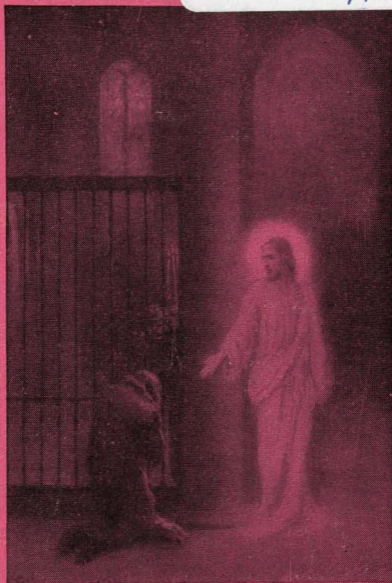


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Lawlor, G.
Don't be afraid...
ADT 5842



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DON'T BE AFRAID TO GO TO CONFESSION

By

GILES LAWLOR, O. F. M.

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List continued on inside back cover

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By

GILES LAWLOR, O. F. M.

*"How beautiful upon the mountains are
the feet of him that bringeth good tid-
ings and that preacheth peace."*

— ISAIAH 52:7

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Paterson, N. J.

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FOREWORD

It is often difficult for a person who is suffering from the physical and mental torments of a neurosis to realize that his difficulties are caused by a hidden conflict. Yet this is generally true. In many cases the conflict is due to a sin which is still causing difficulties because the person has not really faced it. For a Catholic this process is very simple since it is an essential part of confession. I believe that many nervous and mental disorders could be avoided for Catholics if they simply and sincerely confessed their sins and realized that since God has forgiven them, they no longer need torture themselves. Too often people are kept from confession by the fear that their sin is too great or too horrible or too shameful. Others are confused by doubts as to what they should confess. To all, a clear, concise explanation of how to go to confession should prove most helpful. Father Giles Lawlor has filled a great need in writing this short pamphlet.

JUSTIN L. GREENE, M. D.

"It is not the healthy who need a physician, but they who are sick."

(MATT. 9:12)

"'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I have come to call sinners, not the just."

(MATT. 9:13)

"But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

(MATT. 10:6)



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*"The bruised reed He shall not
break, and the smoking flax He
shall not quench" (ISAIAH 42:3).*

DON'T BE AFRAID TO GO TO CONFESSION

IF YOU are afraid to go to confession, you need what the doctors call **INFORMATION THERAPY**, or, in other words, the information cure. The true teaching of the Church will not cause a neurosis, but a misunderstanding of the true teaching of the Church can cause false fears and hence a disordered mental condition. Let us consider just what is required of you to make a good confession, as regards the telling of your sins:

I

You must tell all mortal sins and the number of times and the circumstances which may change the nature of the sin.

II

You are not obliged to tell venial sins. You may tell them; it is splendid if you do.

If you confess your venial sins, you are not obliged to tell the number of times. It is praiseworthy if you do. However, if you deliberately hold back one or all your venial sins, you do not make a bad confession; you do not do anything wrong. This is not the ideal, of course, but it makes a substantial difference in the emotional reaction of a scrupulous person if he has a clear idea as to what things he is obliged to tell and what things he is free not to tell. Indeed, sometimes the confessor may forbid such a penitent even to try telling all his venial sins.

III

All that is necessary for a good confession as regards the telling of your sins is the willingness to tell your mortal sins if they come to mind after an honest effort to remember them. This effort should be made with calmness, and you must not spend too long a time in the examination of your conscience. Three or four minutes for the ordinary confession is sufficient. In the case of a person who has been away from con-

fession for a year, if he has missed Mass, committed sins of impurity, practised birth control, stolen or cheated, surely these things will come to his mind. If he makes a normal effort, five or ten minutes should be sufficient. There is no reason for anxiety, for if you forget a mortal sin or a number of mortal sins, these will be forgiven by the absolution of the priest. THE ESSENTIAL DISPOSITION IS THE WILLINGNESS TO TELL YOUR MORTAL SINS IF THEY COME TO YOUR MIND AFTER A NORMAL, HONEST EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE. This effort must be normal both as to concentration and as to the length of time spent on the examination of conscience. If mortal sins have been forgotten, there remains the obligation to tell them the next time you go to confession. There is no reason for anxiety in the meantime, since the sin is already forgiven and since you are willing to tell the sin the next time you go to confession whether it be one or six months from now. If you forgot to tell a venial sin there is no harm done, since you were not obliged to tell it in the first place.

IV

When the catechism says your confession must be entire, it does not mean you must go into every detail to describe the sin. It simply means you must tell the kind and entire number of mortal sins. If a person committed three sins of murder, three sins of impurity and three sins of theft, it would not be sufficient to say: "I committed nine mortal sins." He has told the number but has not told the kind. On the other hand, it would not be sufficient to say: "I committed sins of murder, impurity and theft." In this case he has told the kind but not the number. With these points in mind, it is not difficult to understand the obligation of telling the number and kind of mortal sins. If you tell only your mortal sins and omit all your venial sins, your confession is entire.



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"Behold, thy Mother"

(JOHN 19:27).

V

When the catechism says that you must tell the circumstances which may change the nature of the sin, again it does not mean going into unnecessary detail. It means that you are to state any fact which may change the nature or kind of the sin. For instance, if a man said that he struck a woman and that woman happened to be his mother, he would have to mention this extra serious impiety. If one committed a sin against purity, the person would have to state whether the sin was committed by thought only, by desire, by word; or if by act, whether alone or with another. If with another, he must add whether the party was married or single, of the same or opposite sex. If a person stole, the amount must be mentioned together with the fact of the wealth or poverty of the one from whom it was taken. EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH MAY CHANGE THE NATURE OF THE SIN CAN USUALLY BE STATED IN ONE SENTENCE. The circumstances in these cases will naturally suggest themselves to you, or the priest will help you. Since there is no intention on

your part to deceive, there is not the least cause for worry. The priest is an expert judge, and is always alert to detect these circumstances, and you may count on his assistance.

VI

It is not necessary to come to a decision as to whether the sin was mortal or venial in order to make a good confession. If you accuse yourself, it is the priest's office to decide. If you cannot decide that it was a mortal sin, STOP TRYING TO COME TO A DECISION. For instance, if a person fears he has given a measure of consent to some temptation against purity and cannot tell whether it was a mortal sin or a venial sin, i. e., whether there was sufficient reflection and full consent of the will, he should state that he is uneasy about making a decision and leave the matter to the judgment of the priest. If the incident was a mortal sin, that would cover it. The priest always realizes that in these cases there may be some measure or a great measure of consent, so that you are not excusing yourself from anything.

STRICTLY SPEAKING, YOU ARE OBLIGED TO CONFESS ONLY WHAT YOU ARE SURE IS A MORTAL SIN. If you cannot give the number of times accurately, you may say, "About so many times." You may give the average number of times the mortal sin was committed over the space of a week, a month or a year. After you have made a normal effort to be accurate, your judgment will suffice. If afterward you remember a particular instance of committing the sin, that nevertheless was confessed when you gave the average number of times. If you need the proper information on any Commandment, you may always ask the priest; he is most willing to give it to you.

VII

One of the high tortures of an abnormal mental condition is the inability to make a decision. A very common example is going back to lock the door five or six times; going back to turn off the gas five or six times. Such a condition is said by doctors to come from obsessive compulsive ideas. A pagan can contract this malady just the same as a

Catholic. The fact that a Catholic has to make a decision in spiritual matters does not mean that the malady is spiritual. The malady is physical or mental, and is ordinarily cured by natural means. You must go to a doctor. The priest can absolve you from sin, but he cannot absolve you from a disease. The priest may help the doctor to convince you that it is your body or mind that is sick and not your soul. He will also be of great aid in pointing out to you what is and what is not sin.

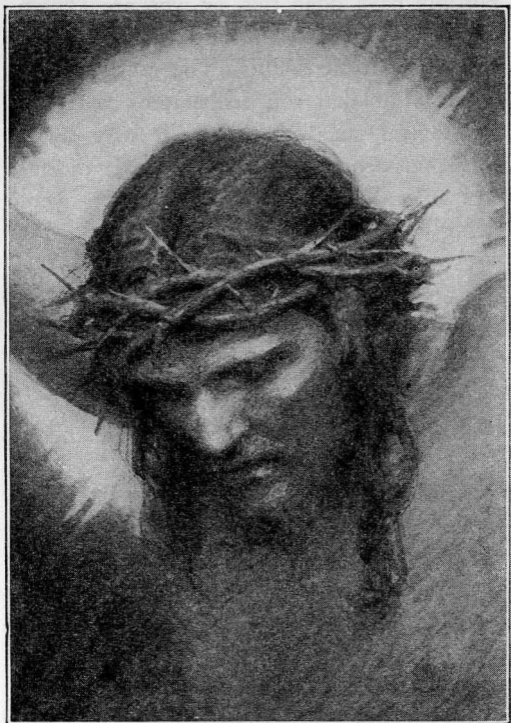
VIII

You must tell the priest some sin before he can give you absolution. If you have no mortal or venial sin to confess since your last confession, then confess either a venial or mortal sin of your past life. You need not, however, state the number of times nor the circumstances which may change the nature of the sin, since it has already been confessed. One of the great trials a priest has to undergo in the confessional is dealing with people who will not talk to the point. They talk about sin for five minutes

but admit nothing. The priest may know you are the biggest liar in the world, but you must admit it to him; at least you must admit that during your life you told one lie. An old grandmother confesses that she became angry with her grandchildren. The priest is not satisfied that she has committed a venial sin, as it may have been only a nervous reaction flowing from the annoyance caused by the children. While the confession of even one venial sin of your past life is sufficient to obtain absolution, to limit confession thus is not in the proper spirit. Tell something from your past that it humiliates you to admit, and you will leave no doubt in the mind of the priest that he has sufficient matter for absolution.

IX

If you deliberately concealed a mortal sin in confession in the past, that confession was bad and sacrilegious. All the confessions after that are also bad and sacrilegious until you confess the mortal sin. I am not talking about people who THINK they may



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"... Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise" (LUKE 23:43).

possibly have done this, or who are AFRAID that they did. You must pay no attention to such neurotic doubts. You must be positively SURE that you deliberately concealed the mortal sin. Strange as it may seem, there ARE people who have held back mortal sins in confession and knew that they were doing it.

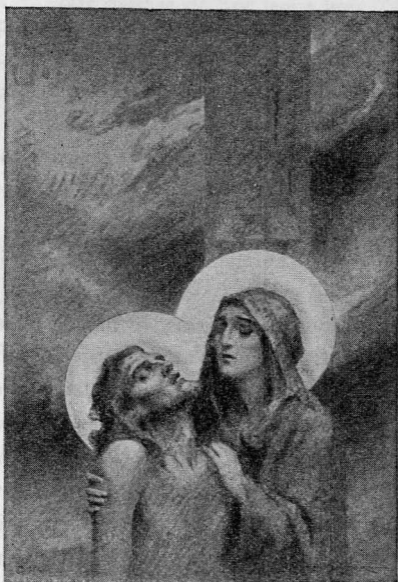
If you have ever done such a thing, then do not go into a panic. Go into the first confessional you come to and tell the priest, "I am now sixty. When I was sixteen I concealed a mortal sin in confession." Within a minute he can rectify the whole thing.

X

Never be ashamed or afraid to confess your sins. If you went to a bank teller and showed him a \$100 bill he would not bat an eye, because he has seen many \$100 bills. If you showed him a \$10,000 bill he would not be surprised; he has seen many such bills. Likewise if you confess a \$100 mortal sin or a \$10,000 mortal sin, the priest will not be in the least amazed because of the number of them he has met before. He has en-

countered sins of every denomination. The priest can never reveal what he has heard in the confessional even at the cost of his own life. No matter how long you have been away, no matter how numerous your sins may be, no matter how degrading, you must never hesitate to name them in the confessional. Sins you would not dare to tell your best friend you can safely tell to the priest. He is the only friend you may turn to when you have fallen to the lowest depths. Even if all society had turned away from you in abhorrence and disgust the priest would still forgive, for at his ordination he received the power to dispense to sinners charity from the very heart of Christ. "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Isaias 49:15). If, like the prodigal son, you have tasted the bitter dregs of debasement, hesitate no longer to confess your sins, and you will leave the confessional as one walking on air; glorifying God Who has given such power to men. And you will wonder at the merciful kindness of God, but there will re-echo in your soul the words

of Christ, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Matt. 28:18). You will envision the scene enacted the first Easter Sunday night when the Saviour of the world appeared to His Apostles and showed them His hands and His side; the symbols of the sufferings He endured in our name, as an atonement for our sins. You will hear Him say to His anointed ones, "Peace be to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And you will hear Him say as He breathes upon them, "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).



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*"Thou shalt call His name Jesus;
for He shall save His people from
their sins" (MATT. 1:21).*

APPENDIX

Some people do not feel better after confession; they are never satisfied that they have fulfilled the requirements properly. You remember when our Lord said to the man sick of the palsy, "Take courage, son; thy sins are forgiven thee," his palsy did not leave him. Our Lord had to work another miracle "in the natural order" to cure him.

Depression, i. e., a heavy feeling of misery, and neurotic doubts are symptoms of a psychoneurosis which is just as truly a disease as palsy or T. B. God does not work miracles without necessity. To cure these physical and mental disorders He has given us the science of medicine; the physician. "Honor the physician for the need thou hast of him. . . . For all healing is from God. . . . The Most High hath created medicines out of the earth and a wise man will not abhor them" (Ecclus. 38:1, 2, 4). How wrong would the sick man in the Gospel have been if he had doubted the forgiveness of his sins because his disease did not leave him. How wrong you would be if you doubted the

forgiveness of your sins because the symptoms of your disease do not leave you. "And then give place to the physician . . . and let him not depart from thee, for his works are necessary" (Ecclus. 38:11, 12).



THE BLESSING OF ST. FRANCIS

May the Lord bless thee, O Francis,

and keep thee.

The Lord show His face to thee,

and mercy on thee.

The Lord turn His countenance to

thee, and give thee peace.

May the Lord bless thee,

O Francis, and keep thee.



THE BLESSING OF ST. FRANCIS

May the Lord bless thee,
and keep thee.

The Lord show His face to thee,
and have mercy on thee.

The Lord turn His countenance to
thee, and give thee peace.

May the Lord T bless thee.

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List continued from inside front cover

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Matrimony

The Church

When You Go to Confession

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By Isidore O'Brien, O. F. M.

Blessed Are the Clean
of Heart

Our Dead

Light of the Cross

Brides of Christ

Our Father Who Art in

Christ the Physician

Heaven

The Church Our Mother

The Plain Truth

Compensation

Resignation

Consolation

The Sacraments —

The Father's Shadow

Parts I and II

The Gospel Parables —

St. Anthony of Padua

God and Justice

Sculpturing Truth

Man's True Friend

Shadow of the Cross

Our Moral Life

Soldiers of Christ

Understanding the

The Ten Command-

Message of Christ

ments of Reason

Half the Young Men

The Third Order of St.

Hands

Francis: Instrument

Let Us Look at Life

of Peace

By Rev. John A. O'Brien

The Christian Home

Until Death Do Us Part

Falling in Love

Why Be Profane?

Happiness! But Where?

Why Not Receive Daily?

By Conall O'Leary, O. F. M.

What It Means To Be a Tertiary

Why the Third Order of St. Francis?

List continued on outside back cover

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List continued from inside back cover

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St. Salvator of Horta

By Thomas Plassmann, O. F. M.
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Upon This Rock

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