

There are 5 steps to a good confession: examine our conscience, be sorry for our sins, have a firm purpose of amendment or to change, confess our sins, and do our penance. I'd like to focus just a bit on the examination of conscience, because it is the key to actually having a meaningful conversion, or change experience in this beautiful sacrament.

We've been big on lists – the 10 commandments mostly. And big on numbers. But has it led us forward? The problem is that sometimes our preoccupation with the mechanics derail what this sacrament is all about. It's about our relationship with God – and others. It's about our attitudes, or an off-the mark act. It's about change. It's about becoming more like Christ. Sin is something that goes deep into the soul. It taps into the tendency we have to mess up, that tendency Christianity has called Original Sin. Sin is a pattern thing, something that pulls us down, or aside and backward. It's made up of all of our compromises, betrayals, self-interest, pride, and omissions.

We need to realize this, or we end up saying "I go to confession, but I don't know what to say. I don't go around killing people or stealing things. I lose my temper, curse sometimes, have impure thoughts, and that's about it."

But that's so anemic, and so shallow. That will not lead to growth in the spiritual life. Sin is deeper and broader. It's that which threads through us, the inner stuff that rises up and breaks out in our speech and attitudes. Sin is how we protect our egos, our selfishness, jealousies, and pride. This is the kind of sin we need to confess.

To be more specific, we are confessing not only the acts, but the attitude itself. Sin, for example, is finding it hard to say 'I love you' to people who need to hear this and hear it often. Sin is withholding compliments. Sin is the failure for being sorry, truly sorry, for what I said, for what I did that was hurtful, unjust, unfair, or fraudulent. Sin is the rash judgment of this or that person whom I tore down because it was the only way I felt I could rise up.

Sin is the jealousy I feel because I have not yet discovered the peace that comes from detachment of ego and attachment to God, and I should confess that lack. I should confess my overwhelming desire for recognition, status, and superiority because I have not followed Jesus and His words to become like a little child. I have not come even close to washing feet as He did as I have passed up opportunities for taking care of the poor and needy.

I still harbor unforgiveness despite Jesus' telling us to love my enemies and pray for those who hate me. Sin, in other words, is failing to frame my life within the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Probably the best confession I ever heard was when a woman said simply "My major sin is that I have made myself the center of the universe." No checklist. No simplistic, off-the-cuff peccadillo. She went right to the heart of the matter. She confessed not an item, but a process, a journey detoured away from love of others to self-centeredness.

Sin is real and we need this sacrament. It is easy for us to make ourselves the center of the universe. So we come with humility, and say, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I made myself the center of the universe." Amen. (taken from Bausch, FROM NO TO YES, p 66-68)