

In today's Liturgy of the Word, we hear the Lord speaking to us about the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ, which is a fundamental Truth we profess every Sunday at mass immediately after the homily when we prayerfully recite the Nicene Creed from the 4th century AD. In these mysterious passages from Sacred Scripture, the Lord is trying to refocus us away from this imperfect, passing, temporary world to our true homeland in Heaven, which for those who freely choose it, will consist of a perfect eternal union with God.

However, this earthly life, while temporary, is *extremely important* because it constitutes our fundamental choice, either for or against God and enables us to either freely embrace God in love or reject Him in pride. In today's Gospel, our Lord Jesus implicitly reminds us that we must be prepared, both for our own death and for His Second Coming, which will come at an hour that only the Father knows. I think one definite lesson we can take from these mysterious words of Jesus, is that we should live everyday as if it were our last, since we don't know when we will die or when the Lord will return.

Brothers and sisters, I know this might seem a little sobering and scary, but if we're united to Christ *in and through* His Church in a vibrant relationship defined by faith, hope, and love, than we have *nothing to be afraid of*, especially death and judgment. If we stay close to Christ through prayer and the sacraments and allow Him to sanctify us, then instead of looking at death or the end of time with terror, we can approach such things fearlessly with hope and loving trust.

Today, I'd like to focus on one of the most important ways we can stay close to Christ and prepare for our own death and for His Second Coming and that is through the liberating Sacrament of Reconciliation, also known as the Sacrament of Penance or Confession. The fruitful and regular reception of this powerful Sacrament of Healing is an absolute necessity in our preparation for death and the end of time.

Brothers and sisters, we as human beings love to talk and communicate. This tendency is in perfect accord with our nature as social creatures who inherently yearn for relationship and are *indeed created* for relationship with God and others. And so we see this fundamental human tendency towards communication manifested in our

popular culture through the prevalence of social media, TV talk shows, radio shows, podcast interviews, etc.

We as human beings are *created* for communication, and we are especially inclined to talk about our problems. Although this is easier and more common for some more than others, we all have a fundamental need for venting and sharing our problems, fears, and experiences with someone, whether it's a spouse, a parent, a friend, a family member, a counselor, etc. In fact, any expert in psychology and counseling will tell you that simply talking about one's problems and experiences with another is inherently helpful and therapeutic.

So brothers and sisters, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, God instituted a sacrament that at its very core consists of the fundamental element of interpersonal communication. And in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we don't just communicate *anything*, but rather we communicate our own sins, which by their very nature demand that we get rid of them and allow our merciful Savior to destroy them through forgiveness. Speaking personally from my own experiences as a penitent receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, *nothing is more*

liberating than getting rid of all the sins that wreak destruction and havoc on our hearts and minds, burdening us with guilt, shame, and pain. Walking out of the confessional with a clean conscience and heart is seriously one of the best feelings in the world.

Brothers and sisters, if we're not receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly in some manner, then something's wrong. At St. Ignatius, we have confessions every Saturday from 3-4 PM inside the church and we also offer confession by appointment if there's anyone who would like to receive the sacrament at another time. The bottom line is that we priests will *always* do our best to make ourselves available for this critical Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This beautiful sacrament established by Christ Himself not only forgives our sins, but also fortifies us with the sanctifying grace that we need to avoid these same sins in the future and grow in love for God and others. The whole purpose of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to bring us freedom and holiness—freedom from our sins and holiness in turning away from evil and embracing Christ and others with greater love and fidelity. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is meant to help us

to grow in humility, honesty, self-awareness, faith, hope, and love. So don't deprive yourselves of all the saving and transformative grace that the Lord wants to give you in this powerful sacrament of healing.

Now I'd like to briefly go over some of the "do's and don'ts" of Confession so that we can all receive this sacrament in a fruitful manner with the proper disposition. First, it's *always* important that before we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we should thoroughly and honestly examine our conscience to identify our own sins so that we can make a good confession. On our parish website, if you click on the link with my name on the left-hand side, you will see another link on my page that says "Examination of Conscience for Adults." I strongly encourage the regular use of this examination. I will also share this extremely helpful examination of conscience soon on Facebook and Twitter if you're interested.

Another critical necessity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is contrition, or sorrow for our sins and our purpose of amendment, which is our sincere intention to change and to sin no more. In order to receive absolution and the Lord's forgiveness of our sins, we must be *truly sorry*

for them and have a firm desire to change and not commit those same sins again. If we're not truly sorry for our sins and have ***absolutely no desire*** to change and not commit those same sins again, then what's the point? Contrition and a firm purpose of amendment, along with the completion of our penance, are essential for the validity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Next, let me go over some “don'ts” for the Sacrament of Penance. First, confession is for the confession of ***our sins, not someone else's sins!*** It's also not the time for extensive personal counseling because there are probably many people waiting patiently in line to receive the sacrament. If you'd like to sit down and meet with a priest to seek extensive spiritual counsel, then you can always contact us and we'd be more than happy to meet with you, listen to you, and offer any spiritual and pastoral counsel that might be helpful.

Lastly, the final “don't” when it comes to the Sacrament of Reconciliation is ***don't be afraid!*** Whenever we receive this beautiful sacrament, it is ***Christ our merciful Savior*** Who we're confessing to—***not the priest***, who is only there acting in the Person of Christ! In this

sacrament of healing, it is truly Christ, ***through*** the person of the priest, who forgives our sins and offers us encouragement and hope moving forward. ***So do not be afraid!*** The priest is not there to judge or condemn, but rather to be a bridge to the infinite mercy and love of Christ! Don't worry, if it's been a while and you can't remember how to go to confession or simply don't know what to do, we will help you!

And brothers and sisters, ***I cannot emphasize this enough:*** but please ***always remember*** that there is ***no sin too great*** for God's infinite mercy and love! As long we're truly sorry and we sincerely intend to sin no more and avoid those evils in the future, then our Lord will forgive us and wash away our sins with His precious blood.

So brothers and sisters, ***do not be afraid!*** If we stay close to our merciful Savior through prayer and the sacraments, most especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and allow Him to make us holy, then we can live life joyfully with great faith, hope, and love, knowing that whenever death comes or whenever our blessed Lord returns, we have ***nothing to be afraid of,*** because we will be prepared to meet the God Who loves us more than we know.