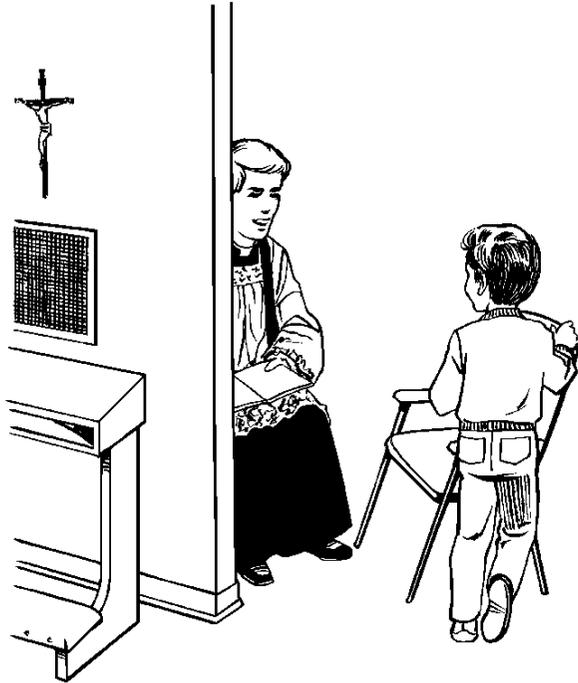


# *EXPLORING CHRISTIAN FAITH*

No. 6

## THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION



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Have you noticed the small prayer desk in the Lady Chapel aisle at S. Andrew's and wondered why it is draped in a purple stole? This is the place set-aside for Confessions. In many Anglican churches and cathedrals there are similar arrangements: in some there will be a screened off area, in others a traditional Confessional (wardrobe-like box where the priest sits and the penitent kneels).

For some it will be strange to think that such arrangements exist: "After all, we aren't Roman Catholic"! However, Anglicans have always been encouraged to 'make their Confession' to a priest. *The Visitation of the Sick* (Book of Common Prayer 1662) contains the following note: "... *the sick person shall be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it)...*". The Rite then gives the formula of Absolution:

‘Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church  
to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him,  
of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences:  
And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins,  
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen’

This is still the formula that many priests will use. However, the practise of 'making your confession' fell out of general use after the Reformation and only returned with the Catholic Revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many priests, who realised and sought to explain it's benefit, were persecuted and even imprisoned. Yet, gradually, the practice became more common and, today, the Sacrament is widely available. Although every priest is ordained to hear confessions (see *The Declaration - Ordination of Priests*) it is necessary to obtain the Bishops permission before one can be authorised to do so, and not all priests wish to include this in their ministry.

It is clear that all of us carry the burden of unresolved issues - anger, guilt, sin, etc. Research into human psychology has shown how important it is to be able to deal with these matters. Whilst Confession is *not* the same as therapy, there are connections. It has been observed that many Christians would be helped if they realised they could unload the burdens they carry within the confidentiality of the Sacrament. Wisely it has been said that the Anglican attitude to Confession is: 'All may, none must, some should'. If you would like to make your Confession before Easter, or at any other time, or if you would like more information about the matter, please speak to your priest.

*Fr. John-Francis - April 2005*