

Forgiven – Q&A

Session 1 – Where are you?

1. “When we sin, God does not love us less – we love ourselves less.”

What do you think this quote means?

RESPONSE

When we sin God does not love us less. We are the ones who change –

- we feel shame and may “love ourselves less”
Adam & Eve hid themselves
- we project our fears onto God
Adam & Eve had difficulty trusting in God’s love for them.

2. There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right – Martin Luther King Jr.

Why is a well-formed conscience essential for our happiness?

RESPONSE

A well-formed conscience helps us to know what is true, good, & beautiful (virtuous) – so that we can make the right choices with our actions.

- Sins wound us.
- Virtue rewards us.
 - Virtue is the habit of choosing the true good.
 - Virtue perfects our natural freedom & increases our freedom to love.

3. God doesn’t just want more **from** us, he wants more **for** us!

What do you think this quote means?

RESPONSE

God only asks us to do things that will increase our capacity to share in his life and love.

In cooperating with God’s grace, we grow in our ability

- to resist temptation
- to love like God does.

This is the MORE that God wants FOR us.

We may THINK God wants us to check items off a to do list:

- got to Mass
- pray every day
- stop complaining so much
- go to Confession ...

But God does not want that FROM us.

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Session 2 – An Encounter with Mercy

1. What difference do you think Jesus makes to the formation of a strong identity?

- According to psychologists, an identity crisis occurs when someone is unsure of their role in life and feel as if they don't really know themselves.
- In other words, someone experiencing an "identity crisis" is unable to provide an answer to the question "Who are you?"

RESPONSE

Jesus proves to us that we are not defined by our failures and mistakes;

- We are defined by God's love for us.

We are NOT defined by what we see as our successes either.

- God cannot love us more than he already does.

Our identity is defined by our Baptism.

- In Jesus we are reconciled to God as sons & daughters.

2. How do we explain the following apparent contradiction?

- Holiness and sin have an inverse relationship. As one increases, the other decreases.
- That being said, it was common for many of the saints to go to Confession frequently. For ex., Pope St. John Paul II & St. Teresa of Calcutta are known to have gone to Confession once a week.

RESPONSE

The saints became more keenly aware of their wounds and desired healing.

- The effect of sin is a wound, not simply a stain on our soul. We go to the dry cleaner to clean stains – but to a doctor to heal wounds. Jesus is our Divine physician.
- In the sacrament, Jesus heals us of the wounds caused by sin & of the root causes of our sins.
- Jesus is not just wiping out our mistakes – he is giving us the grace to transform our lives.

3. In Confession, why does the priest say "I absolve you of your sin" and not "**God** absolves you of your sin"?

RESPONSE

The priest speaks for Jesus in the Sacrament.

- Mt 28:20 – Jesus promised to be with us always.
- As human beings, we have a need to experience reality through our senses.
- Through the mediation of the priest,
the reality that God exists and forgives us of our sin when we repent is experienced thru our senses – so that we can know, deep down, that we have been reconciled to God and his church.

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Session 3 – The Rite Explained

1. In the video we heard that God forgives our sin in order to clear the way for love. Grace increases in our souls similar to the way a fire increases in brightness and heat with the addition of more fuel.

Since sanctifying grace is God's very life, how are we to understand an increase of God's life within us when he is already omnipresent and infinite?

RESPONSE

It is not possible to get more of God.

- What increases is: our soul's capacity to absorb his life and love.

This is where we exercise our freedom.

- We can choose to grow in grace or not.

In James 4:6 we read:

- "But he gives more grace" and
- "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"

The humble

- recognize their sin and their need for God's forgiveness and grace.
- are able to say what can be the most difficult words to say in our relationship with God and with others: "I'm sorry! Will you forgive me?"

Frequent Confession helps us to grow in humility and charity.

2. God's will for our lives is to grow in self-awareness, self-possession, and self-donation.

In other words,

- it is difficult to give ourselves away in love
 - if we are not free to love. And,
- it is difficult to grow in the freedom necessary to love
 - if we are not aware of what restrains us.

How does understanding the purpose of our lives emphasize the importance of a good examination of conscience?

RESPONSE

"The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort.

You were made for greatness" Pope Benedict XVI

We have a high calling as Christians.

A well-formed conscience helps us to understand who we are called to be.

A good examination of conscience is taking the time to reflect on the ways we are

- failing to live up to that calling through our thoughts, words, actions, or omissions.

The more we are aware of our failings and the source of those failings,

- the more empowered we are to overcome them.

And, this makes us more grateful for the Sacrament of Reconciliation where we experience what

St. Paul writes to the Philippians:

- "In our weakness, he is strong" 2 Corinthians 12:10

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3. A presidential candidate was asked the question: “How do you define sin?”
His answer was: “Being out of alignment with my values.”

What is problematic with this answer?

RESPONSE

This answer is an example of relativism.

Relativism is a worldview that denies the existence of objective truth.

In other words,

- there are no universal “rights and wrongs” that we can know, live by, and promote.
- Therefore, truth is what an individual decides it to be.

In this system of thought, we are free to do as we please as long as it does not “hurt others.”

The Catechism, quoting St. Augustine, teaches that

- sin is “an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law” (CCC 1849).

God has given us his eternal law out of his great love for us.

- When you love people, you tell them the truth.

The prevalence of relativism has created a great obstacle to grace:

- the loss of the sense of sin.

Pope Pius XII said in the wake of the horrors of World War II that

- “the greatest sin today is that men have lost the sense of sin.”



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Session 4 – Biblical Foundations

1. Author Richard Dawkins writes in *The God Delusion*:
“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction.”
As an atheist, Dawkins writes this to undermine Christianity and the Bible.

How can we reconcile the God of the Old Testament and the merciful love of our heavenly Father revealed to us through Jesus Christ?

RESPONSE

In *Verbum Domini*, 42, Pope Benedict XVI says:

“God’s plan is manifested progressively and it is accomplished slowly, in successive stages and despite human resistance.

God chose a people and patiently worked to guide and educate them.”

In other words, God progressively revealed his character to a people who lived in warlike times. Even so, his revelation of himself on Mount Sinai reveals that he is

“a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” - Exodus 34:6

The CCC 129 teaches:

“Christians therefore read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen”.

We interpret the Old Testament through the lens of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

2. God says this of David, the great king of Israel:
“I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will”
(Acts 13:22).

And yet, David failed miserably in doing God’s will when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed so that he could take her to be his wife.

Given these circumstances, how is David a role model for us?

RESPONSE

The book of Hebrews (12:1-2) compares the Christian life to a race:

“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ...”.

David is an example to us

that our sin, no matter how grave, does not disqualify us from the race.

Psalm 51

reveals the depths of David’s sorrow and his total confidence in God’s mercy and forgiveness.

It shows how David

overcomes his pride,

(the difficulty we have accepting our failings and forgiving ourselves),
and offers to the Lord a contrite heart.

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3. The great rabbi Maimonides is credited with this profound statement:

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day;
teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

How does this statement give insight into the reasons Jesus delegated his priesthood?

RESPONSE

The priest is an ambassador because

he speaks and acts with the authority of Christ – not his own.

What he says and does in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is in the person of Christ the head,
so if we reject him, we are rejecting Christ.

Some participants will have already heard this,
and so it may not change their attitude.

Others may learn to look past the priest as a man
and see Jesus in the sacrament.

They may feel more comfortable with the idea of the priest’s authority
once they understand that the priest’s authority to forgive sins comes
not from himself or his own merit,
but from God’s authority and free gift.

Thinking about this delegation of authority can also lead us to
greater awe and wonder in contemplating God’s mercy.

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Session 5 – Answering Common Questions

1. Matt had been away from Confession for 7 years.
He had been living far from God and came to a breaking point.
Not knowing where to turn, he went to the parish and got in line for Confession.
He writes about his experience:
 “When I heard the words of absolution from the priest,
 it was as if heavy chains fell away from my body.
 I experienced a sense of freedom and joy that I had never known.
 That was nearly 20 years ago, and today, I am still that changed man!”

How does Matt’s story emphasize our psychological need and spiritual need of the sacrament?

RESPONSE

Our psychological and spiritual needs can be summarized with

- 3 C’s: courage, conscience, and contrition.

We have the need to be courageous and take responsibility for our actions.

We also have the need to unburden our conscience when we make mistakes.

And, finally, we have the need to

- express our remorse and
- ask for forgiveness for the mistakes we have made.

Our effort in these areas is how we

- die to self and
- mature as Christians.

The inability to practice reconciliation

- leaves us “stuck in a rut” and
- prevents our growth as an individual and in our relationships with others.

2. In *The Fate of Empires and the Search for Survival*, historian Sir John Bagot Glubb (1897-1987) chronicles the decline and collapse of great empires and identifies a similar cycle in all.
 - In the beginning collective self-sacrifice and discipline builds the empire.
 - Prosperity follows and leads to greater comfort, less religious practice, and moral decline.
 - Finally, moral decline leads to selfishness, decadent living, and eventual collapse.

How does this cycle demonstrate

- the corporate nature of sin and
- the need for the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

RESPONSE

“The sinner wounds:

- God’s honor and love,
- his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and
- the spiritual well-being of the Church,
 - of which each Christian ought to be a living stone.” (CCC 1487)

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Our sin wounds:

- the family of God and
- the Church's impact on society.

This is why the priest is not only a representative of Jesus in the confessional, he is also a representative of the Christian community.

Therefore, the effects of the sacrament are

- reconciliation with God and
- reconciliation with God's family, the Church.

3. Jesus says to the woman caught in adultery:

"Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." (John 8:11)

His words demonstrate that God loves us just as we are - but too much to leave us there!

Why is it not enough to say that "God loves you just as you are?"

RESPONSE

God loves us in our sin and imperfection.

However, he loves us too much to leave us there.

His goal is to prepare us for Heaven by changing us

"into his likeness from one degree of glory to another." 2 Corinthians 3:18

This preparation for heaven is the process of purifying us from all attachment to sin.

It is serious work,

one that requires both

- God's grace and
- our effort,

because

- the more we are attached to sin
- the less we will desire Heaven.

Author C.S. Lewis writes in *The Great Divorce*:

"There are only two kinds of people in the end:

those who say to God, 'Thy will be done.' and

those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'

All that are in Hell, choose it."