in your midst”* (Luke 17: 21). This, of course, requires that we function on a different, higher and loftier plane. So, it is not at all surprising that the Apostle reminds us: *“That divine power of his*

*joy, peace”* (Galatians 5: 22). Our God has given us so many ways these virtues can enter our lives and the most fundamental way is simply doing His will.

After we ourselves have been enlightened and forgiven, we can then humbly begin to assist others in their spiritual strivings. For the end of the spiritual life is not simply our own salvation. Salvation for us Byzantine Catholics is a community experience. It is true that it begins in the individual soul and souls are saved, not by nations or armies, but one by one. But each soul, after it has found the way of redemption, realizes that its vocation is to know and love and serve the Lord, and to work along with Him. The most divine work in which we can participate is to labor along with our Heavenly Father for the coming of His Kingdom of righteousness and justice and love and joy and peace. We find our own salvation, face our own problems and sins, grow in holiness, and when sin and self are met and slowly overcome, we turn away from preoccupation with ourselves and begin laboring with God for others.

Most souls want the love and joy and peace that ensues from receiving God’s forgiveness, but they lack practical instruction on how to prepare themselves. First, we should go to a place where we can be alone for a time. It is essential that it be quiet and we commune with God. The parish church is the ideal place. For the first few moments, we simply meditate on God’s presence and come to reaffirm His overwhelming love for us. We think about what it cost Christ to redeem us and we do not want to be found wanting.

Sin is conscious choice of evil. It is more than breaking the rule of God because it is a misuse of our great gift of choice and because it is personal disloyalty and treachery. We remember the difference between temptation and sin. Temptation is the impulse to do wrong; sin is actually doing it. We can prayerfully resist temptation and are promised in the Scripture that it can be pushed aside with the grace of the Lord. *“No test has been sent you that does not come to all men. Besides, God keeps his promise. He will not let you be tested beyond your strength. Along with the test he will give you a way out of it so that you may be able to endure it”* (1 Corinthians 10: 13).

Finally, then, it is vital to make an examination of conscience. Many times we do not utilize the grace of this sacramental Mystery because we do not involve ourselves properly in preparing for it. If we invest something of ourselves, it will have greater meaning and benefit for us. Utilize the prayers the Church recommends we employ and they will enrich us.



the mad rush of the modern world. Certainly less is it achieved by suicide, but simply by the confession of our sins, after properly disposing ourselves to receive the forgiveness of our God.

Some like to postpone this important part of their spiritual lives. But we should not wait until it is too late. There may come a time when a soul becomes so enmeshed in selfishness and sinfulness that it becomes totally alienated from God. It loses a salutary vision of God which is the compelling motive for contrition. And there may come a time when the physical senses are so dulled, as when we lie upon our bed waiting to die, that it is well near impossible to make a confession and to be sorry for our sins. And of course, in our modern world, the uncertainty of life and sudden and unexpected death may prove how foolish we are about our eternal destiny.

We should make a frequent confession because, after we have been sorry for our sins and are forgiven, there still remain the possibility of the return of the "old man" (Ephesians 4: 22), the former man, with temptations and problems and imperfections. When we need expert medical advice, we go to a physician who will both assist us and observe the secrecy of his profession. If we lack legal insight, we approach a learned attorney who will enlighten us and respect our confidence. If we need spiritual advice concerning our sins, we will find it awaiting us under the seal of confession.

The spiritual life is not a trackless wilderness, but has a map all its own. While every soul differs in its particular battles, there is a science to the spiritual life which is ours for the asking. There is a special power, an overwhelming grace to the forgiveness of God which enables every penitent to meet individual particular temptations and even if the sincere penitent and the confessor both be ignorant, our God still knows. He supplies the grace to meet the real problems of life and the devoted soul welcomes this means of receiving spiritual power in this many times perplexing life.

What the Church needs, and the very purpose for its existence, is holy souls, holy people. This comes about only if there is a thirst for holiness, if we are on fire with love of God. The confessional is the principle aid to development in sanctity. It certainly is not easy to make our confession and it is right and necessary that it should cost the soul much in the way of faith and sorrow. It was not easy for our Lord to redeem us and it costs us dearly to enter the work of redemption on our own behalf. It is the way the Master went, so shall we the servants not follow? The western bishop, St. Augustine who left behind a life of sin and rose to tremendous heights of holiness caught the ideal of self-sacrifice and wrote: "...the price of love is yourself" (Confessions).

Regular confession of sins is the way to self respect and personal happiness and fulfillment. Joy is the great hallmark of true faith and follows on the gift of love. The Apostle speaks of "Love,

*has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety, through knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. By virtue of him he has bestowed upon us the great and precious things he promised, so that through these you who have fled a world corrupted by lust might become sharers of the divine nature"* (2 Peter 1: 3, 4). Avoiding the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation or postponing it places us outside a serious attempt to share the divine nature of Christ, simply because sin corrupts us and separates us from the Blessed Trinity. If and when we persist remaining away from unity with our God, we will hear the awful reminder of the Saviour: "*The kingdom of heaven shall be taken from you...*" (Matthew 21: 43). The blessed Apostle then enumerates what the effects of a regular life of confession of sins is like: "*This is reason enough for you to make every effort to undergird your virtue with faith, your discernment with virtue, and your self-control with discernment; this self-control in turn, should lead to perseverance, and perseverance to piety, and piety to care for your brother, and care for your brother, to love"* (2 Peter 1: 5-7).

One of the privileges that come to us in the life of the Church is confidence and assurance. We do not have to wonder where God is. The eternal light in the parish church reminds us that "God is here." The Nativity feasts sings out triumphantly, "*God is with us!*" We do not have to search far and wide for the meaning of our life. We know that heavenly power is ours when we receive the Eucharist worthily.

How many the souls there are who wonder needlessly if they have been sorry enough for forgiveness! It is the priestly confessor who offers the forgiveness of the Lord. He judges the contrition of the penitent, so this merciful sacramental Mystery offers us blessed assurance and confidence.

We make our confession on a regular basis because we believe that all true life is community in nature, that the Church is the Body of baptized believers, and, since "*no man lives to himself, or dies to himself"* (Romans 14: 7), or sins to himself, some form of apology is also due the whole Body of Christ which is the Church. "*If one member suffers, all members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all members share its joy"* (1 Corinthians 12: 26). And this apology we make when we are sorrowful of soul and make a good confession of sins. The confession serves a two-fold purpose: apologizing to our God and to other believers in the Church through the official representative of God and the Church, the priest-confessor.

Yes, it is true all the sacramental Mysteries of the Church have as their objective the cleansing of sin. But we cannot depend simply on these offerings of absolution. They must be assumed, they must be claimed, they must be appropriated, they must be responded to in the sacramental Mystery established by the Lord to overcome with grace the individual sinfulness of man.



No man lives to himself and no man sins by himself. When a baptized soul strays from the Lord, it adversely affects all believers, the Body of Christ. So, through our sincere confession of sin, regularly done, is the community apology made that is due the Church. In the early Church, confession was out loud in the midst of all believers, but since such contrition became open to abuse, the Church in its wisdom directed that confession be made only in the presence of the priest, who is not only the representative of Christ, but of the believing Church community as well.

We utilize the grace of this sacramental Mystery because a mere private acknowledgment to God, as should always be done anyway, in the case of grievous sins, is simply not enough. When we examine the directive of our Saviour, He reminds the apostles, "...if you forgive...if you hold them bound..." (John 20: 23), implying rather plainly the confessor must make a judgment, must actually hear the sins verbalized and confessed and recognize the inner sorrow of the soul.

There are those who claim they do not want another man intruding on their relationship with God. But when we come to realize all life flows to us through other people, for we are all the Body of Christ, then we come to value the method our Lord chose for us to be reconciled with Him after we miss the mark, after we stray, after we sin! Just as physical life comes to us through the efforts of other people, so spiritual life is imparted through others. It is true, however, that in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation, the priest is a mediator between the sinful soul and the forgiveness of the Lord. But the important fact to remember is that the priest is present to assist, to help, to affirm, to encourage, not to separate us from our God, but to unite us further with Him. We call upon a physician in time of need, not to hinder, not to introduce further deterioration to our physical being, but to restore us to health.

We make our confession of sins because it is the way of perseverance in sorrow for sin. It is a reminder to us of how vulnerable we are to the sinful attacks of the devil. "*Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you. Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, solid in your faith, realizing the brotherhood of believers is undergoing the same sufferings throughout the world*" 1 Peter 5: 7-9.

The way to a genuine spiritual life appealing in the sight of the Holy Trinity is through an ever-deepening contrition and the reception of sacramental grace to fight stubborn sin and the willful self which keeps us from Him. There are some critics of the sacramental Mystery who think souls approach the confessional without any intention of amendment of life. Of course, it is true that anything good can be abused.

But we must come to recognize that no genuine believer would continue to go to confession without desiring to improve spiritually because such an action is not psychologically possible. A hardened person would give up use of this august sacramental Mystery. In conscience, as the helper of the soul in this sacramental mystery, the priestly confessor would at some point refuse to offer absolution if he doubted the sincerity of the penitent. He would certainly discuss this with him. Then, of course, we come to the realization that God's grace is not magic. Some sins are too deeply rooted in our human nature for God to remove them at once, without serious injury to our personality. Instead, seeing the sincerity of the soul, He offers absolution, knowing its strength will cause improvement and change for the better. As often as we fall, we receive spiritual power and strength to start afresh once again. The sincere soul continues to seek the confessional to uproot sin, just as the good gardener does not give up on his garden because it continually grows a new crop of unwanted weeds. The good gardener zealously and energetically keeps on pulling out the weeds so that the flowers of virtue might be cultivated. We go to the confessional because we need spiritual power to meet besetting temptations. Our part is that of perseverance in hope and humility and we recognize the confessional is a great aid to the acquirement of these virtues.

#### WHY WE SHOULD MAKE OUR CONFESSION

Confession is not only good for the soul of the priest who hears the confessions of other believers, but good for all who seriously want to save their souls. What primarily matters is that it is the will of our Creator and our God that we rid ourselves of our sins by this means. Our God created us because He desires that we be wholly His. Humble confession is the way to God. And then, of course, because we are members of the Body of Christ, we should also make our confession for the sake of other parts, other member of this Body. Just as a hurt or pain in one part of the body causes discomfort and pain to the whole body, so one sinful soul causes spiritual distress to the Body of Christ. For the sake of other souls, we come to be united with Him in full union. We make our confession of sins regularly because it benefits us as it is an escape from sin and death. It is the way of finding spiritual guidance in perplexing problems and is the way of growing in holiness. It is an avenue to happiness because we are fulfilling thereby the will of our Heavenly Father.

The first step in our spiritual lives after we have experienced the vision of love in the face of our Saviour, is to find release from the things which detour us from Him. We have a deep need to eliminate the things which permit our base selves to have dominion in our lives. Certainly even psychologists tell us we must find release from the things that worry and frighten us. The way of release is not by alcohol, narcotic addiction, or sin, or self-culture, self-improvement, or