

CONFESSION VENTILATES THE SOUL!

Today's Text: Prov. 28; James 5: 13-16

Extracts:

1. **He who covers his sins will not prosper, but *whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy* [Prov. 28: 13]**
2. ***Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much* [Jam. 5: 16]**

In the 1970's, a young unmarried Texan girl, called Norma McCorvey, was pregnant with her third child. Her parents had adopted her two earlier daughters. Following their refusal to continue to bear the brunt of her irresponsibility, she opted to abort her pregnancy. However, the doctors refused on the ground that it was illegal. She went to court. That was the beginning of the now famous abortion case, Roe v. Wade. On 22 January 1973, the US Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for any state in that country to prohibit doctors from performing abortions.

*In the year 2000, twenty-seven years after that “notorious” verdict, Norma McCorvey, alias Jane Roe in Roe v. Wade, returned to court with an affidavit, seeking to overturn the earlier ruling. She was now saying, “**My case was wrongfully decided and has caused great harm to the women and children of our nation. I have an interest in stopping this harm.**” She added, “I feel used to justify legalization of terminating the lives of over thirty-five million babies [and] **the responsibility I feel for this tragedy is overwhelming.**”¹*

Although the US Supreme Court has since declined to review its 1973 decision, Norma McCorvey will certainly feel better now than in the past. She has purged her guilt by confessing her sin and doing something about it. She is much better than most of us who have continued to put barricades to hide our sins and offences against God and fellow human beings. But are we happy? How about those guilty feelings? How about those sleepless nights? How about the aches and pains? For how much longer can we hold on to undisclosed secrets without breaking down? Is it not easier to confess and be relieved once and for all? What are we afraid of? These are some of the issues that we shall address in today's lesson.

¹ ‘Affidavit of Norma McCorvey’, www.operationoutcry.org/NormanMcCorveyAffidavit.pdf

1. With God, there is no place to hide!

According to one Nigerian joke, God rested after giving Moses the Ten Commandments. While He was resting, Moses broke the stone tablets that contained the Commandments in anger over the golden calf. As he was about to go back into the mountain for a replacement, his followers told him not to bother because they had fixed the broken tablets. When Moses looked, he saw not the Ten Commandments but just one called the Eleventh Commandment. It read, "Thou shalt not be caught!"

Interestingly, human beings tend to obey this non-existent 11th Commandment. What we say or do in public is different from what we are in private. We protect confidential records, even if it means killing intruders. In the courtrooms, the prosecution is spending enormous resources to unearth evidence to convict. At the same time, the defence is doing the direct opposite, that is, spending enormous resources to hide or destroy the evidence so as to obtain acquittal. Every case has three versions: yours, mine and the truth. If in the end, we are then forced by the weight of evidence to tell the truth, we ask for leniency! Why do we wait to be caught before confessing?

In general, we are reluctant to confess our wrongs, especially to other people, for the following reasons, among others:

a) *Fear of punishment*

Human beings are very scared to go to jail or to be publicly disgraced. How many people have you known who have been set free by the state for pleading guilty? At best, they might receive some mitigation of the punishment but they still get punished. Many spouses are scared to admit infidelity to their partners for fear that their marriages could break up or that they might not be forgiven. How many of the abusive priests confessed their immoral acts against altar boys to their fellow priests before the police found out? It could be the fear of public disgrace.

b) *Many immoral acts are not treated as offences*

We may live in a society that does not encourage us to confess because our immoral acts are not punished by law. For example, how many people get arrested for fornication or promiscuity? In some societies, homosexuality is not legally treated as an offence. When we are not under peer or social pressure to give up something, we are likely to do more of it!

The bottom line is that no matter how hard we may try to hide our sins or faults, we cannot succeed because to hide a sin is to make it worse! For example, King

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah. Then, she got pregnant out of the encounter [2 Sam. 11: 4-5]. Did David confess to Uriah or to God? No. Instead, he tried to trick Uriah to sleep with his wife and thereby cover the fact that David was responsible for her pregnancy. When that did not work, David got Uriah sent to the hot front of the battle lines where he was killed [vv. 6-17]. Adultery conceived and bore lying and murder! The situation got worse, not better for David. So it is for us all because “he who covers his sins will not prosper” [Prov. 28: 13].

A more telling truth is “be sure your sin will find you out” [Num. 32: 23]. Even if our fellow human beings can be fooled, we cannot deceive God because He sees and knows everything, even the thoughts of our hearts. Therefore, we deceive ourselves to think that we can get away without confessing our sins and faults.

2. So, what does it mean to confess?

There is hardly a believer that I know who does not go down on his or her knees everyday to confess to God. But we know that, for confession to be right with God (and those that we have wronged), it has to have the following qualities:

a) *We must own up!*

What sense does it make to ask for somebody’s forgiveness when s(he) does not know what we are talking about? We cannot assume that the other party knows because we could be reading different meanings to the same thing. If David had told Uriah that he was sorry, without telling him that he had made his wife pregnant, the young man might have thought that the king was referring to bringing him back from the battle front and trying to make him drunk while his colleagues were out there! However, later, when the prophet Nathan told David how he had offended God, he fell on his face and said, “I acknowledge my transgressions, and *my sin* is always before me” [Ps. 51: 3]

To own up is to tell it like it is. It is not buck-passing, as Adam and Eve did after eating the forbidden fruit. Adam blamed his wife and his wife blamed Satan. Neither of them owned up for disobeying God’s word [Gen. 3: 8-13]. Therefore, God had nothing to forgive them because they had not owned up!

b) *We must show genuine repentance*

This involves genuine regret, remorse or contrition for the harm that we have done or caused. David wrote “I will declare my iniquity; I will be *in anguish over my sin*” [Ps. 38: 18]. He added, “the sacrifices of God are a *broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart*” [Ps. 51: 17].

The people that we have offended read us like a map when we come to them to ask for forgiveness. They read our mannerisms and put value on them. If the sum does not add up to genuine repentance, they will know! David recognized this when he prayed to God thus, “You desire *truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part* You will make me to know wisdom” [v. 6]. The Prodigal Son did not mince words. He said, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants” [Lk 15: 18-19]. Who will not be moved by such genuine show of remorse?

c) *We must turn completely from the past*

Having admitted guilt and offered genuine contrition, the question of falling back into the same sin or offence should not arise. If our spouse has forgiven us our adulterous indiscretion, how do we think s(he) will feel when we go back into the same old sinful routine? In fact, s(he) will see our next confession as mere mockery of his/her patience and godliness!

David asked God to create in him “*a new heart ... and renew a steadfast spirit*” within him [Ps. 51: 10]. If we are not ready to change, why confess?

d) *How about restitution?*

We hardly appreciate that the harm we have caused others sets off a chain reaction that may not end when the offence stops. It is like throwing a stone into a swimming pool. You cannot stop the ripples from going all the way, even when you have stopped throwing stones. Therefore, we have to make up for the damage. For example, God said to Moses, “Speak to the children of Israel: when a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall *make restitution* for his trespass *in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged*” [Num. 5: 6-7].

If we had lied against another person, it is now our responsibility to go back and tell the truth about him/her to the same audiences. If we stole from our employers, we have to return the money (including the tithe we had paid on it!), plus the interest. Sometimes, the restitution takes the form of punishment. For example, a murderer may be put in jail for life. Even after God had forgiven David in the matter of Uriah, incest, murder and rebellion never departed from his house.

3. Confession ventilates!

When a room is stuffy and we find it difficult to breathe, what do we do? We ventilate it. In other words, we supply fresh air into the enclosed space so as to make the existing atmosphere refreshing. We can do so by natural means, such as opening the windows, or by mechanical devices, such as fans or air conditioners. Such devices remove whatever is contaminating the air, such as fumes, dusts or vapours, and provide a healthy and safe working environment.²

Sin is to the soul as contaminants are to an enclosed space. Sin makes the soul “like scarlet” and “red like crimson” [Is. 1: 18]. Unconfessed sins make us flee when no one pursues us, praise the wicked, or attract calamity [Prov. 28: 1, 4,5,14]. We lose the sense of justice and sins lead the upright to go astray [vv. 5, 10]. Sin hinders our prayers from being answered [v. 9; Prov. 15: 29]. Even when the way of sin seems right with us, “its end is the way of death” [Prov. 16: 25].

On the other hand, when we ventilate the soul through confession, the fresh air will come in through the following ways:

a) *Mercy*

Forgiveness is very soothing and whoever confesses his/her sins “and forsakes them will have mercy” [Prov. 28: 13]. No matter how scarlet or crimson sin has made our soul, confession will make it as white as snow and as wool [Is. 1: 18]. God has promised “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from *all unrighteousness* [1 Jn 1: 9].

b) *Renewed fellowship*

Confession removes a heavy burden and clears the clogs blocking fellowship between the offended party and us, between God and us. After Peter had thrice denied Jesus during His trial, he repented and wept bitterly. Although he remained with the rest of the disciples, he might still have nourished doubts if Jesus had forgiven him. The doubt was erased when a young man (presumably an angel) that Mary Magdalene and the other women saw at the tomb of the risen Christ said to them, “Go, tell His disciples- *and Peter*- that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you” [Mk 16: 7]. Peter was, of course, one of the disciples. Specifically mentioning his name assures Peter of his renewed fellowship with the Lord. That was why the old man ran with renewed vigour to the tomb of Jesus!

c) *Healing*

² www.ilpi.com/msds/ref/ventilation.html

Medical doctors will confirm that people who bury so much within them have more health problems than those who let it all come out. Catholics who practise public confession through a priest will attest that they feel lighter and happier after each confession. Couples who have overcome a major crisis through confession will attest that their renewed love and happiness cannot be quantified. David wrote [**Ps. 32: 5**]:

When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Therefore, confession is therapeutic. It heals. This point is underlined where James wrote, “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, *that you may be healed*” [**Jam. 5: 16**].

4. Conclusion

Unconfessed sin is heavier than lead. When you carry something that is heavy, it always weighs you down. Do you love that? Why don't you take on God's challenge? Confess to your fellow men and women that you have wronged. Confess to your God. Show genuine repentance. Promise never to relapse and ask God to see you through. That will take off the heavy load! The initial fall out from the offended parties may not be pleasant but when God is pleased with you, even your enemies will be at peace with you [**Prov. 16:7**]. Is God's peace, which surpasses human understanding, not better?

In deed, confession ventilates the soul. It will ventilate yours!