

Where have all the penitents gone?

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The Gospel for Dec. 7 is taken from Mark 1, verses 1-8.

Essential to the Christian life and ultimate salvation is the practice of virtuous repentance. It's as simple as this — we must have our sins forgiven. When G.K. Chesterton became a Catholic, his friends asked him why. His simple answer, "I wanted to have my sins forgiven."

St. John the Baptist preached the necessity of repentance, and this included the confession of sins. Later on, during His public life, Christ instituted seven sacraments, one of them the sacrament of penance. "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." In order to exercise the prerogative of forgiving or retaining, the Apostles (the first priests) needed to know the nature and frequency of the sins committed.

How important is the confession of specific sins? Would not it be sufficient to state simply, "I am a

sinner," and let it go at that? No, it would not. Christ is not only the giver of grace and forgiveness, but the great psychologist of human nature. He knows that for sorrow to be genuine it must be aimed at specific faults. Otherwise the antidotes, amendment and atonement, will not be effective.

Confession of sins always will be necessary, under ordinary circumstances, to remain in the state of grace and strive to grow in the spiritual life. In this modern age, in which temptation is so flagrantly publicized, confession is more important than ever. Yet, what has happened to the long lines of people queued outside confessional boxes? Does one dare to say that people are less sinful today, and have less need of absolution?

You know what happened to the confession lines: the same thing that has happened to Mass attendance. Great numbers of people, young and old, who had the benefit of the inflow of the life of Christ through the Mass and the sacrament of penance, no

longer come to these fountains of grace. Liberals will fall over backwards, by manipulating surveys and studies, to insist that the spiritual decline has nothing to do with the "Changes." We need more changes, liberals say.

Where have all the penitents gone? We submit that the attitudes accompanying the changes did the damage if not the changes themselves. Many theologians and liturgical experts have removed the sacredness, the internal power, and the concept of necessity from the Mass and the sacraments. They have demoted the sacred mysteries to external community celebrations. When are our Church leaders going to wake up? When are the Churches empty?

You who believe the Mass to be primarily the re-enactment of the sacrifice on Calvary, and you who believe in the frequent reception of the sacrament of penance, may you continue to maintain your love and fidelity to our Blessed Lord and Savior.