

I was ordained a priest almost twelve years ago now, and to be honest it's like I never was anything else. Yes, you and I are all priests by our baptism, but of course I'm referring to the role I was entrusted with to help make my people saints right along with me- through the sacraments first and foremost, but also through my leadership- such as it is- and my encouragement and even my poor example.

And one of the things I enjoy most about being an ordained priest is hearing Confessions. Which sounds counterintuitive- who wants to hear all that people are up to and be burdened by their stories? That is a childish and selfish way of looking at it, but there are some priests out there- tragically- who feel that way, and I know that for a fact. But for me, and for most priests, thanks be to God, it has always been a privilege to play a part in someone's return to the Lord- to lift them up when they are brought low by their sins.

I must have heard at least 1,000 confessions over the years, and I've noticed a lot of things- that some people use Confession as a chance to talk about everybody's sins but their own; that the Act of Contrition is hard to remember, even if you've said it thousands of times in your life; that they always expect a penance of one Our Father and two Hail Mary's- which you ain't getting from me; that the person feels so much better and so much lighter after the Confession is over, which is even reflected in the physical demeanor of the person.

And I've noticed that many people who come to the sacrament to confess their sins don't realize what a great thing that is in itself- namely, that they have the courage and the inner conviction to admit that they've done something wrong, no matter how embarrassing or how shameful they feel about what they've done. It's not easy to acknowledge our offense- it's a profoundly humbling thing, but in a paradoxical way, that's what makes it exalting for the person confessing their sins.

Which is what the Psalm we prayed today- Psalm 51, the classic Psalm of repentance and of new life- that is what that Psalm is all about.

Because in that moment that the person is repenting of and confessing their sins, they are beginning to let go of the burden of those sins and that in itself opens them up more and more to the forgiveness and the grace of God that is now taking root in their hearts because they have now allowed God to share those things with them.

And by sin I don't mean individual or discrete acts- I don't mean simply the breaking of a rule or the infraction of a law. By sin, I mean something that has hurt someone else and/or has hurt myself and thereby hurt my relationship with the Lord- a choice which is not a good one because it takes us away from our purpose and our meaning and our joy in life- God- and makes us miserable in the process, even if not right away.

Each one of us is a sinner and is not perfect, and each of us in some way has turned away- even if only for a short while- from the God who never turns away from us. And God knows that very well. So we don't have to worry about remembering every last sin when we celebrate the sacrament of Confession- God is not an accountant who counts the last penny- we just have to acknowledge that sin has temporarily taken hold of us but that we want to rid ourselves of that burden. And God will help us do just that.

It's not an excuse to sin, but since we're going to sin anyway, it's good to know that our admitting to what we have done wrong is the way to new life, and it is a new beginning each and every time.

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*Below is only for the 9:30 Mass:*

Back in March 2021, we were just beginning to get over the worst of the pandemic, at least for a short while before it got bad again, and we very tentatively decided that we would once again have our St. Joseph's Table, which we did for the first time in 2019 and was such a great success then.

I remember very well that St. Joseph's Table on March 19, 2021- everyone still in masks of course and social distancing the best we could- but we went downstairs after the Mass that morning and we blessed the altar and the food, and we ate and we laughed, and some of us cried, and it was such a wonderful celebration of community and of thanksgiving for all that the Lord has blessed us with.

This gathering of our people was joyous and uplifting and inspiring, and it reminded us that we still are the close and mutually supportive parish community that we had always been. I could not have been prouder of my people and more grateful that I am privileged to be their leader than I was on that day, and it wasn't the first time and it won't be the last...

Our Capuchin brother Fr. John Mellitt had passed away only a few weeks before that, and we of course missed him terribly (and still do), but I know he was up in heaven looking down on us that day, proud that the community he was and is still part of was able to share some joy in the middle of the sorrow, some light in the midst of the darkness.

We have different problems and challenges now, but we still need to gather and eat and laugh and cry and be there for one another. So please, right after this Mass, come downstairs to the St. Joseph's Table and celebrate the goodness of the Lord to us.