

RECONCILIATION

COMING HOME TO GOD

BY FATHER KENNETH BROWN



When was the last time you celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation? The Pew Research Center reports that only four in ten Catholics go to confession at least once a year (8/31/15). Is this because we don't need forgiveness? Because we don't sin? Because our notion of sin has changed? Or our notion of God has changed? Have we come to believe that forgiveness doesn't matter anymore?

Maybe the best way to get ourselves thinking about the dynamic of the sacrament is to recall something, large or small, over the past twenty-four hours for which we need to either extend or seek forgiveness. It could be as simple as speaking about ourselves in a way that casts us in a more favorable light or harboring ill-will against someone who cut us off in traffic or conversation. How does calling that moment to mind make you feel? Nervous? Guilty? Resistant? Relieved? I suspect most of us wish for the chance to either forgive the offending party or receive forgiveness ourselves, to somehow go back and retrieve, redeem the hurtful thing.

WHAT KEEPS US AWAY?

Anyone who's in relationship with others finds that forgiveness is something humans desire. So what keeps us away from the sacrament of reconciliation? Parents of young children look forward to their little ones celebrating first Communion but are often uncomfortable when they learn their children are first asked to celebrate reconciliation. They come to the parent meeting desiring the gentle mercy of God for their children but often fail to ask themselves: "Why don't I receive this sacrament regularly?"



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Parents who hope to be the best of religious educators for their children do well to honestly examine the barriers they imagine standing between them and their own celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. As a confessor for some forty years and a sinner for twenty-five more than that, I've

encountered rationalizations or excuses both from myself and others.

Turned off by the 'box.' The first objection comes from Catholics whose only experience of the sacrament has been less than pleasant. "I'm turned off by the 'box,' the sliding grille, the stuffiness and darkness of that confined space," they say. And let's face it: movies and TV exaggerate these negative images in the minds of Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

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