

Forgiven by God

Confession

Haven't we all found ourselves in need of forgiveness?

Perhaps as a child we sent a baseball through a window, or broke one of mom's favorite heirlooms. It wasn't easy, but we had to own up to what we had done and say we were sorry. What a great feeling it was to hear them tell us that we were forgiven, and to know that we are loved no matter what we had done!

In the Gospels, Jesus forgave people's sins.

To the paralyzed man, for example, he said, "My son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5) This was astonishing to his Jewish listeners because they understood that sins are offenses against God. Only God can forgive sins; a mere man would have no such authority. And yet, Jesus does have authority to forgive sins, because he is not an ordinary man, but God standing in their midst.

Jesus sent the apostles to forgive sins in his name.

After rising from the dead, he greeted the apostles and told them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Echoing the way that God breathed life into Adam, Jesus then breathed on the apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:21-23) Just as Jesus forgave sin during his ministry, he sent his apostles to act on his behalf, forgiving anyone who desired the grace of God's forgiveness.

Jesus intended for all generations to experience this gift.

This experience of his mercy would be needed by all Christians, not just those who happened to live in the time of the apostles. People would always need to experience his mercy and unconditional love, just as they would always need to hear the Gospel proclaimed. This gift of forgiveness has been passed down through the centuries within the Church, the Lord's family of faith, so that all Christians can experience his forgiveness in a concrete and tangible way. Catholics call this beautiful gift the Sacrament of Confession.

Through Confession, we encounter the Lord's mercy.

Like all human beings, Catholics struggle with sin, damaging our relationship with God. When we need to seek the Lord's mercy and spiritual healing, we meet anonymously with a priest. We speak our sins out loud and ask God's forgiveness. The priest will often give some encouragement or advice, and then Jesus forgives us through the priest. The priest cannot share anything that he has heard in confession, because those sins are between that person and Jesus.

Confession is truly one of the joys of being Catholic.

Wouldn't it be easier to confess our sins straight to God without a priest? Of course it would, but Jesus knew what he was doing. There is something powerful about speaking our sins out loud, taking ownership of them and bringing them into the light.

It can be very helpful to receive spiritual guidance from a priest. And it is a great joy to hear Jesus say to us, through the priest, the beautiful words, "Your sins are forgiven, go in peace!"

