

Extract from Homily of Pope John Paul II on September 13, 1987, at Westover Hills, San Antonio, Texas

In different parts of the world there is *a great neglect of the Sacrament of Penance*. This is sometimes linked to an obscuring of the religious and moral conscience, a loss of the sense of sin, or a lack of adequate instruction on the importance of this sacrament in the life of Christ's Church. At times the neglect occurs because we fail to take seriously our lack of love and justice, and God's corresponding offer of reconciling mercy. Sometimes there is a hesitation or an unwillingness to accept maturely and responsibly the consequences of the objective truths of faith. For these reasons it is necessary to emphasize once again that "*with regard to the substance of the sacrament there has always remained firm and unchanged in the consciousness of the Church the certainty that, by the will of Christ, forgiveness is offered to each individual by means of sacramental absolution given by the ministers of Penance*" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 30).

Again I ask all my brother bishops and priests to do everything possible to make the administration of this sacrament *a primary aspect* of their service to God's people. There can be no substitute for the means of grace which Christ himself has placed in our hands. The Second Vatican Council never intended that this Sacrament of Penance be less practiced; what the Council expressly asked for was that the faithful might more easily understand the sacramental signs and more eagerly and *frequently* have recourse to the sacraments (Cfr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59). And just as sin deeply touches the individual conscience, so we understand why the absolution of sins must be individual and not collective, except in extraordinary circumstances as approved by the Church. I ask you, dear Catholic brothers and sisters, not to see Confession as a mere attempt at psychological liberation – however legitimate this too might be – but as a sacrament, a liturgical act. *Confession* is an act of honesty and courage; *an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God*. It is an act of the prodigal son who returns to his Father and is welcomed by him with the kiss of peace. It is easy, therefore, to understand why "every confessional is a special and blessed place from which there is born new and uncontaminated a reconciled individual – a reconciled world!" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 31, V; cfr. III).

The potential for *an authentic and vibrant renewal of the whole Catholic Church* through the more faithful use of the Sacrament of Penance is immeasurable. It flows directly from the loving heart of God himself! This is a certainty of faith which I offer to each one of you and to the entire Church in the United States.

To those who have been far away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation and forgiving Love I make this appeal: *come back to this source of grace; do not be afraid!* Christ himself is waiting for you. He will heal you, and you will be at peace with God!

To all the young people of the Church, I extend a special invitation to receive Christ's forgiveness and his strength in the Sacrament of Penance. It is *a mark of greatness* to be able to say: I have made a mistake: I have sinned, Father; I am sorry; I ask for pardon; I will try again, because I rely on your strength and I believe in your love. And I know that the power of your Sons' Paschal Mystery – the Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ – is *greater than my weaknesses and all the sins of the world*. I will come and confess my sins and be healed, and I will live in your love!

Full Homily: https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1987/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19870913_messa-san-antonio.html