THE DAILY BREAD

The Acts of the Apostles



Going to Confession

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

INTRODUCTION

The Empty Line

Walk into almost any Catholic church on a Saturday afternoon. The confessional sits there, light on, a priest waiting. The line outside it, if there is a line at all, is usually three people. Sometimes none.

Then look around at the same church on Sunday morning. It is full. Hundreds of people, all of whom, by their own quiet admission, if you asked, are carrying things they no longer need to carry.

This is the strangest thing in modern Catholic life. The mercy is there. The line is empty.

I have a theory about why. It is not, mostly, that people have stopped believing in sin, though some have. It is not, mostly, that they have stopped caring. It is that they have forgotten how. They have not been in years. They are afraid of what it will feel like. They don't know what to say. They don't know what counts. They are pretty sure the priest will recognize their voice. They tried it once as a kid and it felt mechanical and they never came back.

If any of that sounds like you, this book is for you.

If you have been faithfully going for years and you want to go better, this book is for you too. There is more on the other side of this sacrament than most of us ever taste.

I am going to be plain with you. I am not going to lecture. I am not going to scold. I am going to walk you through everything you need, what it is, why we do it, what counts, how to prepare, exactly what to say, what happens after, and I am going to assume you are a grown adult who can handle the truth without being coddled.

The Father is waiting. He has been waiting a long time.

Let's get you ready to go home.

CHAPTER ONE

Why Confess at All?

Let's start with the question almost everyone asks first.

"Why do I have to tell a priest? Can't I just tell God?"

It is a fair question. The answer is yes, you can tell God directly, and yes, He hears you. Every time you whisper "Lord, I'm sorry" in the car, He hears that. He has heard every regret you have ever felt. Nothing is lost on Him.

But Jesus, for reasons of His own, gave us something more.

When the risen Christ appeared to the apostles on Easter night, the first thing He did, after wishing them peace, was breathe on them.

> *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* — Jn 20:22–23

Read that carefully. He didn't say, "Pray for people, and I will forgive their sins." He said, "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.*" He extended His own authority, the authority to forgive sins, to the apostles, and through them, to the Church.

He didn't have to do this. He could have made every act of repentance a purely interior matter. He didn't. He gave us something physical. Something audible. Something specific. Here is why, I think.

Why He Set It Up This Way

Sin is more than information God needs

When you sin, God already knows. You are not informing Him. The confession is for you, not Him. Saying it out loud, to another human, is part of how you actually take responsibility for it. Anyone who has ever had a hard conversation knows the difference between "thinking" you've dealt with something and actually saying it. The mouth makes real what the mind can keep slippery.

You need to hear forgiveness with your ears

Not just hope it's true. Not just suspect God isn't angry anymore. Hear it. "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Those words enter you audibly, from outside yourself. You cannot talk yourself out of having heard them. The enemy who whispers "yes, but does God really forgive that?" has a much harder time with words a priest actually said.

It guards against self-deception

Left alone, we are excellent at minimizing our own sin or, equally dangerous, at exaggerating it into despair. The priest is a steadying hand. He can say "yes, that's serious" when you need to hear it, and "that's not as bad as you think" when you need to hear that.

The priest stands in for the wounded community

Sin is never just between you and God. Every sin damages others, even private ones. The priest, as a member of the Church, receives your confession on behalf of the whole Body you have wounded. Forgiveness goes both vertical and horizontal.

It connects you to the embrace

Read Luke 15. The story of the Prodigal Son.

Notice what happens. The son rehearses a confession on the way home, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." He gets it half out before his father interrupts him with a kiss and a robe and a ring and a feast.

> *That is exactly what confession is. You walk in carrying your list. You start to say it out loud. The Father, through the priest, runs to meet you.*

The robe is the grace of absolution. The ring is the restored identity as His son. The feast is the Eucharist you can now receive worthily.

This is what He set up. This is what He left us. Don't skip it because the line looks short and the room looks small. What happens in that room is enormous.

CHAPTER TWO

What Counts as Sin?

The second question, after "why do I have to," is usually: what am I supposed to confess?

If you have been away for a while, you may not know anymore what counts and what is just being human. The internet is full of bad answers in both directions, Catholics who think everything is a mortal sin and Catholics who think nothing is.

Here is what the Church actually teaches.

The Two Weights

Sin comes in two weights: mortal and venial.

Mortal sin is the kind that breaks the friendship with God so seriously that, if you die in that state unrepentant, you choose to remain separated from Him. It is the spiritual equivalent of a heart attack, not something to play with.

Venial sin wounds the friendship without breaking it. It weakens you. It makes you more vulnerable to larger sin. But it does not, by itself, sever you from grace.

The Three Conditions

The Church teaches that three conditions must all be met for a sin to be mortal:

- **Grave matter.** The act itself is objectively serious.
- **Full knowledge.** You knew it was seriously wrong.
- **Deliberate consent.** You chose it freely, not under panic or coercion.

If any one of those three is missing, the sin is not mortal. The angry word you spat at your wife when you were exhausted in the middle of a fight, the consent was compromised; probably not mortal. The lustful thought that flashed across your mind that you immediately rejected, that's not even a sin. The thing you did at twenty-two because nobody had ever told you it was wrong, the knowledge was missing.

But the affair you planned, the lie you crafted to protect your reputation, the porn you returned to deliberately knowing exactly what you were doing, that is the territory of

mortal sin. Not because the Church is harsh, but because that is what those acts actually are.

An Honest, Non-Exhaustive List

Common matters that, when meeting all three conditions, rise to mortal sin:

- Missing Sunday Mass without a serious reason (illness, caring for a sick person, genuine travel impossibility, not just inconvenience or fatigue).
- Sexual sin outside marriage, adultery, fornication, deliberately consumed pornography, masturbation done with full deliberation.
- Deliberate, sustained anger that wishes harm; words intended to wound; contempt held against someone.
- Theft of significant value, fraud, dishonesty in business that hurts others.
- Lies that materially damage someone's reputation or interests.
- Drunkenness to the point of losing rational control; recreational drug use that risks the same.
- Sustained, deliberate refusal to forgive someone.
- Skipping the moral teaching of the Church on matters you know perfectly well, contraception, cohabitation, abortion's gravity, marriage.
- Receiving the Eucharist while conscious of unconfessed mortal sin.

This is not exhaustive. If you are not sure whether something rises to mortal weight, the safe move is simple: confess it anyway and let the priest help you sort it out. There is no penalty for over-confessing. There is significant cost to under-confessing.

Two Traps to Avoid

Scrupulosity

Some people, especially after a sensitive childhood or a period of intense religious anxiety, go the opposite direction and convict themselves of mortal sin over things that aren't even venial. Every stray thought becomes a confessable offense. Every imperfect motive becomes proof of damnation. This is not holiness. This is a wound, and it needs treatment, not feeding.

If you are confessing the same minor matters every week, ruminating endlessly on whether you really consented or really knew, second-guessing absolutions you've already received, talk to a steady, experienced confessor. He will tell you, gently and firmly, where the line actually is and ask you to trust him.

Laxity

The opposite trap is more common in our culture. "I'm a basically good person; I don't really have anything to confess." If you have been alive for thirty years and cannot think of a single serious sin, you are not telling the truth, you are just not looking hard. Pride is the easiest sin in the world to miss because it is the one that hides the others.

> *The man who thinks he has nothing to confess and the man who thinks he has too much to ever be forgiven are making the same mistake, they are looking at themselves instead of at God.*

CHAPTER THREE

Examining Your Conscience

Before you go, you sit with the Lord and look at your life. This is called an examination of conscience. It is not a memory test. The point is not to construct a perfect list. The point is to be honest.

Take fifteen minutes. Sit somewhere quiet. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what He wants healed.

> *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*
> *— Ps 139:23–24*

That is the prayer. Then sit with it. He will surface what you need to see. Often the Spirit highlights one or two things you have been avoiding rather than every minor failure of the past month. Trust that.

There are several frames you can use. Pick one. Don't try to use all three at once.

Frame One: The Ten Commandments

The most traditional examination. Walk through the commandments slowly. Each one is broader than its literal wording.

- **1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have other gods.** Have I put anything before God, money, career, comfort, a relationship, my reputation, my hobbies, myself? Have I neglected prayer? Have I dabbled in horoscopes, fortune-telling, the occult? Have I despaired of God's mercy or presumed on it?
- **2. You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.** Have I used God's name carelessly, profanely, as a curse? Have I blasphemed in anger? Have I broken vows or oaths?
- **3. Remember the Sabbath.** Have I missed Mass through my own fault? Have I treated Sunday as just another day of errands and work? Have I received the Eucharist worthily?

- **4. Honor your father and mother.** Have I treated my parents with contempt or neglect? Have I failed in duties to my spouse, my children, my employer, my pastor, those legitimately in authority?
- **5. You shall not kill.** Have I harbored hatred or grudges? Have I been physically or verbally violent? Have I supported, advised, or paid for an abortion? Have I been reckless with my health, with addiction, with my driving? Have I neglected someone who needed help?
- **6. & 9. You shall not commit adultery; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife.** Have I been faithful in body, mind, and eyes? Have I used pornography? Have I masturbated deliberately? Have I committed adultery, fornication, or other sexual sin? Have I dressed or spoken in ways meant to seduce? Have I led others into sexual sin?
- **7. & 10. You shall not steal; you shall not covet.** Have I taken what isn't mine, including time, attention, or credit? Have I been dishonest in business? Have I cheated on taxes? Have I refused to pay what I owe? Have I been consumed by envy of others' success or possessions?
- **8. You shall not bear false witness.** Have I lied? Have I gossiped or damaged someone's reputation? Have I judged others harshly or assumed the worst? Have I broken confidences? Have I flattered or manipulated for my own gain?

Frame Two: The Seven Deadly Sins

If the commandments feel too external, try this frame. It asks not what you did but what is driving you.

- **Pride.** Am I the center of my own world? Do I resent correction? Do I quietly think I am better than others?
- **Greed.** Am I attached to money and possessions in a way that distorts my decisions? Am I generous with what I have?
- **Lust.** Are my eyes and imagination disciplined or do I let them roam? Do I treat my spouse as a gift or as a means?
- **Envy.** Do I rejoice in others' good fortune or quietly resent it? Do I diminish others to make myself feel taller?
- **Gluttony.** Am I governed by my appetites, food, drink, screens, novelty? Or do I govern them?

- **Wrath.** Do I hold anger? Do I let it spill on people who didn't earn it? Have I forgiven those who wronged me?
- **Sloth.** Have I neglected prayer, Mass, the duties of my state in life, the people who depend on me? Have I traded the difficult good for the easy emptiness?

Frame Three: The Daily Examen

If you build the habit of examining each evening, Ignatius's daily examen, five minutes, every night, your big confessions become much easier. You are no longer reconstructing months of life from memory. You are bringing in a clean log.

The Ignatian examen has five steps:

- Place yourself in God's presence.
- Look over your day with gratitude, what was given to you?
- Ask the Spirit to show you what He wants you to see.
- Review the day, honestly. Where did you respond to grace? Where did you refuse it?
- Ask forgiveness for what was wrong, ask grace for tomorrow, and rest in His love.

Do this for thirty days and you will know yourself in a new way. The examination of conscience before confession becomes a five-minute scan instead of a frantic excavation.

CHAPTER FOUR

If It's Been a Long Time

This chapter is for the man whose last confession was first communion.

Or junior high. Or before his wedding. Or the funeral of someone he loved. Or whatever year it was, it has been a long time and the thought of going now is making his chest tight.

Read this carefully:

> *You do not have to remember everything. You do not have to make a perfect list. You do not have to know the right words. The priest is on your side.*

This is the single most important thing to understand about returning. Confession is not a courtroom. It is not a final exam. The priest is not waiting to grade you. He is, though you may not feel it yet, overjoyed to see you. Priests will tell you, when they're being honest, that nothing in their week compares to hearing the confession of someone who has been away for thirty years. It is what they got ordained for.

How to Actually Do It

Find a parish where you are anonymous

If you are nervous about being recognized, drive to a parish where you don't know anyone. Many city downtowns have parishes with confession on weekday lunch hours specifically for working professionals who want to slip in. Search "confession times" plus your city. Most diocesan websites publish a master schedule.

Use the screen if you want

Most confessionals have two options: face-to-face with the priest in a chair, or anonymous behind a screen. There is no spiritual superiority either way. If anonymous feels safer for the first time back, take it. You can switch later.

Bring a written list

It is perfectly acceptable to walk in with notes on a piece of paper. Many people do. You can read from it. The priest will not think less of you. He will think more. It means you took it seriously.

The opening line

When you enter, kneel or sit. Make the Sign of the Cross with the priest. Then say something like:

> *Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been about [thirty] years since my last confession. I'm not sure I remember exactly how this goes.*

That sentence is a master key. The priest will immediately understand. He will slow down. He will walk you through it. He may ask a few gentle questions to help you. He has done this many times. He is not going to be shocked by any number, five years, twenty years, sixty years.

What to confess if you can't remember specifics

For a long absence, the standard guidance is: confess by category, with frequency where you can estimate it. You do not have to itemize every sin of forty years.

"I have been away from the sacrament for about thirty years. In that time I have committed adultery, twice. I have looked at pornography regularly for years, probably weekly on average. I have lied in business dealings, I cannot give a number, but it was a pattern. I have failed to attend Mass for most of that time. I have been harsh and angry with my wife and children, in ways I am still ashamed of. I have not prayed. There is more I am not remembering. I am sorry for these sins and all the sins of my life."

That is a complete and worthy confession of a long absence. The priest may ask a clarifying question or two. He will give counsel. He will give a penance. He will absolve you.

And then, and you need to hear this clearly, you will walk out clean. Not partially clean. Not on probation. Not pending review. Clean. Every sin of those thirty years, gone. The Father will run to meet you, the way the prodigal's father ran. That is not a metaphor. That is what actually happens.

If you don't remember the Act of Contrition

Most parishes have one printed on a card in the confessional. The priest can recite it with you, or even for you. A simple version that will always work:

> *My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against You whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with Your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy.*

CHAPTER FIVE

Walking Through It

Here is the whole thing, step by step. Read it once. You will not need to memorize it.

Before You Go

- Find a time. Most parishes offer Saturday afternoon (often 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.). Many also offer weekday times. If your parish's schedule doesn't work, look at a neighboring parish.
- Examine your conscience earlier in the day, not in the parking lot. Give it the room it deserves.
- Arrive ten minutes early. Sit in a pew nearby. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind what He wants you to confess. Don't strain. Receive.
- If there is a line, use the wait to pray, not to rehearse. The wait is part of the sacrament.

In the Confessional

When it's your turn, walk in. There will usually be a kneeler with a screen, or a chair facing the priest, or both. Choose. Make the Sign of the Cross, the priest will often make it with you and say something brief.

The opening

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been [time] since my last confession. These are my sins..."

Confessing

Now you simply say what you came to say. Mortal sins by kind and approximate frequency. Venial sins as you wish, you do not have to confess venial sins, though it is good to. Be honest. Be brief. Do not over-explain. Do not make excuses. Do not name other people involved ("my wife did X first", leave her out).

The priest's response

He may ask a clarifying question. He may offer a word of counsel, sometimes very short, sometimes a few sentences. He may suggest a way forward. Listen. Don't argue. If something he says doesn't sit right, you can ask a follow-up gently; you don't have to win the conversation.

Your penance

He will give you a penance, usually a prayer or two, sometimes a small action ("call your brother this week," "do one act of kindness for your wife tomorrow"). Listen carefully. If you didn't catch it, ask him to repeat it.

The Act of Contrition

He will ask you to make an Act of Contrition. Use whichever version you know, or the one printed in the confessional, or the simple one in the previous chapter. If you blank, just say honestly: "Father, I am truly sorry for my sins and I want to do better with God's help." That is a valid Act of Contrition.

The absolution

The priest will then say the words of absolution. The essential form is:

> *God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

This is the moment. Right there. Listen. Receive. Do not rush past it. Your sins, at that instant, are gone.

Respond "Amen." He will dismiss you, often with "Go in peace, your sins are forgiven", and you can answer "Thanks be to God."

After You Leave

- Do not rush out of the church. Sit in a pew. Do your penance, or at least begin it. Thank God.
- If you feel emotion, relief, tears, lightness, even disorientation, let it be. That is grace landing.

- If you don't feel anything in particular, that is fine too. Grace is not a feeling. The absolution is just as real either way.
- Do not go from confession straight into a near occasion of the sin you just confessed. Drive home a different way if you need to.

CHAPTER SIX

The Hard Sins

Most of what keeps people out of confession is one or two specific sins they cannot imagine saying out loud.

For some men it is pornography, a habit that started in adolescence and never really stopped, and the shame of admitting how long, how often, how much. For some it is something they did decades ago and have never spoken about, an abortion they paid for, an affair their wife doesn't know about, a stolen sum, a violence done. For some it is something done to them that they have confused with something they did. For some it is the same sin they have confessed forty times before and gone right back to.

This chapter is for them.

The Priest Has Heard It

Whatever you are dreading saying, the priest has heard worse. Many times. From men in suits, from men in workboots, from women in their seventies, from teenagers. The combinations and severities of human failure are not infinite, and a priest who has heard confessions for five years has heard the same handful of stories repeatedly.

Your sin is not unique. Your story is not the worst story he has heard this week, let alone this year. The thing you cannot bear to say is, statistically, something he heard from someone else last Saturday and will hear from someone else next Saturday.

This should be a relief, not an insult. You are not alone. You are part of a long line of people walking back home. The priest is the one stationed at the door to welcome you.

The Seal Is Absolute

This needs to be said clearly. The seal of confession is the strongest confidentiality in the world. A priest cannot reveal what was said in confession to anyone, for any reason, ever, not to the police, not to a court, not to his bishop, not to your spouse, not to save his own life.

Priests have gone to prison rather than break the seal. Some have been killed for refusing to break it. The Church regards a violation of the seal as one of the gravest crimes a priest can commit; it results in automatic excommunication that can only be lifted by the Holy See.

In practice, this means that the priest forgets what you told him almost as soon as you leave. Many priests describe a kind of supernatural amnesia, they walk out of the confessional and genuinely cannot recall specifics. The grace of the sacrament includes the priest's ability to hold what he hears without carrying it.

You are safe in that room. Whatever you say stays there forever.

Confessing the Sin You Cannot Say

If there is a specific sin you have been unable to say for years, try this approach. Before you go in, write the words on paper. Read them out loud, alone, in your car, until you can get through them without your voice breaking. Bring the paper with you. If you cannot say the words, hand the paper to the priest and let him read it.

Or use this opening line, which works for almost anything:

> *Father, there is one sin I am having trouble saying out loud. Will you help me?*

A good confessor will say yes, and he will help you. He may ask gentle questions to draw it out. He may sit in silence while you find your words. He is not going to make you wrestle with it alone.

The Same Sin, Over and Over

Many men do not return to confession because they confessed something last month and then did it again last week and they feel like a hypocrite.

You are not a hypocrite. You are a sinner trying. There is a difference.

A hypocrite hides his sin while pretending to be holy. A sinner trying acknowledges his sin again and again and keeps showing up for grace. That is, in fact, the entire Christian life. You will not be sinless this side of heaven. You will fall. You will get back up. The sacrament is built for exactly this rhythm.

Saint Padre Pio reportedly told a man who confessed the same sin many times, "If you fell a thousand times in a day, come a thousand times to confession." That was not him being soft on sin. That was him being serious about grace.

> *The man who confesses the same sin a hundred times and gets up to fight it a hundred and one, that man is not failing. That man is becoming a saint slowly.*

When the Sin Has Hurt Others

Some sins require more than confession. They require restitution, making it right, as far as you can.

If you stole something, give it back or pay for it. If you damaged someone's reputation through gossip, work to undo it. If you owe someone money, pay it. If you have an affair you have not ended, ending it is part of the repentance.

You do not have to have completed restitution before confession. You confess with the intention of making it right, and the priest can guide you on what that looks like. But absolution is not a magic eraser that lets you keep the spoils of the sin. Real repentance includes real change.

For some sins, adultery, an abortion you participated in, a serious wrong against a specific person, you may also benefit from spiritual direction or counseling alongside confession. The confessional gives you absolution. It is not always sufficient on its own for the long work of healing. Don't be afraid to seek both.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Finding a Good Confessor

Any validly ordained priest can give you a valid absolution. The grace of the sacrament does not depend on the priest's personal holiness, his preaching skill, or his bedside manner. That is the official answer and it is true.

But there is a difference between getting a valid confession and finding a regular confessor, a priest you return to, who knows your patterns, who has the long view of your life. That second thing is one of the most underrated gifts in the spiritual life.

What to Look For

A good regular confessor has three qualities:

- **Orthodoxy.** He teaches what the Church teaches. He doesn't soft-pedal sin to make you feel better, and he doesn't invent new sins the Church hasn't named. You should leave his confessional with the Church's mind, not his.
- **Kindness.** He is firm but not cruel. He doesn't humiliate. He doesn't make you feel like a child. He treats you like a man who is trying.
- **Steadiness.** He is the same week to week. He doesn't blow with the wind. You know what you'll get from him.

You do not need a famous spiritual director. You need a steady, faithful parish priest who knows his job. Most dioceses have many of them.

Confession vs. Spiritual Direction

These are different. Confession is the sacrament, confession of sins, absolution. Spiritual direction is an ongoing conversation about your prayer life, your discernment, your spiritual development. The same priest can do both, but they are usually scheduled separately. A confession line on a Saturday afternoon is not the place for a forty-minute conversation about your vocation.

If you want a deeper conversation than confession provides, ask the priest separately: "Father, would you have time sometime to talk outside of confession? I'd like spiritual direction." Most parish priests do this for parishioners, though their schedules are tight.

How to Choose

Go to confession at your parish several times. Notice which priest you find most helpful, not most pleasant, most helpful. Then start going to him regularly. Over time he will come to know you. You will not have to re-explain yourself every visit. He will be able to say things like, "This is the third time this year you've confessed this, let's talk about why", and that conversation is worth thousands of standalone confessions.

When to Switch

Sometimes you will end up with a confessor who is wrong for you. He may be too harsh, too lax, too inattentive, or simply mismatched to your situation. If you leave his confessional consistently worse, more anxious, more confused, more discouraged, find another priest. You are not obligated to stay.

Switching is not disloyalty. It is stewardship. The sacrament is too important to be hampered by a poor pairing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

After You Leave

Confession is not the end. It is the beginning of the next stretch.

What you do in the days and weeks after a good confession determines whether the grace you received takes root or evaporates. Here is what to attend to.

Do Your Penance

Whatever the priest assigned, do it. Soon. Today if possible. The penance is not the price of forgiveness, that was paid by Christ. The penance is a small, symbolic act that joins you to the sacrifice and reinforces the change. Skipping it is like signing a contract and refusing to deliver the handshake.

If you forgot what he assigned, do something equivalent, three Our Fathers, a decade of the Rosary, an act of kindness toward someone you've wronged. The Lord knows you tried.

Avoid the Near Occasion

Every sin has its setup. The porn habit has its time of night, its device, its mental cue. The anger has its trigger. The dishonesty has its conversation. Identify the setup and avoid it for the first few days especially. Drive home a different way. Put the phone in another room at night. Don't drink with that one friend this week. The grace of confession gives you the strength to break the pattern; don't squander it by walking back into the trap.

Build a Rhythm

Sporadic confession is better than no confession. Regular confession is much better than sporadic confession.

Aim for monthly. That is the rhythm most spiritual directors recommend for a serious lay Catholic. It is frequent enough that you stay current, no sin festers for more than a few weeks, and infrequent enough that you take it seriously when you go.

> *Sporadic confession heals the wound. Monthly confession changes the man.*

If monthly feels like too much at first, start with every other month. Or every three months. The point is to put it on the calendar, not to wait until you feel like going. You will rarely feel like going. Go anyway.

When You Fall Again

You will. Not maybe, definitely. The question is what you do next.

The pattern that defeats most men is this: they sin, they feel awful, they avoid prayer because they feel awful, the time between sin and confession lengthens, more sin accumulates, they feel even worse, prayer becomes harder, and they end up sitting outside the sacrament for another year. The enemy does not care which sin you commit. He cares that you stay away.

The counter-pattern is this: you sin, you make an act of contrition right away, you put confession on the calendar within the week, you do not stop praying in the meantime, and you go. Then you get up and keep walking.

> *"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*

The Long View

A man who goes to confession monthly for thirty years is not the same man at the end. The sacrament works on you slowly. Patterns soften. Habits weaken. The Spirit moves in territory that had been closed to Him.

You will probably never have the dramatic conversion of Augustine or Ignatius. Most of us don't. What you will have, if you stay with the sacrament, is the quiet, cumulative transformation of a life that has stayed close to mercy. After enough years, you will look back and realize you are not the man you were. You will not be able to point to the date that changed everything. There won't be one. There will be the steady, almost invisible work of a thousand small absolutions, each one moving you a little further into the heart of the Father.

CONCLUSION

The Father Is Waiting

So here we are at the end.

There is one thing left to say, and it's the same thing this whole book has been trying to say from the first page.

Read Luke 15 one more time. Read it slowly. Watch the father in that story, he is the central character, not the son. The son rehearses his confession on the road, but the father is already looking down the road, watching for him. Scripture says the father saw him "while he was still a long way off", which means he had been watching. For how long? We are not told. Years, maybe. Every day, scanning the horizon. Every evening, hoping today was the day.

> *"While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."* — *Lk 15:20*

That is God. That is the Father you are walking back to. He is not in the confessional with His arms crossed. He is running down the road. He has been running down that road, in a sense, since the day you walked away, whenever that was.

There is a parish near you. There is a confession time this Saturday, or some Saturday soon. There is a priest who is, whether he knows it or not, the man stationed at the door of the Father's house to welcome you home.

Don't make Him wait any longer.

Go.

✦ ✦ ✦