

# HEALING *OUR* FAMILY

## SHAPE UP FOR EASTER BY CONFESSING IN LENT

*Through the sacrament of Reconciliation,  
we become Christians newly equipped to  
heal a hurting world*

*By Father Paul Turner*

**L**ent makes a perfect time for you to go to confession. The season is built for it. On Ash Wednesday, you confront both your sin and your mortality. Your ashes assign you six weeks to shape up for Easter.

People ask how often they should go to confession. In practice, some Catholics go frequently — nearly every week or every month. Others go once or twice a year in preparation for Christmas and Easter. Still others rarely go at all.

Frequency depends on factors both inside you and outside your control. Inside you, it depends on the gravity and recurrence of your sin. Outside your control, it relates to times of the year — like the arrival of Lent and Easter.

Most Catholics would probably benefit from going to confession more frequently than they do. Lent opens a door.

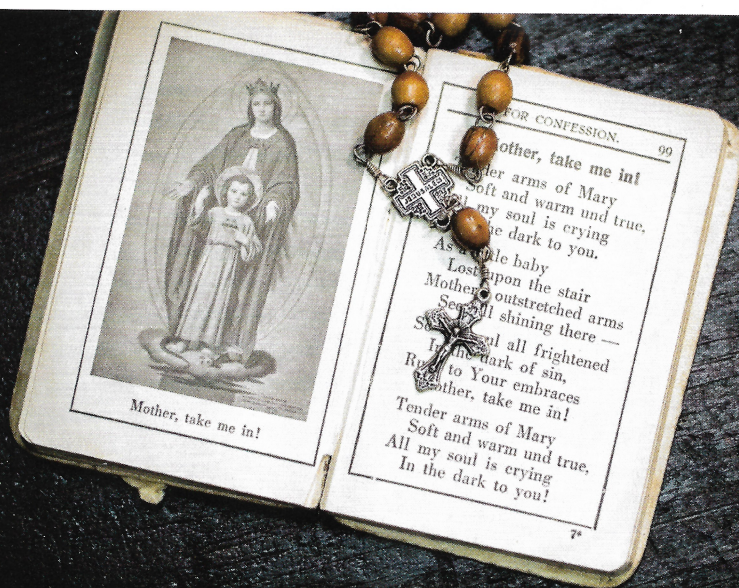
Lent was designed for conversion of heart. It grew from the rich soil of the catechumenate, those receiving instruction in the Christian faith to be baptized. From the early Christian centuries, adults who sought baptism entered a period of formation. Catechumens had previously centered their lives on false values, but through formation they turned away from the past and toward a future in Christ. The word “conversion” captures the nature of this turning. As Christ conquered death, so he overcame sin, and gradually, Easter became the ideal occasion for baptism.

After baptism, however, everybody sins again. Experienced Christians look toward new catechumens for inspiration. As catechumens convert, so do we. We turn from our sinful ways and recommit ourselves to Christ.





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 but for the healing that it brings.  
 When we confront our own sin, when  
 we tell God we're sorry, when we  
 receive absolution, we have healed  
 our own hearts.*  
 ”



The spiritual disciplines of Lent have this goal: recommitment to Christ, conversion from sin. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving give us the practical means to confront our moral failures. Confession naturally follows. We have examined our conscience. We want to improve. We accept disciplines. We seek forgiveness.

Our spiritual growth in Lent climaxes when we renew our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. We spent six weeks disciplining ourselves to make better moral choices. If we have also gone to confession, those promises will sound more convincing: we renounce sin and profess our faith in Christ.

The Church offers us many helps toward making a good confession. The Gospels assigned to the middle Sundays of Lent deserve consideration.

In Year B, this year, the Gospels relate events that led to the crucifixion. Jesus cleanses the Temple of buyers and sellers, he conversed with Nicodemus about being lifted up like the serpent in the desert and he prophesies how the grain of wheat must fall to the earth and die before it bears fruit. All these passages prepare us for hearing the Passion of Jesus on Palm Sunday.

In Year A, the accounts of the woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus illustrate the gradual coming to faith that the catechumens experience. Because the elect celebrate the scrutinies on those Sundays, you may hear those Gospels on any year of the cycle.

In Year C, the Gospels on the same three Sundays pertain more

to the faithful Christians who have accepted the discipline of Lent to atone for their sins. That year, we hear the accounts of Jesus cursing of the unproductive fig tree, the mercy shown the prodigal son, and the conversion of the woman caught in adultery. All these illustrate the mystery of sin and forgiveness. They help us make a good confession.

The Church offers other initiatives to help Catholics celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. Many parishes offer penance services or at least increase the hours of individual confession during Lent. We join other dioceses who “keep the light on” for penitents by publishing confession times in our parishes all in one place on the website of the Office of Divine Worship. Furthermore, in response to an appeal from Pope Francis, our diocese honors “24 Hours for the Lord” through adoration and confession at designated locations each year from Friday to Saturday of the Third Week of Lent.

You can make a good Lent by following these traditional disciplines. On Ash Wednesday, reflect on your sin and mortality. Adopt a plan of prayer, fasting and almsgiving for the entire six weeks of Lent. Go to confession. At the Easter Vigil, show your rebirth by renewing your baptismal promises.

Lent is not just a time for repentance, but for the healing that it brings. When we confront our own sin, when we tell God we're sorry, when we receive absolution, we have healed our own hearts. We become Christians newly equipped to heal a hurting world. **A**



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