

***The Jubilee of Mercy and  
The Good Confessor***  
**Priestly Association of Jesus Christ, Priest and Victim**  
**June 4, 2015**

- I. Why is there a crisis in the Sacrament of Penance?
  - A. Protestantism
  - B. Inaccessibility of Priests
  - C. Loss of Sense of Sin
    - a. moral relativism
    - b. lukewarm
    - c. formation of conscience
    - d. erroneous principles of behavioral sciences
- II. Importance of Sacrament of Penance among the Priest's Duties
  - A. First Gift of Jesus after the Resurrection
  - B. Adrienne von Speyr: Communion is Who He IS; Confession is What He does
  - C. Pastoral Practice of Holy Cure' d'Ars
  - D. Confession is the only ordinary means for persons to be reconciled to God and Church for sins after Baptism
  - E. Only a priest can absolve
- III. Quadruple Office of the Confessor
  - A. Father
  - B. Teacher
  - C. Judge
  - D. Physician
- IV. Qualities of a Good Confessor
  - A. Knowledge
    - a. Understands human nature
    - b. knows moral theology
    - c. knows spiritual theology
    - d. understands good psychology
  - B. Holiness
    - a. Man of Prayer
    - b. Attentiveness
    - c. Generous
    - d. Man of Sacrifice
    - e. Patient
    - f. Prudent

V. What do Lay Persons say about Confessors?

A. Good Qualities

- a. good listener
- b. does not pry
- c. brief, to the point, helps
- d. patience
- e. compassion
- f. punctuality and generous with time for confessions

B. Bad Qualities

- a. assumes role of spiritual director
- b. expresses curiosity about details of sin
- c. late for appointed time
- d. expresses irritation with having to hear confessions
- e. downplaying one's sins

VI. The "Quasi-Matter" of the Penitent

A. Confession of Sin

- a. Integral Confession – kind and number
- b. Forgotten Sins
- c. Lack of Sufficient Matter

B. Contrition

- a. Expressed normally by Act of Contrition
- b. Firm purpose of amendment
- c. Case of repeat offenders – doesn't mean person is not contrite

C. Satisfaction

- a. Acceptance of Penance
- b. Intention to fulfill penance
- c. Cases of restitution for sins against justice

VII. Absolution

- A. Withholding absolution
- B. Conditional absolution

VIII. Counsel Administered in the Confessional

- A. Prudence
- B. Question of leaving penitent in good faith

- C. Not forcing manifestation of conscience
- D. Avoid eroding trust in others – other priests, religious, teachers, parents, etc.
- E. Make distinction and practice the distinction between confessor and director

#### IX. Sacramental Seal

- A. Inviolable by Divine Law
- B. Applies to penitent's sins in a strict manner – Canon 983 (*non-proditio peccatoris*) and Canon 984 (use of confessional knowledge *cum gravamine poenitentis*) – Divine Seal and Canonical Seal
- C. Forbidden to talk to penitent of sins outside of Confessional
- D. Fact of going to Confession? Absolution?  
 “For the confessor to reveal that he granted sacramental absolution to a certain penitent would not in itself violate the seal. Such a statement, however, would indirectly violate the seal if it implied or aroused suspicions that others were not absolved. In practice, when asked, for example, by relatives, whether a particular person has received absolution, the confessor should always direct the inquirer to the penitent himself for the answer, explaining that such questions should not be asked of the confessor” (Roos, p. 34).
- E. Never delineate particular cases even when having to seek counsel
- F. Never cite a particular case in private, and much less from the pulpit (cf. Instruction of the Holy Office, June 9, 1915).
- G. Practice Amnesia – penitent confesses to God and God forgets – confessor does not know as man, but only in standing in for God.
- H. In general seek counsel generically if need be; rarely if need be with permission of penitent; generally through study
- I. Use of knowledge gained from confessional for personal pursuit of holiness, study, becoming a better confessor, learning from mistakes, etc. is permitted
- K. Some examples how a confessor may not employ confessional knowledge as legislated in *CIC* 984 given by Roos in *The Seal of Confession*, p. 102:

1. A confessor may not refuse Holy Communion to a penitent because of his confessional awareness that the latter had to be refused sacramental absolution. This is true even if the penitent seeks Holy Communion in private.
2. A confessor may not refuse his assistance at a marriage because he is aware from the parties' confessions that the marriage in question will be invalid.
3. A confessor may not change his vote in an election on the grounds that he knows from the candidate's confession that the latter is unworthy of being elected.
4. A parish priest may not dismiss an employee because he knows from the candidate's confession of the latter's dishonesty.
5. A confessor may not become less cordial towards an acquaintance because of something the latter discloses in confession.
6. A confessor may not attempt to avoid hearing a certain person's confession because, for instance, he knows from previous confessions of the penitent's lack of proper dispositions required for absolution.

## X. Reserved Sins

- A. physical attack on person of Holy Father
- B. desecration of Holy Eucharist
- C. priest who breaks directly sacramental seal
- D. priest who absolves an accomplice in a sin against 6<sup>th</sup> commandment
  1. Canon 1357 grants any priest ability to absolve a non-declared *latae sententiae* excommunication if confessor judges it would be hard for his penitent to remain in a state of serious sin for time required to get permission or have recourse with competent superior. The penitent is to be instructed within a month to have recourse to competent authority or the confessor can himself have recourse, preserving anonymity. For cases reserved to Holy See contact

Cardinal Mauro PIACENZA  
Tribunale della Penitensieria Apostolica  
00120 Città del Vaticano  
Europa

- E. heresy, apostatizing, schism – faculties often to priest (see *Pagella*)
- F. Abortion – now to Diocese; faculties often to priest (see *Pagella*)
  1. Canons 1324.1.9 and 1324.3 – case of one being without any fault unaware of an attached penalty to a law or precept.

## XI. Catechizing on How to Make a Good Confession

- A. Be brief, be blunt, be gone!
- B. Get in touch and Get out of touch!
- C. Three effects of Sacrament
  1. removal of guilt – union with God and Church
  2. increase in Sanctifying Grace
  3. medicinal graces

## XII. Special Cases

- A. Sufficient Matter? Cases of Devotional Confessions
- B. Generic Confession – patient who is dying or seriously incapacitated
- C. Integral Confession
- D. Lack of Firm Purpose of Amendment
- E. Frequent Fliers
- F. Penitents who are source of temptation – use of grill
- G. Having recourse on reserve sins
- H. Confession in relation to administering the Sacrament of the sick
- I. Apostolic Pardon and Plenary Indulgence
- J. Cases of Scrupulosity

Fr. Michael Champagne, CJC  
Community of Jesus Crucified  
103 Railroad Avenue  
St. Martinville, LA 70582  
[www.jesuscrucified.net](http://www.jesuscrucified.net)