

## SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: ON CONFESSION - STUDY 4

### Preparing the Heart For Confession: Preparation – Liturgical Order – Fulfillment – Joy Restored

#### Confession is the rejection and condemnation by the penitent of their sin and alienation from God

“It is the awareness of God’s beauty (obtained through prayer, fasting and scriptures) that makes one realize the chasm that separates one from His gratuitous Grace...In repentance it is man’s total limitation and insufficiency that is placed before God, not simply wrongdoings or transgressions.” (Fr. John Chryssavgis, Repentance & Confession, p. 6)

“The Church in the person of the priest, witnessing that there is true repentance and that God has accepted it, has reconciled and united the penitent with the Church. (Schmemmann).”

**Penthos** (sorrow or mourning) is the conditioned sorrow of a repentant soul...(it) consists in mourning for the loss of God’s presence; it makes for sorrow at His absence and thirst for Him. ‘Passion or suffering for God gives rise to tears.’” (Fr. John Chryssavgis, Repentance & Confession, p. 10-11)

**The Gift of Tears** – *blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted.* (Matthew 5:4)

“Greater than baptism itself, is the fountain of tears after baptism...For baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. As baptism is received in infancy, we have all defiled it, but we cleans it anew with tears... there are souls who have no tears, but pound out and scour away their sins by sorrow, sighing and great heaviness of heart.” (John of the Ladder, Step 7/26).”

#### Humbling Ourselves Before God

“But He gives greater grace. Wherefore it says, “God sets Himself against *the* proud, but giveth grace to *the* humble.” (Proverbs 3:34) <sup>7</sup>Be subject therefore to God. Stand against the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, O sinners! And purify *your* hearts, O double-minded ones! <sup>9</sup>**Endure hardship, and mourn (Penthos), and weep.**...<sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He shall exalt you. <sup>11</sup>Cease speaking against one another, brethren [Jas. 4:6-10].”

**“Create within me a clean (new) heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me not away from your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit away from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.”** (Psalm 51:10-12)

**Love Your Enemies- A New Commandment** – “...that you be loving one another; even as I loved you, that you also be loving one another [Jn. 13:34].”

“I ask you to try something. If someone grieves you, or dishonors you, or takes something of yours, then pray like this: ‘Lord, we are all your creatures. Pity your servants, and turn them to repentance,’ and then you will perceptibly bear grace in your soul. Induce your heart to love your enemies, and the Lord, seeing your good will, shall help you in all things, and will Himself show you experience. But whoever thinks evil of his enemies does not have love for God and has not known God (St. Silouan).”

“The man who knows the delight of the love of God - when the soul, warmed by grace, loves both God and her brother - knows in part, that the kingdom of God is within us. Blessed is the soul that loves her brother, for our brother is our life. The Spirit of the Lord lives manifest within her, giving peace and gladness (St. Silouan).”

#### **What to Confess?**

- ❖ **Sins in relation to God: faith, doubts, anger, church attendance, fasting etc.**

“For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him... To put it shortly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments (If you love Me, keep My commandments, says our Lord Jesus Christ), and I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the conclusion follows that I do not love God. (Way of the Pilgrim, Four Things I Always Confess, <https://assumptionaz.org/confession>)”

❖ **Sins in relation to others: indifference towards the sufferings of others, selfishness, lack of interest, love, envy, gossip, slander, cruelty etc.**

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one utterance, in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15But if you bite and devour one another, be taking heed that you be not consumed by one another. [Gal. 5:14,15]

“I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake, but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with ensure (Way of the Pilgrim, Four Things I Always Confess).”

❖ **Sins in relation to oneself: Sins of the flesh, self-love, lack of self-control, drug or alcohol dependency, defiled my body as the temple of God**

“But I say, be walking in the Spirit, and in no wise shall you fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17For the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; and these are opposed to one another, that whatsoever you wish, you do not those things... Now the works of the flesh... which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, 20idolatry, use of drugs, potions or spells, enmities, strifes, jealousies, fits of anger, intrigues, divisions, heresies, 21envyings, murders, drunkennesses, revellings, and things like to these... they who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. [Gal. 5:16-21]

“I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it... In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render it uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts. Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? (Way of the Pilgrim, Four Things I Always Confess).”

❖ **I live a worldly life - I have no real belief in the Kingdom of God, no regards for scriptures**

“Do not keep on loving the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that *is* in the world—the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the false pretensions of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17And the world is passing on its way, and the desire of it; but the *one* doing the will of God abides forever [1 Jn. 2:15-17].”

“If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land ... That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses. Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it...”

## What does a Saint's Confession Look Like?

### A Compunctionate Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

“Now once again today, ashamed and with eyes cast down, I dare to speak to You, the Master and creator of all” – **A disposition of humility, I am a created being speaking to my Creator**

“How shall I begin my confession? On which sins, shall I, the miserable one, first ask for remission? For those I have committed knowingly or for those by which I have violated Your commandments?” – **An acknowledgment and awareness of sins committed and simultaneously seeking to know that which I do which is hidden and unknown to me**

“Or should I begin, rather, with my evil thoughts that have been recorded and must be accounted for?” – **Examining the intent of my heart which my thoughts reveal, the seat of all my true misdirected desires**

“I know, O Lord, that because of my many and evil sins, I am not worthy to call upon your fearful and holy name...for I have transgressed more than any man.” – **A sense of unworthiness flows from a deep sense that any “good or virtue” comes from God, whose action in my life is an unwarranted gift**

“I have lived more prodigally, than the prodigal son; I who love prostitution, have prostituted myself more than the harlot...I have in various ways stained my soul, created in Your image; I have wasted in sins the time that You gave me for repentance; I have shamed my face; I have totally blinded my eyes; I have defiled my lips with lies; and all the parts and portions of my soul and body have been instruments of sin...I cannot resist sin but I am always captured by it...” – **An acknowledgement that I am like those in scripture who have an enslavement to sin, that is equivalent to ‘prostituting’ my soul for a payment of pleasure, avarice, greed, self-love**

“But, O Master, look mercifully from Your holy place. Behold my incorrigible soul and with the means and ways You know correct me by Your mercy. As if standing before You, O Christ King, as if touching Your immaculate feet, so I implore You with a broken heart. Have mercy on me, O merciful one...I have no eagerness to correct myself. For many times, I have been ready to repent, yet I, the most miserable one, have become a liar with respect to my decision to be with You. ” - **Despite an acknowledgement of sin, standing before God, asking for His mercy which alone saves us.**

### Fasting → Prayer → Almsgiving → Confession → Scriptures → Worship

"Every Christian should know that unless one lifts his mind and heart towards God through Christian fasting and through prayer, he cannot attain a consciousness of his sinful state and earnestly seek the forgiveness of sins. . . Prayer and fasting serve as a means of self-study, of discernment of our true moral state, of an accurate estimation of our sins and of a knowledge of their true character. Without fasting and prayer we lack the means of acquiring this knowledge, and we cannot have a true picture of our sins, a perfect awareness of them and contrition of heart, and hence true and fruitful confession. (Schmemmann.)"

### Confession is the Mystery of Divine Love

- A. PRAYERS OF FORGIVENESS – CALLING UPON GOD FOR HELP
- B. PENITENT – RECITES 51<sup>ST</sup> PSALM
- C. STAND BEFORE GOD WHO IS INVISIBLY PRESENT
- D. WE HAVE ALL SINNED
- E. A CALL TO CHANGE
- F. ABSOLUTION –DEPENDENT UPON THE PRESENCE OF REPENTANCE

