

Session 26: Sin and Forgiveness

HYMN: Forgive Our Sins As We Forgive



"Forgive our sins as we forgive,"
 You taught us, Lord, to pray.
 But You alone can grant us grace
 to live the words we say.

How can Your pardon reach and bless
 the unforgiving heart
 that broods on wrongs and will not
 let
 old bitterness depart?

In blazing light Your cross reveals
 the truth we dimly knew:
 how small the debts men owe to us,
 how great our debt to You.

Lord, cleanse the depths within our
 souls
 and bid resentment cease.
 Then, reconciled to God and man,
 our lives will spread Your peace.

PRAYER:

Let us pray:
 O God, Who,
 through Your Word
 reconcile the human race to Yourself
 in a wonderful way,
 grant, we pray,
 that with prompt devotion
 and eager faith,
 the Christian people may hasten
 toward the solemn celebrations
 to come.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Your Son,
 Who lives and reigns with You
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 God, for ever and ever.
 — Amen

READING:

Jn 20:21-23

The Lord be with you.
 — *And with your spirit*
 A Reading from the holy Gospel
 according to John
 — *Glory to You, O Lord*

Jesus said,
 "Peace be with you.
 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."
 The Gospel of the Lord
 — *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Sin is an offence against God,
 by any thought, word,
 deed, or omission
 against the law of God.

Actual sin
 (as opposed to original sin)
 is any sin
 that we ourselves commit.
 It is divided into *mortal sin*
 and *venial sin*.

Mortal sin
 is a grievous offence against God,
 so called because it kills the soul,
 depriving it of supernatural life,
 and deserves Hell.
 It is the greatest of all evils
 to fall into mortal sin.

Venial sin is an offence
 which does not kill the soul,
 yet displeases God,
 and often leads to mortal sin.
 It is called venial
 because it is less serious
 than mortal sin.

In the Apostles' Creed, we say,
 "I believe
 in the forgiveness of sins."

We mean that Christ has left
 the power of forgiving sins
 to the pastors of His Church,
 principally by the Sacraments
 of Baptism and Penance.

Penance is the Sacrament whereby
 the sins, whether mortal or venial,
 that we have committed after Baptism
 are forgiven.

Besides forgiving sin,
 the Sacrament of Penance
 increases our fortitude,
 so we should go to Confession often.—

Our Lord instituted this Sacrament when He breathed on His apostles and gave them power to forgive sins, saying,

"If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them."

The priest forgives sins by the power of God when he pronounces the words of absolution:
"I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This forgiveness requires three conditions on the part of the penitent: contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

Contrition is a hearty sorrow for our sins, because by them we have offended so good a God. It also includes a *firm purpose of amendment*: a resolution to avoid, with the help of God, not only sin, but also the dangerous occasions of sin.

Perfect contrition is sorrow for sin arising purely from the love of God. By it, our sins are forgiven immediately, even before we confess them. (Nevertheless, if they are mortal, we are strictly bound to confess them afterward.)

However, *imperfect contrition* is sufficient in Confession: sorrow for our sins because by them we have lost Heaven and deserved Hell.

Confession means accusing ourselves of our sins before a priest. If a person willfully conceal a mortal sin in Confession, he is guilty of a great sacrilege in telling a lie to the Holy Spirit.

Satisfaction means doing the penance

given us by the priest. This penance does not always make full satisfaction for our sins, so we should also perform other good deeds and penances, and try to gain indulgences.

(An indulgence is a remission, granted by the Church, of the temporal punishment which often remains due to sin after its guilt has been forgiven.)

BIBLE READING

Mt 21-28

This week, as you finish Matthew's Gospel, you will read how Jesus summed up God's commandments.

The "greatest and first commandment," He said, is to "love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind."

The second is to "love your neighbour as yourself."

You will also read how Jesus completed His work on earth by His Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension — all of which He undertook "for the forgiveness of sins."

Next week, we will demonstrate "How to Go to Confession."

Sin and Forgiveness

Introduction

Through human reason and through God's gift of the Decalogue,¹ we know the limitations which we, being created and not self-existent, must "freely recognize and respect with trust."² However, since Adam and Eve's fall, we have been inclined to sin.³ As a result, the world has been "virtually inundated by sin."⁴ Its very condition has become sinful,⁵ so that we speak of "the *sin* of the world,"⁶ not just the *sins*.⁷

Guilt

But it is not just "the world." We ourselves are sinners. "If we say, 'We are free of the guilt of sin,' we deceive ourselves."⁸

Are we trying to "lay a guilt-trip on you"?

Yes. Guilt feelings are not always psychologically unhealthy. If we have *really* done something wrong, it is appropriate for us to feel guilty.⁹

We are all *objectively* guilty because we have done things that are *objectively* wrong: wrong whether we know it, admit it, or feel it. We are all *subjectively* guilty because we have done them (at least partly) through our own fault: we knew they were wrong and did them anyway, without excuse.

So let us continue with our guilt-trip.

How guilty are we? Of course, we are not perfect, but we do not steal, murder, gossip (much), or harm our neighbours. We give to charities. Is that not enough?

This is "the religion of the natural man in every age and place; often very beautiful on the surface, but worthless in God's sight;... because it does not go further, because it is based on self-sufficiency, and results in self-satisfaction." Such people "walk by their own light, not by the true Light of men." They rely on their own judgement, not caring what God says or fearing His condemnation as long as "they stand approved in their own sight."¹⁰

We tend to be like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable. "I give you thanks, O God, that I am not like the rest of men — grasping, crooked, adulterous.... I fast twice a week. I pay tithes on all I possess." But Jesus condemned the Pharisee and praised the tax collector, who said simply, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."¹¹

We settle for a standard we can easily keep: what satisfies the world rather than God. But Jesus said that we must be made *perfect* as God Himself is perfect.¹²

Sin

Sin is "a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law,"¹³ a "deliberate transgression of a law of God."¹⁴ Every sin, therefore, offends God.¹⁵

"All wrongdoing is sin, but not all sin is deadly."¹⁶ A "deadly" or "mortal" sin¹⁷ kills supernatural life (*Zoë*). Anyone "in mortal sin"¹⁸ is not in "a state of grace";¹⁹

1 The Ten Commandments. See CCC 2071.

2 CCC 396

3 See CCC 1264. See also the talk on "Creation and the Fall."

4 CCC 401

5 CCC 408

6 Jn 1:29

7 It is a waste of time to try to ignore sin or disguise it as "a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure" (CCC 386-387).

8 1 Jn 1:8. "There is no just man, not even one;... All have taken the wrong course" (Ps 14:1-3; see Rom 3:10-12). Jesus said, "Moses has given you the law, has he not? Yet not one of you keeps it" (Jn 7:19).

9 A criminal who shows no signs of remorse often gets a longer jail sentence.

10 John Henry Newman: *The Religion of the Pharisee, the Religion of Mankind*

11 See Lk 18:11-14. Also see Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part III, 17, "Guilt and Reconciliation."

12 See Lk 5:48.

13 Augustine: *Contra Faustum*, 22

14 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Sin." We can also sin by co-operating in the sins of others: taking part in them directly and voluntarily; ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; not disclosing or hindering them when that is our duty; or protecting evil-doers (see CCC 1868).

15 See CCC 1850.

16 1 Jn 5:17

he is a dead branch on Christ the vine, a dead organ in Christ's Mystical Body.²⁰

For a sin to be mortal, it must be

- *gravely or seriously wrong, AND*
- committed with *full knowledge* that it is seriously wrong, *AND*
- committed deliberately, with *full consent*.

If we reach the end of our natural life (*Bios*) without repenting a mortal sin, the death of our *Zoë* is permanent. The "eternal punishment" (or "consequence") of mortal sin, then, is Hell — eternal separation from God.²¹

Sins which are not grave enough to be mortal are called "venial":²² "light" or "less serious." They do not kill our *Zoë*, but, if deliberate and unrepented, can lead to mortal sin.²³

Every sin strengthens the "unhealthy" or "inordinate"²⁴ attachment to created things that we inherit from Adam and Eve.²⁵ This is called the "temporal"²⁶ punishment (or "consequence") of sin, for it takes effect in this world.

Certain sins are called "capital,"²⁷ not because they are necessarily grave, but because they are the source of other sins:²⁸ pride (self-assertion),²⁹ avarice,³⁰ envy,³¹ wrath,³² lust,³³ gluttony,³⁴ and sloth.³⁵

Temptation

A *temptation* to do something wrong is not a sin. Jesus never committed sin, but Satan *tempted* Him to abandon His mission — in the desert³⁶ and in the Garden of Gethsemane.³⁷ Indeed, Jesus was "tempted [tested] in every way that we are."³⁸

Temptations to sin come from the world, the flesh, and the devil — "the enemies we must fight against all the days of our life."³⁹

- "The flesh" means "our own corrupt inclinations and passions, which are the most dangerous of all our enemies."⁴⁰ Here, "passion" means any intense desire; not just sexual desire, but also anger, envy, pride, *etc.*
- "The devil" means "Satan and all his wicked angels, who are always seeking to draw us into sin, that we may be damned with them."⁴¹

17 See CCC 1854–1859.

18 That is, a person who has committed a mortal sin but not repented it.

19 See the talk on "Grace and the Sacraments."

20 See the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ."

21 See the talk on "Death and the End of the World."

22 See CCC 1862–1863.

23 Appendix 1 lists venial sins as well as those which are serious enough to be mortal — when committed with full knowledge and full consent.

24 "Disordered" or "out of order": valuing the gifts above the Giver.

25 We must be purified from this attachment, either on earth or in Purgatory, before we can enter Heaven (see CCC 1472). See the talk on "Death and the End of the World."

26 From the Latin *tempus, temporis* ("time"). It has thus come to designate the things of this world rather than the next.

27 From the Latin *caput, capit* ("head"). These sins are sometimes, wrongly, called "deadly."

28 See CCC 1866; also see John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Capital Sins." For a prayer to be guarded from these sins, see the talk on "Prayer," Appendix 1.

29 "Inordinate esteem of oneself" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Pride").

30 "Excessive or insatiable desire for money or material things" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Avarice").

31 "Sadness or discontent at the excellence, good fortune, or success of another person" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Envy").

32 "Emotional sense of displeasure and usually antagonism aroused by real or apparent injury" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Anger").

33 "Inordinate desire for or enjoyment of sexual pleasure" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Lust").

34 "Inordinate desire for the pleasure connected with food or drink" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Gluttony").

35 "Sluggishness of soul or boredom because of the exertion necessary for the performance of a good work" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Sloth").

36 See Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–13.

37 See Mt 26:39; Lk 22:42.

38 Heb 4:15

39 *The Penny Catechism*, 348.

40 *The Penny Catechism*, 352

41 *The Penny Catechism*, 349. For a good exposé of the devil's methods, read C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape*

- Here, "the world" means "the false maxims of the world and the society of those who love the vanities, riches, and pleasures of this world better than God."^{4 2}

The *world* tempts us to sin by claiming that "everybody does it": missing Sunday Mass to play sports; being dishonest to keep "in" with the "right" people; dressing immodestly to be fashionable; acquiescing in destructive criticism to keep our friends; or being unchaste to keep our boyfriends, girlfriends, or spouses.^{4 3}

In short, the *world* tempts us to sin rather than appear "different." But it also tempts us to do things just *because* they are wrong. For example, its terms of approval include "forbidden," "sinful," "wicked," "decadent,"^{4 4} "voluptuous,"^{4 5} "sexy," "luxurious,"^{4 6} "self-indulgent," "prestigious," "exclusive," and "limited-edition."

Forgiveness

So much for the guilt-trip. That is the bad news. Now for the good.

We believe in "the forgiveness of sins."^{4 7} However, we must understand what that means. Otherwise, we can easily slip into *presumption* (continuing to sin because we know God will forgive us) or *despair* (thinking that God *cannot* forgive us.)

Not excusing

Forgiving does *NOT* mean *excusing*. Forgiveness says, "You have done this wrong thing, but I will not hold it against you." Excusing says, "You couldn't help it, or didn't mean it; you weren't really to blame."^{4 8}

Suppose a friend is two hours late for dinner. If it is because, say, he got hit by a car running a red light, then it is not his fault in any way; it is completely excusable. If it is because *he* ran a red light and hit someone else, then it is partly his own fault and therefore only partly excusable. But if it is because he wanted to finish an exciting book, it is completely his fault; it is totally *inexcusable*.

What is excusable does not need forgiveness. Only when there is something *inexcusable* — something to condemn — is there anything to *forgive*.

When we sin, God knows how much we were tempted, how afraid we were to do the right thing, how hard we resisted, how thoroughly we knew what we were doing, how fully we consented, *etc.* He will excuse whatever is excusable. It is what is left over — the deliberate, *inexcusable* part — that He will forgive.

Not overlooking

Forgiving does *NOT* mean overlooking or ignoring. When Christ took on our sins, He did not *ignore* them or *overlook* them: He suffered *what they deserved*.^{4 9}

People who think that forgiving means overlooking or ignoring evil cannot believe that God will forgive Hitler, for example.^{5 0}

Letters, in which one imaginary devil advises another on how to damn a human soul.

42 *The Penny Catechism*, 350. Here, "world" means something different from the world God created and saw to be good (see Gn 1:4,10,12,18,21,25, 1:31) In future, to distinguish this meaning from the standard meaning, we will print "world" (negative sense) in italics. For illuminating analyses of the temptation offered by *the world*, see C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, 10, and *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, "The Inner Ring."

43 We are all influenced by the prevailing *zeitgeist* — the defining spirit or mood of the world as shown by the ideas and beliefs of the time. In the story of the Scottish village of *Brigadoon*, the minister asked God to keep his people "unspotted by the world" (Jas 1:27) by making Brigadoon vanish into the Highland mist and reappear only one day in every century — too short a time for it to be touched by the prevailing *zeitgeist* (see Alan Jay Lerner: *Brigadoon*, Act One, Scene 5).

44 "Falling away, declining, deteriorating"; used especially of periods of art and literature.

45 "Of, tending to, occupied with sensuous or sensual gratification."

46 "Contributing to luxury or self-indulgence, voluptuous," from the Latin *luxuria* ("sinful indulgence of sexual pleasure"). "Though not sinful in itself, luxury easily leads to sin or may itself be the result of injustice or failure in charity" (John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Luxury").

47 As we say in the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. A woman said that when she first made the Stations of the Cross after becoming a Catholic, she was annoyed to hear so much about guilt and sin. Gradually, she said, she realized that she was guilty, but that she could "dump" all her guilt on to Christ. "It was such a relief to get rid of the load," she said.

48 See C.S. Lewis: *Fern-Seed and Elephants*, "On Forgiveness."

49 Paul says that to reconcile us with Himself, God "made Christ to be sin" (2 Cor 5:21). To see what our sins deserved, watch the movie *The Passion of the Christ*.

Why? Because the evil he did was just too great?

God will not overlook or ignore any of it, but His *forgiveness* has no limits. "Though your sins be like scarlet," He said, "they may become white as snow; though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool."⁵¹

Why do we think God will forgive *us*? Because *our* sins are not really that bad?

But there is no fault so little that God will ignore it or overlook it. "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,"⁵² Jesus said.

Convinced of sin

To be forgiven, we must admit our guilt, objective and subjective. If we refuse, we commit a sin against the Holy Spirit, which Jesus said "will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."⁵³

This "non-forgiveness" is not a failure in God's mercy; rather it is linked to our "non-repentance": our "radical refusal to be converted." It is "the sin committed by the person who claims to have a 'right' to persist in evil — in any sin at all — and who thus rejects Redemption." In such a person, the Holy Spirit, Who must "convince us of our sin"⁵⁴ before we can be forgiven, encounters "an interior resistance" or "an impenetrability of conscience" which the Bible calls "hardness of heart."⁵⁵ This is "a state of spiritual ruin."⁵⁶

The early Christians welcomed the *Evangelium*, the Good News, because they were conscious of their guilt. "It promised healing to those who knew they were sick."⁵⁷ But our society has lost this *sense* of sin.⁵⁸ Accordingly, the Church today has to convince people of "the unwelcome diagnosis" before she can expect them to welcome "the news of the remedy."⁵⁹

Firm purpose of amendment

Seeking forgiveness, then, means *admitting guilt*. However, it also means *intending to change*. To see this, try to imagine that your spouse has been unfaithful to you. He asks you to forgive him, but says he is not going to stop.

You probably cannot imagine it, for no one puts into words, at the same time, the desire for forgiveness and the intention to repeat the offence. The two states of mind are incompatible.⁶⁰

Now try to imagine your spouse admitting that he has been unfaithful and asking you to forgive him, but warning you that it *might* happen again.

Maybe he calls it "being realistic." But its verbal expression seems incompatible with a genuine desire for forgiveness. It implies that the offence was beyond his control. But if so, it is completely excusable; he needs help, not forgiveness. If he wants forgiveness, he must know that at least part of the offence was his fault.

When we ask God to forgive us, we must assure Him that the part of the sin that was our fault, the deliberate, inexcusable part, will not occur again. In the Act of Contrition,⁶¹ we say that we "firmly resolve," with God's grace, not to sin again.

50 Father Tony Trafford of Sacred Heart Church in Cheltenham England raised a storm of protest April 30 1995, the 50th anniversary of Hitler's death, by praying that God would "treat with mercy" those who had "not been merciful in their own lives." One former serviceman said, "It is monstrous for him to say this after millions of Jews were exterminated and thousands and thousands of our boys died in the war. I appreciate that we are all God's children, but to pray for this evil man is going too far" (see *The BC Catholic*, May 25 1995).

51 Is 1:18; see Ps 103:12.

52 Mt 6:48

53 Mt 12:32. It is "unforgivable by its very nature, insofar as it excludes the elements through which the forgiveness of sin takes place" (Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 14, a. 3).

54 Jn 16:8-9

55 Ps 81:13; Jer 7:24; Mk 3:5

56 Pope John Paul II: *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 46

57 C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "God in the Dock"

58 For example, see Pope John Paul II: *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 47, and *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 18; also see Pope Pius XII: *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, October 26 1946.

59 C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "God in the Dock"

60 Even though we can regret our sin, seek forgiveness, and succumb again to the same temptation; or even plan to sin, knowing that we will regret it, and intending to seek forgiveness afterward.

Should we not rather promise to *try* not to sin again?

All we can *do* is try. But when we say "I'll try," we must be sure that we are not just *leaving room for failure*, as when we say, "I'll try to write that letter today."⁶²

If my husband promised "to try" not to commit adultery again, I know what I would say: "What do you mean — try? If this woman tempts you, avoid her. If she works in the same office, get another office. Don't be alone with her again."

All we can *do* is try. But if we have the firm *intention* of trying, what we *say* is, "I promise I won't do it again." Then what we *do* is to make any necessary changes.

Jesus warned that it might be as difficult as cutting off our hand, plucking out our eye,⁶³ or getting a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.⁶⁴ "For man it is impossible," He said, "but with God all things are possible."⁶⁵

We also start acquiring the self-knowledge we need to avoid situations in which we will probably be tempted again. In the language of the Act of Contrition,⁶⁶ we promise, with God's grace, "to avoid the occasions of sin."⁶⁷

We also pray faithfully for God's help,⁶⁸ as Jesus told us to pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation."⁶⁹ We ask Him "not to allow us to take the way that leads to sin"⁷⁰ even when, in our ignorance and selfishness, we ask Him for things that would, if granted, lead us into temptation.⁷¹

Finally, we turn to Jesus the instant temptation comes: "Jesus, I trust in You."⁷²

We need not despair. We are all tempted to sin. And we can be sure that God does not let us be tested beyond our strength.⁷³

Sorrow for sin

Seeking forgiveness, then, means *admitting guilt* and *intending to change*. But there is something more.

Suppose your spouse says, "I've been unfaithful to you, but I promise I won't do it again." Full stop. Something seems to be missing.

In practice, almost anybody asking to be forgiven *says* he is sorry. But what does he mean? What meaning would you demand — or even accept — as proof that your spouse really wanted forgiveness?

- "I'm sorry you had to find out."
- "I'm sorry because I've contracted an STD."
- "I'm sorry because it makes me ashamed of myself."
- "I'm sorry because it's damaged my reputation."
- "I'm sorry because the scandal has cost me my job."
- "I'm sorry because it wasn't much fun."
- "I'm sorry because it's made you angry."
- "I'm sorry because it's made you want to leave me."
- "I'm sorry because it's hurt you."

Our sorrow for sin can have many motives, especially as we come to love God

61 See the end of Appendix 1.

62 The latter is the state of mind of a girl who keeps a packet of condoms, an alcoholic who keeps a corkscrew, a smoker who keeps a lighter, or a drug addict who keeps a roach clip.

63 Mk 9:43-47

64 Mt 19:24

65 Mt 19:26

66 See the end of Appendix 1.

67 For an example, see Appendix 2.

68 See CCC 2340.

69 The Greek in this passage means both "do not allow us to enter into temptation" and "do not let us yield to temptation." "No one who is being tempted is free to say, 'I am being tempted by God.... God, Who is beyond the grasp of evil, tempts no one'" (Jas 1:13-14). On the contrary, He wants to free us from evil.

70 See CCC 2846.

71 For example, we ask for material goods, happiness, high position in the world, and freedom from persecution, even though Jesus said that it is the poor, the sorrowing, the lowly, and the persecuted who are truly "blessed" (see Mt 5:3-12). See the talk on "The Beatitudes."

72 One priest says in Confession, "Pray that when temptation comes, you will rely on His strength rather than your own."

73 See 1 Cor 10:13.

more. Think of a sin you are ashamed of. If we saw sin clearly, as God does — without the false glamour given it by the *world*, the flesh, and the devil — surely we would be just as ashamed of all our sins. We would be sorry not just because they offend God, but also because they are so hateful in themselves — so mean, malicious, despicable.

Think of the disgust heterosexual people feel for the homosexual act, and *vice versa*. It must be only a pale shadow of God's abhorrence for *all* sins, even those we find so tempting, "normal," and "excusable" — the ones "everybody" commits. St. Catherine of Siena spoke of "the stench" of sin.⁷⁴ If we could smell the stench of our own sins, surely our revulsion would form part of our sorrow.

In the Act of Contrition,⁷⁵ we tell God we are sorry because we "dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell," but most of all because our sins offend Him, Who is all-good and deserves all our love. We admit to mixed motives.

There are many reasons why your spouse might be sorry for his infidelity. We would probably find most of them unacceptable as part of his apology. Who would not feel insulted if his spouse said he was sorry because he was afraid of going to Hell?

Yet even this God accepts. Jesus tried hard to make us afraid of Hell: that place of everlasting punishment by torment, where the devil will "destroy both body and soul,"⁷⁶ made not for humans but for "the devil and his angels,"⁷⁷ a place of privation, "the darkness outside."⁷⁸ Do not fear "those who kill the body and can do no more," He said, but "him who has power to cast into Gehenna after he has killed. Yes, I tell you, fear him."⁷⁹

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son,⁸⁰ the son decides "to declare himself guilty" because of his "deep humiliation" (he is obliged to feed pigs) and "extreme misery" (he is hungry enough to eat the pigs' food). Humiliation and misery are not very noble motives. Yet Jesus told this parable to describe "the process of repentance and conversion."⁸¹

God is less demanding than we are. He will forgive us on almost any terms, no matter how insulting and humiliating to Him.

We often surrender to God only as a last resort, when the ship is going down under us, offering Him what we call "our own" only when it seems to be no longer worth keeping.⁸² "If God were proud He would hardly have us on such terms, but He is not proud; He stoops to conquer;⁸³ He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to Him, and come to Him because there is nothing better to be had....⁸⁴ It is hardly complimentary to God that we should choose Him as an alternative to Hell: yet even this He accepts."⁸⁵

Why are we sorry for our own sins? Are we *truly* sorry?

It is more important to express our sorrow than to analyze it. Above all, we must not be dishonest. If we enjoyed a sin, we should not tell God or try to convince ourselves that we did not.⁸⁶ I often recall what my Grade Three teacher said:

74 Catherine of Siena: *The Dialogue*, 14, 46

75 See the end of Appendix 1.

76 Mt 10:28

77 Mt 25:41

78 Mt 8:12. He said of evildoers, "The angels will hurl them into the fiery furnace where they will wail and gnash their teeth" (Mt 13:42). He said that it was better to go through life crippled by the loss even of a foot or an eye than to be thrown into "Gehenna, with its unquenchable fire" (Mt 18:8-9), "where 'the worm dies not and the fire is never extinguished'" (Mk 9:48).

79 Lk 12:4-5

80 See Lk 15:11-32.

81 See CCC 1439.

82 Read Francis Thompson: *The Hound of Heaven*.

83 *She Stoops To Conquer* is the title of a play by Oliver Goldsmith.

84 In the 1955 movie version of Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, a woman who has promised to renounce the man she loves and be faithful to her husband says to the priest, "What does God want of me? All I can give Him now is a shabby second-best." The priest says quietly, "I'm afraid He's used to that."

85 C.S. Lewis: *The Problem of Pain*, VI

86 The pleasure was God's gift. As the devil Screwtape says, God "made the pleasures; all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures

"Being sorry for your sin means wishing you hadn't done it."

We should ask God for true contrition⁸⁷ and thank Him when He grants it. In the meantime, let us prove our sorrow by our actions. "I'm sorry; I won't do it again" — the two phrases go together.

* * * * *

Forgive us as we forgive

"Sin is before all else an offence against God, a rupture of communion with Him."⁸⁸ In forgiving us, God reconciles us to Himself⁸⁹ and restores our communion with Him.⁹⁰

However, sin also "injures human solidarity"⁹¹ and "damages or even breaks" our "fraternal"⁹² communion⁹³ with others. There are no "private" sins.

For the baptized, sin "damages communion with the Church."⁹⁴ Now the Church is Christ's Body;⁹⁵ He is its Head⁹⁶ and we are its members.⁹⁷ Insofar as we cut ourselves off from Him by sin, we cut ourselves off from His other members.

Reconciliation with Him, then, entails reconciliation with them: "reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God."⁹⁸

Accordingly, Jesus told us to say, in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."⁹⁹ This is a point He stressed: "If you forgive the faults of others, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours. If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you."¹⁰⁰

Now we have many ways of "forgiving" others. We can do it morosely, reluctantly, tacitly informing the offender that we will continue to hold the offence against him.¹⁰¹ We can delay our forgiveness, taking time to nurse or vent our anger and thus punish the offender emotionally.¹⁰²

Instead, we are to "forgive as the Lord has forgiven" us.¹⁰³ And in the Parable of the Prodigal Son¹⁰⁴ — or rather "the Merciful Father" — Christ told us how.

The younger son demanded his share of the estate, left his father's house, and "squandered his money on dissolute living."¹⁰⁵ When he returned home, penitent, his father could have scolded him, disowned him, demanded an apology, or required him to make restitution by working as a hired hand.¹⁰⁶ Instead, while he "was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was deeply moved. He ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him."¹⁰⁷ Ignoring his son's self-abasement, he said, "Let us eat and celebrate because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found."¹⁰⁸

which our Enemy has produced at times, or in ways, or in degrees which He has forbidden" (C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*, 9).

87 Sorrow for one's sins.

88 CCC 1440

89 See 2 Cor 5:19.

90 See CCC 613.

91 CCC 1849. "Human solidarity and charity" is "dictated and imposed both by our common origin and by the equality in rational nature of all men, whatever nation they belong to" (CCC 1939).

92 "Brotherly"; from the Latin *frater* ("brother").

93 CCC 1469

94 CCC 1440

95 See the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ."

96 See Col 1:18.

97 See 1 Cor 12:27.

98 CCC 1445

99 Mt 6:11. There is no comma after "trespasses"; grammatically, the clause that follows is restrictive. It means "forgive us as we forgive," not "forgive us, as we forgive."

100 Mt 6:14. See also Mt 18:21-35; Mk 11:25; Lk 6:37; and Sir 28:1-25.

101 For example: "I am quite ready to forgive him, of course. But anything more is quite impossible.... I forgive him as a Christian. But there are some things one can never forget" (see C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 10). In contrast, when Christ "pardoned all our sins," He "cancelled the bond that stood against us with all its claims, snatching it up and nailing it to the cross" (Col 2:13-14).

102 "The sun must not go down on your wrath; do not give the devil a chance to work on you" (Eph 4:26-27).

103 Col 3:13.

104 See Lk 15:11-32.

105 Lk 15:13

106 The son himself suggested this; see Lk 15:19.

107 Lk 15:20-21

This is how we are to forgive one another, as often as we are offended.¹⁰⁹
How do we set about it?

First, we *decide* to do it.¹¹⁰ "Forgiveness is above all a personal choice, a decision of the heart to go against the natural instinct to pay back evil with evil."¹¹¹

Second, we turn to God every time our resentment re-surfaces, asking Him to help us kill it. "It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offence; but the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession."¹¹²

Accept forgiveness

To be forgiven, then, we must acknowledge our guilt, regret our sins, intend to change, and forgive others from our heart.¹¹³ Then we must *accept* forgiveness — and that takes humility.¹¹⁴

Literature portrays people who, out of pride, reject it.

"I've lived my life, and by God I've enjoyed it! There's no merit to go snivelling now. I'm not sorry for myself and I don't want anyone else to be. What's coming I'll take. That's all."¹¹⁵

"The record shows I took the blows and did it my way!"¹¹⁶

"Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven."¹¹⁷

"I only want my rights. I'm not asking for anybody's bleeding¹¹⁸ charity." (The reply is, "Then do. At once. Ask for the Bleeding Charity."¹¹⁹)

When Alice broke her promise to marry John, John forgave her and wanted to renew their engagement. However, Alice refused, for she knew that "she had no right of her own to be taken back after the evil she had done, and she did not choose to be taken back as an object of pity and forgiveness."¹²⁰

"I cannot forgive myself what I have done," she told John, and "you ought not to forgive me."¹²¹ In pride, she magnified the wrong she had done until, "in an agony of despair," she convinced herself "that there was no pardon for her."¹²²

Despair is the sin we commit when we deliberately give up "all hope of salvation," refusing God's forgiveness on the grounds that we are too wicked to be saved, or that God has cast us away. It is "a grave crime against God's goodness."¹²³

"I must be like a leper in God's eyes," said Kristin, and the priest replied sternly, "Are you so arrogant that you think yourself capable of sinning so badly that God's mercy is not great enough?"¹²⁴

108 Lk 15:23-24

109 When Peter asked Jesus whether he should forgive his brother as often as seven times, Jesus replied, "No; not seven times; I say, seventy times seven times" (Mt 18:21-22).

110 We must be *ready* to offer forgiveness whether or not it is accepted.

111 Pope John Paul II: *No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness*, Message for World Day of Peace January 1 2002, 8

112 CCC 2843. See Appendix 3.

113 See Mt 18:21-35.

114 This is so well known that some people offer to forgive us with the *intention* of humiliating us.

115 Winson Graham: *Ross PoIdark*, Prologue

116 Paul Anka: *My Way*. The preceding line is "To say the things he truly feels and not the words of one who kneels."

117 John Milton: *Paradise Lost*, Book 1, line 261

118 Some English people would substitute "bleeding" for "bloody."

119 C.S. Lewis: *The Great Divorce*, 4

120 See Anthony Trollope: *Can You Forgive Her?* 54.

121 See Anthony Trollope: *Can You Forgive Her?* 74.

122 See Anthony Trollope: *Can You Forgive Her?* 37. Similarly, Emily Wharton "had been proud of all her virgin glories — proud of her intellect, proud of her beauty, proud of that obeisance which beauty, birth, and intellect combined exact from all comers. She had been ambitious as to her future life — had intended to be careful not to surrender herself to some empty fool — had thought herself well qualified to pick her own steps" (Anthony Trollope: *The Prime Minister*, 79). However, against all advice, she marries a scoundrel. When, after two years, he commits suicide, her family — whom she knew she had "disgraced," upon whom she had "brought a load of sorrow" — are willing and eager to forgive her, but "she was too proud to be forgiven so quickly" (Anthony Trollope: *The Prime Minister*, 61).

123 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Despair"

124 Sigrid Undset: *Kristin Lavransdatter, The Wife*, Part I, Chapter 4. "It's a kind of arrogance to be so

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation when He breathed on His apostles 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."¹²⁵

This Sacrament — also called the Sacrament of Penance, Forgiveness, Conversion,¹²⁶ or Confession¹²⁷ — is one of the two "Sacraments of Healing." (The other one is the Sacrament of the Sick.)

The Church hands on to priests the power to forgive sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.¹²⁸

The Sacrament of Penance, in which priests exercise this power, has four parts:

- the penitent's *contrition* or *repentance*, which comprises sorrow for sin and a firm intention to stop sinning.

Contrition is called "perfect" if it arises from love of God above all else, but "imperfect" if it arises from other motives, such as revulsion at the sin's ugliness or fear of damnation. Imperfect contrition is sufficient for forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance.¹²⁹

- the penitent's *confession* to a priest of all the unconfessed mortal sins he remembers after examining his conscience. He does not have to mention venial sins, but the Church strongly recommends it.¹³⁰

A priest who hears a confession is bound under very severe penalties to keep it absolutely secret, with no exceptions, making no use whatever of the knowledge it gives him. This secrecy is called "the seal of Confession."¹³¹

- *satisfaction*, or the penitent's intention to make acts of *reparation* to repair the harm caused by his sin and re-establish good habits. It is accomplished by the "penance" imposed by the priest¹³² and by other acts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving,¹³³ especially acts that carry indulgences.¹³⁴
- *absolution* by the priest.¹³⁵

The words of absolution, said by a priest, are the sacramental sign of the Sacrament of Penance.¹³⁶ Like all sacramental signs, they are efficacious; that is, they bring about the spiritual realities they symbolize: reconciliation with God and the Church, remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sin, and remission of at least part of the temporal punishment incurred by all sin. They also impart spiritual consolation, peace, and strength.¹³⁷

Confession

Confession of our sins to a priest is often the most difficult part of the Sacrament of Penance. Can we not just confess them to God in our hearts?

- certain you're past redemption" (Ellis Peters: *A Morbid Taste for Bones*, Chapter Nine).
- 125 Jn 20:22-23. "It was that very first Easter Sunday evening when Jesus imparted to His Church the forgiveness of sins, sharing with His first priests the power to pardon sins in His name. His first gift upon His Resurrection!... What He most wanted to give His Church was mercy for sins, and to share with His priests the power to absolve them" (Timothy Dolan: *Priests for the Third Millennium*, 18). See the talk on "How to Go to Confession," Appendix.
- 126 "Turning back"; from the Latin *convertere* ("turn around").
- 127 See CCC 1423-1424.
- 128 See the talk on "Mass: Sacrament and Sacrifice."
- 129 See CCC 1451-1453. If a person is unable to go to Confession, it is also sufficient in the Sacrament of the Sick (see John Hardon SJ: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Imperfect contrition").
- 130 See CCC 1454-1456, 1458.
- 131 See CCC 1467, 2490. Also see the movie *I Confess*.
- 132 See CCC 1459-1460.
- 133 See Tb 4:7-11, 12:8-10.
- 134 See the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ," including Appendices 1-3.
- 135 "Absolve" means "acquit": "set or pronounce free from blame or guilt."
- 136 "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 grant you pardon and peace. I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Go in peace; your sins are forgiven."
- 137 See CCC 1496.

No;¹³⁸ for "God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ," has given "the ministry of reconciliation" to His Church.¹³⁹

"Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in Heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in Heaven,"¹⁴⁰ Jesus told His apostles. "If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound."¹⁴¹ Clearly, if the Church is to exercise this power of binding or loosing our sins, she must be told what those sins are¹⁴² and she must have no doubt that we are sorry for them and intend to amend our lives.¹⁴³

Accordingly, "individual, integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary way" for Catholics to reconcile ourselves with God and the Church.¹⁴⁴ ("Integral" means confessing all our remembered mortal sins at once, not reserving some of them for confession later.)¹⁴⁵

However, there are also human reasons for confession.

Like *remembering* or *promising*, forgiving is a mental act. Mental acts can be solitary or social. For example, remembering is a solitary act, for we can perform it alone, but promising is a social act, for we make the promise to another person.¹⁴⁶ A solitary mental act may exist without being expressed or known to any one else. However, a social mental act *must* be verbalized; it cannot exist "without being expressed by words or signs" that make it known to the other party concerned.¹⁴⁷

Now forgiveness is a social act, for it is offered by one person and accepted by another. It must, therefore, be expressed: "I'm sorry" and "I forgive." It is what linguists call a speech act: an act we perform by saying something.¹⁴⁸ For the forgiveness to be complete, the offence must be mentioned explicitly: it is not

138 Except under extraordinary circumstances, such as danger of death.

139 See 2 Cor 5:18-19.

140 See Mt 16:19, 18:18. "Binding" and "loosing" were the terms used by Jewish rabbis for "forbidding" and "permitting." The Pharisees claimed these powers as theirs by tradition, and Queen Alexandra of Judea (76 BC — 67 BC) reinstated them, says the historian Josephus. By these powers, he says, the Pharisees "restored such as had been banished and set such as were prisoners at liberty, and, to say all at once, they differed in nothing from lords" (Josephus: *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XIII, Chapter XVI, 2).

According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "this does not mean that, as the learned men, they merely decided what, according to the Law, was forbidden or allowed." Rather, "they possessed and exercised the power of tying or untying a thing by the spell of their divine authority, just as they could, by the power vested in them, pronounce and revoke an anathema [a solemn condemnation] upon a person."

It is "in this sense," says the *Encyclopedia*, that "Jesus, when appointing His disciples to be His successors, used the familiar formula (see Mt 16:19, 18:18). By these words He virtually invested them with the same authority as that which He found belonging to the scribes and Pharisees, who [He said], 'bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will not move them with one of their fingers'; that is, 'loose them,' as they have the power to do (see Mt 23:2-4)."

141 Jn 20:22-23. "The words *bind* and *loose* mean: whomever you exclude from your communion will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into His" (CCC 1444-1445).

142 Some sins incur automatic excommunication (see *Code of Canon Law*, 1331) whose absolution is "reserved" to a bishop or the pope; e.g. apostasy, violation of the Eucharist, or physically attacking the Pope (see the *Code of Canon Law*, 1364, 1367, 1370). However, no one is excommunicated who is under the age of sixteen or ignorant of the penalty's existence (see *Code of Canon Law*, 1323).

143 For example, a priest could refuse absolution to a person who claims to have been "forced" to come to Confession by a parent, or who expresses his intention to continue in a state of adultery or fornication. However, if the penitent asks for absolution and the priest has no reason to doubt his contrition, absolution "is not to be denied or deferred" (*Code of Canon Law*, 980).

144 CCC 1484

145 "General absolution, without prior individual confession, cannot be given to a number of penitents together," unless 1) death is imminent and there is no time for individual confession, or 2) there are, unforeseen, a large number of penitents and too few priests (see *Code of Canon Law*, 961). However, in the latter case, the absolution is not validly received unless the penitent is resolved to make an individual confession in due time (see *Code of Canon Law*, 962).

146 It cannot exist "without the intervention of some other intelligent being, who acts a part" in it (Thomas Reid: *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, No. 5, VI).

147 Thomas Reid: *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, No. 5, VI. For example, it is not enough for your spouse to love you; he must show you or tell you that he does. It is not enough for one who has offended you to be sorry; he must apologize to you.

148 "In saying something, we do something" (John Langshaw Austin: *How to Do Things with Words*). For example, it is by saying "I take you to be my husband" and "I take you to be my wife" that a woman and a man marry each other. It is by saying the words of inauguration before Parliament that a person becomes Prime Minister. It is by saying the words of the oath of allegiance to a judge that a person becomes a citizen of a country.

enough to say "I'm sorry for anything I may have done to offend you."

When we confess our sins, expressing our sorrow and our intention to change, we make our penitence known not only to the priest, but also *to ourselves*.

"We can hardly be confident of the state of our own minds, but as it stands attested by some external action," said Samuel Johnson; "we are seldom sure that we sincerely meant what we [in fact] omitted to do."¹⁴⁹ Accordingly, one of the twelve steps to healing in Alcoholics Anonymous is to admit "to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."¹⁵⁰

Confession is difficult, primarily, not because it reveals our sins to another human being, but because in stating them *unequivocally*,¹⁵¹ *out loud*, we get them "off our chest,"¹⁵² place them *out there*, look at them squarely as *objectively evil*, and take responsibility for them. (Notice that confession out loud is just as difficult when we are alone, where no human being can possibly hear us.¹⁵³) It is humbling, but humility is appropriate when we ask for forgiveness.¹⁵⁴ Even psychologically, it "frees us and facilitates our reconciliation" with God and the Church.¹⁵⁵

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest acts *in persona Christi* ("in the Person of Christ"),¹⁵⁶ the One Whom we have offended in both Head and Body.¹⁵⁷ After the difficult words of confession, we hear the most consoling and uplifting words of absolution, in which Christ, through His priest, "personally addresses every sinner: 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'"¹⁵⁸

When Father Vince's mother became a Catholic, she said, "I have always believed that God is merciful, but now I *know* He has forgiven me: I have *heard* it."

We experience many temptations to stay away from Confession: pride, shame, discouragement, or reluctance to "avoid the occasions of sin." Overcoming them can be part of our *reparation* for our sins.

Priests know how difficult the Sacrament of Reconciliation can be, and Pope Francis has urged them to make it as easy as possible: an experience of "forgiveness and mercy," not of "a prosecuting court."¹⁵⁹

True compassion

Jesus was infinitely compassionate to sinners.

- "Has no one condemned you?" He asked the woman caught committing adultery. "Neither will I condemn you."¹⁶⁰

149 *Letter to Hester Thrale*, July 20 1775. English actor Sir Alec Guinness (1914-2000), who became a Catholic in 1956, quotes English writer and critic Edward Garnett (1868 - 1937) — "How can I know what I think until I hear what I say?" — and his wife, English translator Constance Garnett (1861 - 1946) — "How can I tell what I feel until I see what I do?" (Alec Guinness: *A commonplace Book*). God intended Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac to be a mental act, but He let Abraham all but kill his son before He intervened. God said, "I know now how devoted you are to God" — but only in this way could Abraham know it too (see Gn 22:1-18).

150 Step 5. Step 10 is to continue "to take personal inventory" and, when wrong, to admit it promptly.

151 That is, without ambiguity or double-talk.

152 John Dowling: *Why Confess Your Sins to a Priest?*

153 Verbalizing a fact without circumlocution gives it a different character (see Brant Pitre: *The Case for Jesus*, 1, "(Almost) Losing My Religion"). For example, when Ruth's father tried to persuade her to marry Mr. Vince, she asked him bluntly why he thought Mr. Vince was rich. That embarrassed him, for he had "carefully avoided" mentioning Mr. Vince's money. "The fact that he was thinking of it and that Ruth knew he was thinking of it, and that he knew that Ruth knew, had nothing to do with the case. The question was not in order, and it embarrassed him" — for it changed the character of what he was saying (P.G. Wodehouse: *The Man Upstairs and Other Stories*, "Ruth in Exile"). Similarly, it is easier to bear the fact that a priest knows our sins *if he does not talk to us about them, even privately* (see the talk on "How to Go to Confession," Note #6).

154 See Lk 18:10-14.

155 See CCC 1455. "The mere telling of the story ... is a purging process, emptying us of all that would stand in the way of being forgiven" (John Dowling: *Why Confess Your Sins to a Priest?*).

156 "The ordained priesthood guarantees that it really is Christ Who acts in the Sacraments" (CCC 1120). See the talk on "Grace and the Sacraments."

157 See Augustine: *Expositions on the Psalms*, 75, 4.

158 CCC 1484. Christ "is the Physician tending each one of the sick who need Him to cure them. He raises them up and reintegrates them into fraternal communion."

159 Pope Francis: Address at a course sponsored by the Apostolic Penitentiary, March 28 2014

160 Jn 8:10-11

- He said, "It is mercy I desire, and not sacrifice."¹⁶¹
- He promised to accept us no matter how late we turn to Him.¹⁶²
- Finally, He gave His life for us.¹⁶³
- Yet He was so severe that His disciples asked, "Who can be saved?"¹⁶⁴
- He said, "You must be made perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."¹⁶⁵
- He told the woman caught in adultery to "go, and sin no more."¹⁶⁶
- He said that many who "try to enter" Heaven will "be unable."¹⁶⁷
- He said that His disciples must be ready to renounce loved ones.¹⁶⁸
- He called people "hypocrites,"¹⁶⁹ "whited sepulchres,"¹⁷⁰ and "vipers."¹⁷¹
- He said He will not recognize some whom He has taught and eaten with.¹⁷²

Jesus loves us as we are, but He will not be satisfied until He has made us perfect, like His heavenly Father.¹⁷³ He forgives everything, but overlooks nothing.

How can He? He knows that we will never know true peace or happiness until we love God with our whole being,¹⁷⁴ for, ultimately, there is nothing else to love. We must abandon the idea that there is "some kind of delight which He does not appreciate or arbitrarily forbids, but which would really delight us if only He would allow it."¹⁷⁵

His compassion, therefore, is directed toward forgiving our guilt, not pretending that we are innocent; raising us up, not making us comfortable when we are down. "Failures will be forgiven; it is acquiescence that is fatal: the permitted, regularized presence of an area in ourselves that we still claim for our own."¹⁷⁶

Nonetheless, "this Helper Who will, in the long run, be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection, will also be delighted with the first feeble, stumbling effort [we] make tomorrow to do the simplest duty."¹⁷⁷

Caution

"The man who loves Me," Jesus said, is the one "who obeys the commandments he has from Me."¹⁷⁸ "Love the Lord your God, therefore, and always heed His charge: His statutes, decrees, and commandments."¹⁷⁹

When a human relationship deteriorates, we ask ourselves what we have done wrong. Similarly, when our relationship with God is damaged or broken off by sin, we must examine our consciences with respect to the commandments.

Appendix 1 lists thoughts, words, and actions that are *objectively* wrong.¹⁸⁰

It might tempt us to *scrupulosity* about sin: "the habit of imagining sin where none exists, or grave sin where the matter is venial."¹⁸¹ On the other hand, it

161 Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13, 12:7

162 See Mt 20:1-16.

163 "There is no greater love than this" (Jn 15:13).

164 Mt 19:25

165 Mt 5:48

166 Jn 8:11

167 Mt 7:13-14

168 Lk 14:26

169 Mt 15:7

170 Mt 23:27

171 Mt 12:34

172 Lk 13:26-27

173 See Lk 5:48.

174 See Lk 10:27. "If you devise, as it were, indentures between God and you — what you will do for Him and what you will not do, as though He should hold Himself content with such service of yours as you yourself care to appoint Him — if you make, I say, such indentures, you shall seal both the parts yourself, and you get no agreement thereto from Him" (Thomas More: *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, Book III, XIV).

175 C.S. Lewis: *Collected Letters*, Volume II, To Arthur Greeves, September 12 1933. See the talk on "The First Three Commandments," Appendix 3.

176 C.S. Lewis: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*, "A Slip of the Tongue"

177 C.S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, 9

178 Jn 14:21

179 Dt 11:1

180 The degree of *subjective* guilt incurred when we commit them depends on how much we were tempted, how frightened we were, how much we resisted, how thoroughly we knew what we were doing, how fully we consented, etc. See CCC 1861.

none exists, or grave sin where the matter is venial."¹⁸¹ On the other hand, it might tempt us to *self-satisfaction*: the presumption that we are good enough.

No one commits every sin in the list. No one sins all the time. And no matter how often or how grievously we sin, God forgives us if we repent. But we cannot enter Heaven *clinging* to even one sin; we must repent and reject them all. If we *refuse* to obey even one commandment, we reject God, no matter how many of the others we accept.¹⁸²

Appendix 1 should neither scare us nor reassure us, but simply help us examine our consciences with a view to repenting.

Conclusion

God never declares the guilty guiltless,¹⁸³ but always judges sin by His own justice and holiness. If we do not understand that, "we cannot understand the wonder of God's forgiveness" or "the amazing truth of the cross, where Christ endured the wrath of God for our sin" and revealed how "justice and love" can be reconciled:¹⁸⁴ "how a holy God can make sinners right with Himself" without leaving sin unjustly unpunished.¹⁸⁵

The "characteristic mark" of Catholicism is "a confession of sin and a prayer for mercy." Indeed, "confession of sin enters into the idea of its highest saintliness," for even the most holy "carry with them into Heaven the rapturous avowal of their being redeemed, restored transgressors."¹⁸⁶

We should go to Confession often, but especially in Advent and Lent. If we commit mortal sins, the Church requires us to confess them at least once a year,¹⁸⁷ and we may never receive Holy Communion until we have done so.

After Confession, we can say with glad confidence, "Then I acknowledged my sin to You; my guilt I covered not. I said, 'I confess my faults to the Lord,' and You took away the guilt of my sin."¹⁸⁸

"If we acknowledge our sins, He Who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong."¹⁸⁹ In the Sacrament of Penance, God brushes away our offences "like a cloud," our sins "like the morning mist."¹⁹⁰

Bibliography

I Confess

Paul Coulter: *Mass Killing in the Old Testament*

John Dowling: *Why Confess Your Sins to a Priest?*

Scott Hahn: *Lord, Have Mercy*

Imaculée Ilibagiza: *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*

C.S. Lewis: *The Screwtape Letters*

C.S. Lewis: *The Weight of Glory*, "The Inner Ring"

C.S. Lewis: *Fern-Seed and Elephants*, "On Forgiveness"

C.S. Lewis: *God in the Dock*, "God in the Dock"

181 John Hardon: *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, "Scrupulosity." This is a real psychological problem for some people.

182 "With every freely committed mortal sin, [man] offends God as the Giver of the law and as a result becomes guilty with regard to the entire law" (Pope John Paul II: *Veritatis Splendor*, 68; see Jas 2:8-11).

183 See Ex 34:7.

184 See Pope Benedict XVI: *Deus Caritas Est*, 10.

185 Paul Coulter: *Mass Killing in the Old Testament*

186 John Henry Newman: *The Religion of the Pharisee, the Religion of Mankind*

187 See the talk on "The First Three Commandments," Appendix 2.

188 Ps 32:5

189 1 Jn 1:9

190 Is 44:22

Appendix 1: Sins

Grave matter

The following acts are always gravely (or seriously) wrong. If they are committed with full consent and full knowledge that they are gravely wrong, they constitute mortal sins.

1. abortion or co-operation in abortion (see CCC 2271, 2272)
2. adultery (see CCC 1756)
3. blasphemy (see CCC 1756, 2148)
4. causing someone's death (see CCC 2269)
5. concealing a mortal sin in Confession (see *The Penny Catechism* 296; CCC 2020)
6. concubinage (see CCC 2390)
7. contraception (see Pope Pius XI: *Casti Conubii*, 56)
8. despair (see CCC 1864, 2091)
9. divorce (see CCC 2384, 2385)
10. drug trafficking (see CCC 2291)
11. euthanasia (see CCC 2277)
12. extermination of a people, nation, or ethnic minority (see CCC 2313)
13. failing to support the Church materially (see CCC 2041, 2043, *Code of Canon Law* 222)
14. failing to fast and do penance (see Pope Paul VI: *Paenitemini*, Chapter III, II, 1; CCC 2041, 2043, *Code of Canon Law*, 1250-1253)
15. failing to attend Mass (in Canada) December 25 or January 1 (see CCC 2041-2043; *Code of Canon Law* 1246-1248)
16. failing to attend Mass on Sunday (see CCC 2041-2043, 2181; *Code of Canon Law* 1246-1248)
17. failing to confess mortal sins at least once a year (see CCC 2041, 2042; *Code of Canon Law* 989)
18. failing to receive Communion at least during the Easter Season (see CCC 2041, 2042; *Code of Canon Law* 920)
19. false witness (see CCC 2476)
20. fornication (see CCC 2353)
21. heterologous artificial insemination (see CCC 2376)
22. homologous artificial insemination (see CCC 2376, 2377; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Donum Vitae*, B, 4-6, especially 4(a), in which the act is compared to contraception, which Pope Pius XI called "a grave sin")
23. homosex (see CCC 2357)
24. incest (see CCC 2388)
25. magic (see CCC 2117)
26. masturbation (see CCC 2352)
27. murder (see CCC 1756, 2261, 2268)
28. perjury (see CCC 1756, 2476, 2152)
29. polygamy (see CCC 2400)
30. pornography (see CCC 2354)
31. pre-natal diagnosis for abortion (see CCC 2274)
32. presumption (see CCC 1864, 2092)
33. prostitution (see CCC 2355)
34. rape (see CCC 2356)
35. receiving Communion in mortal sin (see CCC 2120; 1 Cor 11:27-32)
36. refusal to accept children in marriage (see Pope Pius XII: *Address to the Congress of the Italian Association of Midwives* October 29 1951, III "The Order of Values")
37. sacrilege (see CCC 2120)
38. simony (see *Code of Canon Law* 1380)
39. sorcery (see CCC 2117)

(continued)

40. sterilization (see Pope Pius XII: *Address to the Congress of the Italian Association of Midwives* October 29 1951, III "Direct Sterilization")
41. suicide (see CCC 2281)
42. terrorism, including kidnapping, hostage-taking, torture (see CCC 2297, 2298)

Possibly grave matter

The gravity of the following wrong acts depends on the circumstances.

1. abusive language (see CCC 2073)
2. adulation (see CCC 2480)
3. anger (see CCC 2302)
4. calumny (see CCC 2484)
5. cheating at games (see CCC 2413)
6. detraction (see Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae*, Part 2-2, Ques. 73, Art. 2)
7. drunkenness (see CCC 2290)
8. envy (see CCC 2539)
9. excessive speed (see CCC 2290)
10. hatred (see CCC 2303)
11. lying (see CCC 2484)
12. scandal (see CCC 2284, 2285)
13. theft (see CCC 1858, 1754, 2408)
14. unfair wagers (see CCC 2413)
15. use of drugs (see CCC 2291)
16. withholding fair pay (see CCC 2434)

Venial matter

The following acts (the selection is not exhaustive) are wrong, but not grave enough to be mortal. They are given in the form of questions to make an examination of conscience easier. In each case, the italicized words would be a good way of describing them in the confessional.

1. Is my heart set on money, clothes, vanity, amusement, or pleasure at any cost? That is, have I been *intemperate* in any of these areas?
2. Am I so caught up with getting on in this world that I do not think about God? For example, have I been *lazy with morning or evening prayers* or *omitted grace before or after meals*?
3. Have I deliberately *courted* or *consented to distractions while I am praying*?
4. Have I let Christ down in public? For example, have I *omitted to make the Sign of the Cross in public through embarrassment or shame*?
5. Have I been *frivolous in church*, by talking, laughing, joking, or neglecting to pray? Has my careless behaviour made it impossible for others to pray?
6. Have I been *late for Mass through carelessness*?
7. Have I *neglected to fast one hour before Communion*?
8. Do I *manipulate other people for my own ends and advantage*?
9. Do I *neglect my family duties*?
10. Have I *insulted others, quarreled with them, fought with them, or lost my temper with them*?
11. Have I *treated others rudely or discourteously*?
12. Have I made it difficult for others to be charitable toward me by my *irritability or bad temper*?
13. Have I *neglected work I ought to have done*, whether through idleness or because I did more pleasant work instead?

14. Have I *spoken critically about others*, whether I am lying or telling the truth? (Telling lies about them is called "calumny"; telling the truth when it is not absolutely necessary is called "detraction." Both are wrong.)
15. Have I *told lies*, explicitly or by letting an untruth be assumed?
16. Have I *harbored resentment or refused to forgive an injury*?
17. Do I *hate anybody*?
18. Have I *consented to impure thoughts or taken part in impure conversation*?
19. Have I *misused my body for sexual pleasure, alone or with someone else*?¹
20. Have I *consented to read or look at impure books, magazines, films, etc.*?
21. Have I *helped to lead others into sin by impure looks, words, or suggestions*?
22. Have I *consented to coveting someone else's wife or husband*?
23. Have I *consented to lustful thoughts*?
24. Have I *dressed immodestly*, so as to lead myself or others into sin?
25. Have I *stolen anything*, whether from individuals, companies, or the government?
26. Have I *cheated*, on exams, in playing games, on expense accounts, or in filling out income tax, sales tax, or customs forms, *etc.*?
27. Have I *wasted money by gambling*, whether my own or someone else's?
28. Have I *wasted time*, whether my own or my employer's?
29. Have I *procrastinated*?
30. Have I *been late through carelessness*?
31. Have I *disobeyed the lawful rules of the road*, as a driver or as a pedestrian, by *speeding, running a red light, jaywalking, etc.*?
32. Have I *been discourteous to other drivers or pedestrians*?
33. Have I *eaten too much*?
34. Have I *drunk too much alcohol*?
35. Have I *used legal drugs like tobacco or tranquilizers too much*?
36. Have I *used illegal drugs*?
37. Have I *consented to coveting someone else's possessions*?
38. Have I *eaten meat on Friday* without substituting another special act of penance, charity, or piety? (See "Keeping Friday" on ccb.ca.)
39. Have I *given bad example to others*, especially children, in any of these ways?

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 Your help,
 to sin no more
 and to avoid the occasions of sin.

¹ Of course, there are also mortal sins which fall under this description; they have specific names, listed above under "Grave sins."

Appendix 2

How To Stop Adultery Before It Starts

Adapted from Walter Wangerin Jr.: *As for Me and My House*

The 'maybe' moment

Adultery is never a sudden, spontaneous, totally unexpected act. It is always preceded by a longer drama at the beginning of which you are not helpless.

Early on, there comes a "maybe" moment. Even when a relationship is innocent, your friend may send the signal or you may sense the feeling of further possibility. It arises from a glance, a hug, a touch that tingled more than you expected.

An unspoken mutual understanding seems to establish itself. Perhaps you succeeded together with a project at work and a greater closeness crept into your celebration. Perhaps one of you supported the other in a crisis, but the dependency became too personal. That's the moment of "maybe."

In that moment nothing more is communicated than this: our friendship could turn into something else. Neither of you need to say or even think what that something else might be. The friendship is still innocent; nothing has been said or promised or done.

Nevertheless, it is precisely here that the drama toward adultery begins. Whether it also ends here is the critical question.

If, in the moment of "maybe," you make no decision to restrict this relationship, the drama continues. For though a promise hasn't been made, it hasn't been denied either. By making no decision, you grant that "maybe" permission to mature.

From this point on, every small exchange with your friend will be a promise of things to come, and sooner or later promises will subtly turn into commitments. To renege after this point will be to break commitments. Then you'll say, "How can I hurt him now?" or "How could I break her heart?"

"How," you'll wonder, "did we become so entangled?"

You become entangled by not indicating no at the moment of "maybe." At that moment, both yes and no are equally available. Neither answer would hurt, since no commitments have been made.

It's your responsibility to perceive these moments, and it's definitely in your power to close the door, right then, by defining the friendship as friendship, nothing more.

No one can insist, "I couldn't help it; I don't know what came over me." There is always a moment when he could very well have helped it, when she could have closed the door.¹

Marriage more important than sex

The strongest protection a marriage can have is the attitude of the spouses toward their marriage and toward each other. No one who has vowed faithfulness deserves sexual satisfaction outside the marriage bond.

Yet self-centered adulterers justify their sin by the premise that sexual satisfaction is somehow their right, because God made them sexual and they can't help it, because the world makes so much of sexual experience, or because they don't receive enough loving from their spouses.

The marriage vow subordinates an individual's satisfactions in all areas to his or her marriage partner, declaring publicly that sex is less important than the spouse and their relationship.

Sexual satisfaction is not a right, but a blessing. The attitude that the health of a relationship is infinitely more important than anyone's own desires not only closes the door to adultery, but also abolishes the door altogether!

The person who takes his declared commitment seriously will guard the marriage

even against the assaults of his own desires. That attitude makes him wary and able to identify as threats those desires that are merely self-satisfying. He will recognize those threats when they're still weak and will quench them before they can grow monstrous and demanding.

When a desire comes along, we have a choice. We can refuse it from the very beginning or we can fantasize about it and feed our sexual thoughts with pictures, books, videos, and a wandering eye.

After a while, we lose the opportunity to choose. The desire overpowers us. Enslaved by a passion, our only choice is how to justify the sin.

Listen to your spouse

Are you worried that you won't be able to recognize a "maybe" moment when it comes, or that you are too unaware of your own internal attitudes? In this case, your spouse's jealousy can serve as a warning. A reasonable jealousy is how your marriage clamours danger.

"I was only being kind," I said to my wife, Thanne, early in our marriage. "She was crying. Surely you didn't expect me to abandon her."

I said these things at midnight, having come home later than I promised. Thanne had met me at the door, visibly upset. We'd been married only a year and she shocked me with what seemed to be ludicrous accusations.

"Had I been with that woman? Did I know what time it was?"

"Well, yes, but we'd only sat in her office, talking. What's wrong with talking?"

"She's using you."

"Oh, Thanne, no. You don't understand how troubled she is. I offered her sympathy."

"She's using you!"

I thought Thanne was suspicious, ill-willed, and weak in confidence.

"She's burrowing into your life and you don't even see it!" Thanne was angry that I would be so easily flattered and so gullible.

In the days that followed, sensitized by Thanne's sharp feelings, I watched my friend through different eyes. Then I saw that she was asking more than sympathy of me, that her communication was not all restricted to the matter of her suffering, and that it was more than my counsel that she cherished.

"You are so understanding," she'd said to me; that was safe and specific; but then she began to say, "You are so strong," with eyes that said, "and I depend on you."

Thanne's jealousy jangled in my ear. I learned the "maybe" moment by drastic instruction.

A spouse's jealousy is an alarm bell to be heeded, and only those who are self-centered think that all jealousy is purely suspicious and evil. I've learned through Thanne's eyes to see the "maybe" moment.

I recommend that you view all your friends through the eyes of your spouse; those eyes see clearly, unblinded by vanity. It's wisest for all of your friends to know your spouse. If your spouse knows your friends, a natural restraint is imposed on all your actions, because he or she is there in spirit even when physically absent.

More practically, you can enlist the aid of your spouse to overcome the "maybe" moments even at the early stages. If all things are open between you, your spouse will be able to act out of trust, helping and not blaming you.

When marriage partners believe their relationship to be more important than their individual desires, when they establish a Distant Early Warning system² in their souls, and when they say no at the moments of "maybe," they will be protected from adultery.

¹ Watch the movie *Brief Encounter*.

² A system of radar stations in the far north of Canada, with additional stations along the north coast and Aleutian Islands of Alaska, as well as stations in the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland. From 1957 to 1993, it was part of the North American Aerospace Defence Command, a branch of the Royal Canadian Air Force and the United States Air Force.

Appendix 3: Learning to Forgive

In 1994, nearly one million Rwandans were slaughtered in a few months, mainly ethnic Tutsis killed by ethnic Hutus. Immaculée Ilibagiza, a young Catholic Tutsi woman home from college for the Easter break, spent 90 days in a clergyman's house, hiding from killers with seven other women in a small bathroom whose door was concealed by a closet, or wardrobe. Her parents and three brothers were killed, but she has forgiven their killers. The following is an excerpt from her book (with Steve Erwin) *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*.

I was deep in prayer when the killers came to search the house a second time.

It was past noon, and I'd been praying the Rosary since dawn for God to give His love and forgiveness to all the sinners in the world. But try as I might, I couldn't bring myself to pray for the killers. That was a problem for me, because I knew that God expected us to pray for everyone, and more than anything, I wanted God on my side. As a compromise, I prayed the Rosary many times, as intensely as I could, every day. Working through all those Hail Marys and Our Fathers took 12 or 13 hours — and whenever I reached the part of the Lord's Prayer that calls us to "forgive those who trespass against us," I tried not to think of the killers, because I knew that I couldn't forgive them.

During that second search, the killers' racket reached the edge of my prayers like an angry voice waking me from a dream. Then I heard four or five loud bangs next to my head, and they had my full attention. I realized that they were right there in the pastor's bedroom! They were rummaging through his belongings, ripping things from the wall, lifting up the bed, and overturning chairs.

"Look in that!" one of them yelled. "Now look under here. Move that chest! Search everything!"

I covered my mouth with my hands, fearing that they'd hear me breathing. They were only inches from my head ... the floor was creaking in front of the wardrobe — the wardrobe! I thanked God again for it, but my heart still thumped against my chest. I could hear them laughing. They were having fun while going about killing people! I cursed them, wishing that they'd burn in Hell. The wardrobe banged against the door. I covered my ears and prayed: *God, please. You put the wardrobe there ... now keep it there! Don't let them move it. Save us, Lord!*

My scalp was burning, and the ugly whispering slithered in my head again: *Why are you calling on God? Don't you have as much hatred in your heart as the killers do? Aren't you as guilty of hatred as they are? You've wished them dead; in fact, you wished that you could kill them yourself! You even prayed that God would make them suffer and make them burn in Hell!*

I could hear the killers on the other side of the door, and entreated, *God, make them go away ... save us from —*

Don't call on God, Immaculée, the voice broke in. He knows that you're a liar. You lie every time you pray to Him to say that you love Him. Didn't God create us all in His image? How can you love God but hate so many of His creations?

My thinking was paralyzed. I knew that the demon in my head was right — I was lying to God every time I prayed to Him. I was so overwhelmed with hatred for the people responsible for the genocide that I had a hard time breathing.

There were at least 40 or 50 men in the pastor's bedroom by this time, and they were shouting and jeering. They sounded drunk and mean, and their chanting was more vicious than usual: "Kill the Tutsis big and small ... kill them one and kill them all. Kill them!" I began praying, asking God to keep them away from the wardrobe and out of the house altogether.

Beneath the raucous singing, the dark voice taunted me: *It's no use ... don't call on God. Who do you think sent the killers here for you? He did! Nothing can save you. God doesn't save liars.*

I began to pray for the killers and then stopped. I desperately wanted God's protection, but I believed in my heart that they deserved to die. I couldn't pretend that they hadn't slaughtered and raped thousands of people — I couldn't ignore the awful, evil things that they'd done to so many innocent souls.

Why do You expect the impossible from me? I asked God. How can I forgive people who are trying to kill me, people who may have already slaughtered my family and friends? It isn't logical for me to forgive these killers. Let me pray for their victims instead, for those who've been raped and murdered and mutilated. Let me pray for the orphans and widows ... let me pray for justice. God, I will ask You to punish those wicked men, but I cannot forgive them — I just can't.

Finally, I heard the killers leaving. First they left the bedroom, then the house. Soon they were walking away down the road, their singing fading in the distance. I resumed my prayers. I thanked God for saving us and for giving me the idea to put the wardrobe in front of the bathroom door. *That was so smart of You, God. You are very smart*, I said mentally, and thanked Him again. I wondered where the killers were off to; then I started praying for my friends and family: *Please look over my mother, God, she worries so much about us. Watch over my father; he can be so stubborn....*

It was no use — my prayers felt hollow. A war had started in my soul, and I could no longer pray to a God of love with a heart full of hatred. I tried again, praying for Him to forgive the killers, but deep down I couldn't believe that they deserved it at all. It tormented me.... I tried to pray for them myself, but I felt as though I was praying for the devil. *Please open my heart, Lord, and show me how to forgive. I'm not strong enough to quash my hatred — they've wronged us all so much ... my hatred is so heavy that it could crush me. Touch my heart, Lord, and show me how to forgive.* I struggled with the dilemma for hours. I prayed late into the night, all through the next day, and the day after that, and the day after that. I prayed all week, scarcely taking food or water. I couldn't remember when or how long I'd slept, and was only vaguely aware of time passing.

One night I heard screaming not far from the house, and then a baby crying. The killers must have slain the mother and left her infant to die in the road. The child wailed all night; by morning, its cries were feeble and sporadic, and by nightfall, it was silent. I heard dogs snarling nearby and shivered to think how that baby's life had ended. I prayed for God to receive the child's innocent soul, and then asked Him, *How can I forgive people who would do such a thing to an infant?*

I heard His answer as clearly as if we'd been sitting in the same room chatting: *You are all My children ... and the baby is with Me now.*

It was such a simple sentence, but it was the answer to the prayers I'd been lost in for days. The killers were like children. Yes, they were barbaric creatures who would have to be punished severely for their actions, but they were still children. They were cruel, vicious, and dangerous, as kids sometimes can be; nevertheless, they were children. They saw, but didn't understand, the terrible harm they'd inflicted. They'd blindly hurt others without thinking, they'd hurt their Tutsi brothers and sisters, they'd hurt God — and they didn't understand how badly they were hurting themselves. Their minds had been infected with the evil that had spread across the country, but their souls weren't evil. Despite their atrocities, they were children of God, and I could forgive a child, although it would not be easy ... especially when that child was trying to kill me.

In God's eyes, the killers were part of His family, deserving of love and forgiveness. I knew that I couldn't ask God to love me if I was unwilling to love His children. At that moment, I prayed for the killers — for their sins to be forgiven. I prayed that God would lead them to recognize the horrific error of their ways before their life on earth ended — before they were called to account for their grievous sins. I held on to my father's rosary and asked God to help me, and again I heard His voice: *Forgive them; they know not what they do.*

I took a crucial step toward forgiving the killers that day. My anger was draining from me — I'd opened my heart to God, and He'd touched it with His infinite love. For the first time, I pitied the killers. I asked God to forgive their sins and turn their souls toward His beautiful light. That night I prayed with a clear conscience and a clean heart. For the first time since I had entered the bathroom, I slept in peace.