



WINNOWING FAN

The Spiritual Life according to the Fathers and Saints of the Catholic Church in preparation for Christ's Second Coming.

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A HISTORICAL MISFORTUNE - I

Evidently there had been great pressure on the part of the evil forces in the world to destroy the Church, at least to make her invisible so that she cannot be found by other souls for their salvation. And there are many times in history where her beacon light seems to dim and be difficult to find.

Even before the great Council of Trent, the shining truth of the Church seemed to dim. That is the reason why the Council of Trent was called; to clarify Catholic Doctrine. And the Council of Trent did a very fine job. The best definitions of Catholic Doctrine were made at the Council of Trent. But after the Council of Trent, it seems that the Catholic Church never regained the clarity of her teachings. Councils never clarify doctrines. It is souls with Faith who clarify Church teachings, like the

doctors of the Catholic Church.

With doctrines unclear, it was impossible to enter the Catholic Church and attain salvation. So the Church continuously exerted her efforts with the grace of God to clarify her doctrines which she had received from Divine Revelation. After the Council of Trent it was the saints who did it; St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, Jerome Emiliani, Cajetan, John of God, John Fisher, Peter of Alcantara, Peter Canisius and Robert Bellarmine. All of these just around the year 1500.

But the world does not notice the saints; it just loves to enjoy the world. So the decline of the Catholic Church continued.

CATHOLICS COMMIT THE SAME MISTAKES.

The signs advanced by the pagans that theirs is the true church are not found in Scriptures. So it is easy to refute them.

But the signs advanced by the Protestants that theirs is the true Church are found in Scriptures. And, indeed, they are found in Scriptures. But they are signs not really meant by Christ to be the visible signs of His Church. An example of this from the Protestants is 'praying the divine office.' Christians pray the Divine Office and Catholics also do so. But praying the Divine Office was never the visible sign of the true Church of Christ, according to Scriptures.

Most Catholics, also, when asked what are the signs that they are Catholics give the wrong signs; like because they are baptized, or because they go to Mass, etc... These indeed are Catholic acts but these were never considered by Scriptures as the visible signs of the true Church. As we have seen before; it has been agreed that the four visible signs of the true Church of Christ are that it is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

THE VIRTUE OF PENANCE vs THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

The virtue of Penance and the Sacrament of Penance go hand in hand. In fact, in the Catechism they are enumerated or described together. But for the sake of clarity let us separate the two. So we can also show which one we should emphasize.

The virtue of Penance is what the penitent does. The Sacrament of Penance is what the priest-confessor does. The virtue of Penance makes up the human acts of the penitent which consist in knowing your sins, contrition for your sin, purpose of amendment and restitution. The Sacrament of Penance is when the penitent confesses his sins to the priest, receives his absolution and makes his penance.

We must not be unjust and require from ourselves what is not in ourselves.

Do not desire not to be what you are, but desire to be very well what you are.

St. Francis de Sales



THE MATTER AND THE FORM

The 'matter' of the Sacrament of Penance is the human acts of the Penitent. The 'form' of the Sacrament is the absolution of the priest.

Evidently, the absolution of the priests depends so much on how well the penitent puts the 'matter' into practice.

The 'form' works on the 'matter.' The 'form' removes the 'matter', which are the sins. But if there is no virtue of Penance, the 'form' cannot remove the sins. So instructions should be concentrated on teaching the penitent to do his part, the 'matter', well.

THE 'FORM' IS FOR THE PERFECTION OF THE 'MATTER.'

In all the Sacraments, the 'forms' are meant to perfect the 'matter.' Imagine a baptism where there was water poured on the forehead but there were no words uttered. There would be no baptism.

But this is not the same with the Sacrament of Penance. The 'matter' if well done can have past sins

forgiven even if there is no form: the absolution of the priest.

The reason, St. Thomas wrote, is that it is God who forgives; the priest is only the minister of absolution. So if the penitent had done the 'matter' God would certainly forgive past sins even if there were no priest available to give absolution.

The example are the penitents in the Old Testament—at that time the Sacrament of Penance had not yet been instituted. King David had his past sins forgiven even without the absolution of a priest.

In fact, most of us will die without the absolution of a priest; like those who die suddenly. How can our past sins be forgiven? Well, as long as we know our sins, are contrite for our sins, are resolved not to commit them again and to make reparation for our sins.....we can be certain that our past sins are forgiven.

The Christian prays in every situation, in his walks for recreation, in his dealings with others, in silence, in reading, in all rational pursuits.

St. Clement of Alexandria

MONASTIC PRACTICE

Baptism is the Sacrament by which original and past sins can be forgiven. But it can be received only once. What do we do when after Baptism we commit new countless actual sins? Monastic life is a substitute baptism. If lived well, it is a substitute baptism that has the same effect as baptism.

So Catholics who have lost their baptismal grace enter the monastic life to regain the baptismal graces.

In the monastery, monks live the life of Penance. Since many monasteries are on top of inaccessible mountains, forests, islands and deserts, many monks die without the consolation of a priest. How do they go to heaven? By the virtue of Penance, i.e. those four steps that make up the virtue. Christ's example that that is enough for salvation is clear in the Old Testament and in the example of the woman caught in adultery.

ELEMENTS OF THE VIRTUE OF PENANCE.

To acquire the virtue of Penance that is the main ingredient for the forgiveness of past sins, the four steps are enough. The absolution of the priest is not needed though it

would be a big help to perfect the virtue.

But as we have mentioned, most men will die without the benefit of the Sacrament of Penance. Christ knows that so He had taught that the virtue of Penance is enough for the forgiveness of past sins. So we must concentrate on this virtue. And the monastic life had been designed precisely for that purpose. This way of life can be lived at home, according to St. John Chrysostom. All we need is our room. Christ said; just enter your room and lock the door. And you can obtain the virtue of Penance there very easily.



It is not possible to pay God as much as we owe Him.

We should seek temporal things not in the first but in the second place.

Lust for riches, properly speaking, brings darkness on the soul, when it puts out the light of charity, by preferring the love of riches to the love of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas

