

Wednesday in the Fourth Week: Confession

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

We will meditate tomorrow upon confession, and we shall see that it ought to be: first, humble; second, sincere; third, entire. We will then make the resolution to impart these three conditions to all our confessions, and we will retain as our spiritual nosegay the counsel of the Holy Spirit: "*Be not ashamed to confess thy sins*" (Ecc. IV:31).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore Our Lord Jesus Christ instituting, in His love for us, the Sacrament of Penance; let us thank Him for so precious an institution. It is like a sacred bath which washes away all our stains, like a divine channel through which grace flows upon us; it is a school of wise counsels and encouragements to good; it is, lastly, the most efficacious means for correcting our defects and making us advance in the practice of virtues. May we always rightly use this marvellous invention of divine love.

OUR CONFESSIONS OUGHT TO BE HUMBLE

We ought to present ourselves before the priest tilled with respect and confusion, like a sinner before an angel of God, before another Jesus Christ; like a sick man covered with hideous wounds before a doctor who can cure us if we show them to him such as they are; like a criminal who has committed high treason against the Divine Majesty, who deserves to be cast into the dungeons of hell, before the supreme Judge who holds in His hands the sentence giving us life or condemning us to eternal death. Not being able to obtain anything in the name of justice, but solely in the name of clemency and mercy, we ought to present ourselves with profound exterior and interior humility, humbly confessing our sins, and declaring them, not with the indifference of a person reciting a history, but with the shame and grief of a soul which understands its wrong-doing; not in accusing ourselves in order to avoid the confusion of appearing guilty, but in accusing ourselves without the contrivances which tend to induce the belief that our sins are less than they really are in the sight of God; not with pride and arrogance, as if we had performed some beautiful action, but with modesty and sighs over our wretchedness and as fearing the judgment of God more than that of man. Is it thus that we make our confessions?

OUR CONFESSIONS OUGHT TO BE SINCERE

Sincerity in confession consists in confessing with entire candour and simplicity all we remember, without troubling ourselves about what we may possibly forget, since a defect of memory is not a sin in the sight of God. It is not right to exaggerate our sins, under the pretext that it is better to say more than less; the sick man is not wise who exaggerates what he suffers when he speaks to his doctor. It is still worse to veil our faults by artificially enveloping them with other accusations which are less painful, and gliding rapidly over what costs us the most, in the hope that the confessor will not observe it. A sincere penitent desires only to be known

for what he is, and he holds cunning and artifice in horror. It is equally wrong to excuse our faults, whilst at the same time saying what they are, or to endeavour to make them seem less by laying the blame of them on others, as Adam and Eve did, for to do so is a want of candour. But the supreme degree of evil is to hide our faults through false shame. Then the sacrament of mercy is changed into an anathema, the work of salvation into a work of reprobation, and the sentence of life into a sentence of death. Better a thousand times not to confess. We may deceive man, but we cannot deceive God, who knows the secrets of all hearts; for one sin hidden from the priest all those which we have committed will, at the judgment day, be brought to light in the face of the whole universe; and for a little shame that we try to avoid in this life we shall be covered in the next with eternal confusion. Let us here examine our confessions. Have we declared them without disguise, without excuse, without ingeniously presenting them in colors which disguise their deformity? Have we confessed certain sins as certain, doubtful ones as doubtful, and have we avoided superfluous and useless words, terms which are vague, obscure, and equivocal, and which prevent our confessor from rightly seeing the truth?

OUR CONFESSIONS OUGHT TO BE ENTIRE

In order that they may have the necessary integrity, it is not enough to accuse ourselves of mortal sins, we must also, first, say how many times we have fallen into them, declare the aggravating circumstances of them, or such as change their character, the results or grievous consequences of them—for example, if there has been scandal, if the calumny has been serious in its nature, uttered before several persons, against a superior, or a priest; if it has been inspired by hatred, by resentment, or vengeance, and, when we accuse ourselves of disobedience, whether the disobedience was accompanied by arrogance, contempt, or bad temper. Without that, the confessor is not sufficiently acquainted with the state of his penitent to pronounce a prudent judgment upon him. We must, second, accuse ourselves of venial faults. Although this is not a rigorous precept, it is at the same time very important to do it: first, because not to accuse ourselves of a sin of which we have a doubt whether it be mortal or venial would be sacrilege, and there is often a reason for such a doubt; second, because the confessor, knowing the penitent only imperfectly, cannot direct him with surety either as to the communions to be permitted to him, or in regard to the other acts of Christian life, or in the reform of his faults, or the acquisition of virtues; third, because the accusation of venial sins makes the penitent take greater care to avoid them, and he is helped therein by the grace of the sacrament, by the advice of the confessor, and the shame of the accusation. Let us examine ourselves as to whether such have been our confessions.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.