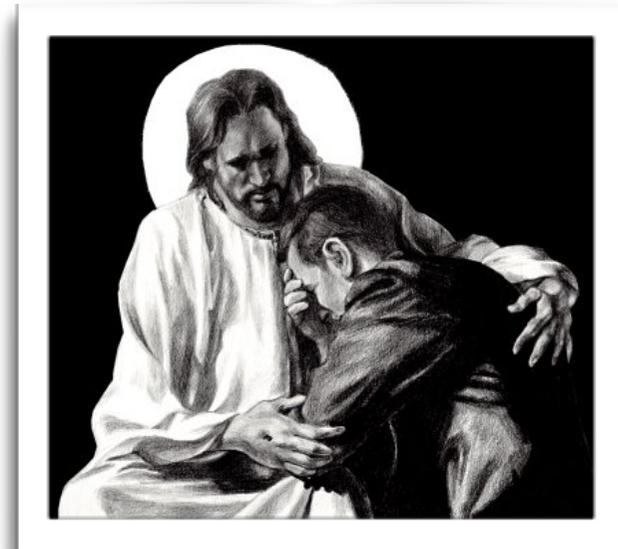


## Things to Consider

- ▶ To truly confess our sins is to be sorry for them and that deep division which is there in us all (Romans 7.19). To confess fully is to *repent*. St John of Kronstadt said that to repent is to know that there is a lie in our heart.
- ▶ The Greek term for repentance is *metanoia*, which means to think again, change our mind, and form a new outlook, to see God, others and ourselves in a new light. And so this is much more than simply having a few regrets about our past. It is to form a new centre in God. It is to recognise our alienation from God.
- ▶ Repentance lies at the heart of the Gospel and was fundamental to the preaching of Jesus (Matthew 4.17) as it had been with his predecessor, John the Baptist (Matthew 3.2).
- ▶ St John Climacus said 'Repentance is the daughter of hope and the denial of despair'. Our hope is in God with the belief that we can be forgiven and the past put behind us; thus there is no need to despair. It is to believe the miracle of forgiveness.
- ▶ **Each day, as part of your prayers**, include a time for private confession and this is perhaps best done towards the end of the day. As you sit or kneel, reflect back over your day. Look for those moments emerging in your mind when you know you said, or did, or thought that which was wrong, that which was unworthy of your best. Try in your own words to offer this to God, seeking His forgiveness.
- ▶ Or, you could use as a basis the form of confession in the Eucharist on page 120 of *A Prayer Book for Australia*, changing the wording from the plural to the singular and naming the sins you have thought of. Let it all emerge from your heart so that it does not become a perfunctory process to be gone through. Then give time for His peace and forgiveness to wash over you, giving thanks in the process.
- ▶ Another thing you can do is to recite the Jesus Prayer silently at times during the day: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me' ('a sinner' is sometimes added). Psalms such as 38, 51, 130, can also help.
- ▶ Then too, with the passing of time, you will find yourself becoming more sensitive to those occasions of sin in your life and you will find yourself seeking God's forgiveness immediately.
- ▶ 'Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation, to you be glory and praise for ever. In the darkness of our sin, you have shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Open our eyes to acknowledge your presence, that freed from the misery of sin and shame we may grow into your likeness from glory to glory. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Blessed be God forever.' (*Daily Prayer Common Worship*) AtG/B9/MBH

## Attending to God

'Confession ... saying sorry, being sorry'



**There are four elements** to prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication and the acronym ACTS has often been used as a memory jogger. The last brochure explored Adoration; this one will look at Confession.

**In the Prayer of Manasseh**, which is in the Apocrypha, a secondary Scriptural source that stands alongside our Bible, the author begins by speaking about the greatness of God and how merciful and forgiving He is, before moving on to focus on his own sins. Then he speaks these beautiful and compelling words: 'And now I bend the knee of my heart before you, imploring your kindness upon me. I have sinned, O God, I have sinned, and I acknowledge my transgressions' (verses 11-12).

**With Manasseh 'bending the knee'** of his heart, we see a link with Adoration and how the two, Adoration and Confession, belong together. Our recognition of the greatness and majesty of God reminds us of our frailty and mortality, leading to a sense of humility in the best sense of that word. The root meaning of humility is 'of the earth'. In such a context, acknowledging our sinfulness in confession belongs here.

**We can feel uncomfortable** with confession. We don't like admitting we are wrong and that our life is not what it should be. Yet there is a deep need within us to do this and there is something cleansing, life giving, and freeing when we are able to do so. Life can begin again: we are forgiven, healed, renewed. It is the way God has made us. It reminds us that we are part of a community, of not only other people, but also one that includes God. We do not stand alone.

**This reminds us that God in Jesus** died for us on the Cross, reconciling Himself to us; it is through Jesus' death that we are able to be forgiven (Romans 5.6-21; 1 Peter 2.21-25).

**We are familiar** with the parable Jesus told of *the Lost Son* (Luke 15.11-32) which should in fact be called *the Forgiving Father*. Philip Yancey in his book *What's So Amazing About Grace?* tells a variation on that story.

**A teenager** who grew up on a cherry orchard near Traverse City, Michigan, after yet another argument with her parents told them she hated them and left home for Detroit. With the company she kept, her life started going downhill; she became hungry and homeless, with the beginnings of serious health problems.

**It slowly dawned on her** how she had messed up her life and she thought of home. More than anything, she just wanted to go home. She phoned three times and on each occasion heard the answering machine. However, that third time she said, 'Dad, Mom, it's me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm catching a bus up your way, and it'll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you're not there, well, I guess I'll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada.'

**On the bus journey home**, she had all sorts of doubts and fears and she tried to rehearse her lines over and over: 'Dad, I'm sorry ...' She had not said sorry in years.

**On arrival**, she entered the bus station not really expecting to see anyone, but hoping ... And there to greet her stood about forty people of her extended family with a big banner saying, 'Welcome home!' Through her tears she began her memorised speech, 'Dad, I'm sorry. I know ...', but was interrupted, 'Hush, child. We've got no time for that. No time for apologies. You'll be late for the party. A banquet's waiting for you at home.'

**That too is our story.** And that too is the power of God's grace to bring change, forgiveness, healing, wholeness and newness of life. It comes from saying sorry and meaning it.

**Yes, we will sin again**, sometimes repeating the same old pattern as before, seeming never to learn, and sometimes we will not even be sure we wish to stop sinning. I am reminded of a prayer of St Augustine: 'Lord, help me to stop sinning, but not just yet.' God is ever-patient, as a parent with their child, only more so.

**This story from Philip Yancey** also reminds us that our life is, or should be communal. In the extended family meeting the teenager, we are reminded that we are to be a reconciling community and that there is or can be a corporate dimension to sin. This dimension is recognised in our formal prayer of confession and receiving absolution in our Eucharist. Sin need not just be personal; even a casual look at our world reveals corporate sin.

**Like the father in the parable** of Jesus and like the parents of that teenager, God weeps copious tears for each of us, as He bears us as His burden. They are the tears of God and they are like the tears of any parent for their child.

**Why does He do this?** There is the story of a priest in country Ireland who spied an old peasant kneeling by the side of the road, praying. He said to the man, 'You must be very close to God.' The peasant looked up from his prayers, thought for a moment, and then smiled, 'Yes, He's very fond of me.' Moreover, that too, is true for us; that is the story of each of God and us. We are closer to God than we might imagine.

**By acknowledging our sin**, we are recognising that our life is in some way splintered, that we are somehow incomplete and lacking wholeness. The paradox is that in acknowledging our sin, we then allow God's grace to enter our life and this frees us from being ruled by our ego.

**Not confessing our sins to God** is to carry a heavy burden that He wishes we did not. In Toni Morrison's novel *The Song of Solomon* a woman named Sing had killed a man and now carried his bones around with her in a green sack because she felt 'responsible' for him. She was unable to let her sin go and let the past be in the past through God's forgiveness. Asking forgiveness of God and others is important.

**Sometimes**, where others have been involved and depending on the sin, there may be consequences. Nonetheless, whenever we have acted wrongly, sinned, God wants us to lay these burdens of ours in confession at His feet so that He can forgive and pronounce blessing upon us. Luke 15 tells us there is joy in heaven when we repent, for the one lost is now found.