

# JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: March 2017

*My Commentary on: "The Healing Power of Confession" By Dr. Scott Hahn*

YouTube Audio → <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1fAnjDhdR1bN95tG7hAVzT1voHwoTX1W>

## Confession: Where Mercy Abounds

Happy Ash Wednesday (March 1<sup>st</sup>), the beginning of another grace-filled liturgical season! Lent, I believe, is a special time to experience God's mercy. For this reason, I chose to highlight a YouTube audio resource titled, "The Healing Power of Confession," by Scott Hahn. During this talk, Dr. Hahn speaks of the Sacrament of Confession and of his experience with it, being a convert to Catholicism. This talk is awesome! Dr. Hahn bravely shares personal testimony, including details of past transgressions, to bring home the message of the amazing healing power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Of all of the sacraments, the one that is arguably the most misunderstood, and the least popular, is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is viewed as cruel and unnecessary punishment, a way of living in the past and of berating oneself for past mistakes. Nothing is further from the truth. However, many Catholics run from Confession; they are afraid and they hide from it. They are unaware of the tremendous healing power and grace that this sacrament holds. I was one of these people.

In my last commentary, I wrote of the depression and despair I felt in coming to terms with the life changes I experienced due to the aftereffects of a concussion. What I did not mention is that there was another factor contributing to these feelings of worthlessness. In the midst of this great suffering, I had had the chance to re-evaluate my life, to ask some important questions and to explore my faith like never before. In the midst of my soul-searching, I began to learn of the riches of my faith, and I experienced a conversion-of-sorts. I began attending Mass regularly again, as I had with my family in my childhood and adolescence. Through an outpouring of God's grace, I also gained a deeper understanding, appreciation and reverence for the Eucharist (see my December commentary, "Head Injury, Mended Heart," for more on that). I then wanted to make certain to receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of my Lord in a state of grace, so I began to participate frequently in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

This conversion and return to the sacraments caused me to genuinely contemplate all of my sins, as I had also never done before. Consequently, I was intensely penitent as I remembered, it seemed, every sin I had ever committed from childhood onward. The scenes of my transgressions tormented me as they replayed incessantly in my mind, like a never-ending reel of film. I felt the urge to seek out those I felt I had offended, regardless of the amount of time passed since my misdeed, and apologize. I felt unworthy of the absolution I was offered in the confessional and, unable to forgive myself, I sunk further into the pit of despair, deeper into depression. I had little hope in my salvation, as I felt my sins too grave and too numerous to overcome.

This unhealthy obsession with my past wrongdoings came to a head in the midst of Lent, 2015. I longed to be a servant of God and to follow His will for my life, but I wrestled with feelings of shame and with a yearning to make peace with my past. I finally acknowledged in the confessional my inability to forgive myself and to accept God's gift of pardon, among other things. As a penance, I was instructed by my very wise confessor to pray that someone would experience in a very real way God's Divine Mercy that Easter. I prayed obediently, but I did not expect that this person would be me, for the peace I so ardently desired seemed unlikely, impossible even.

Then, on Holy Thursday, I attended Mass with my family. The Gospel reading recounted the story of the Last Supper and of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. As Christians, this is a story with which we are surely familiar. It teaches us all that we must serve others and sacrifice for others as Jesus did for us.

On this grace-filled evening, God revealed to me another message hidden in this passage, a message that helped release the spiritual chains that were digging into my wrists and holding me back from full intimacy with God. As Jesus prepares to wash Simon Peter's feet, Peter protests. He does not want his Lord to wash his feet. He feels undeserving, unworthy. But Jesus responds, "If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me (John 13:8)." This means that by refusing Jesus' altruistic example, Peter is rejecting Jesus and separating himself from His Lord. Therefore, Peter must accept Jesus' charity, even though it is undeserved. Likewise, I must accept God's forgiveness, as unworthy as I am to receive it! The magnitude of what Jesus had done for me suddenly struck me like an unanticipated, and much needed, slap in the face. He had made the ultimate sacrifice by dying for my sins; how wretched I had been, unwilling to accept His sacrifice and His gift of forgiveness!

I have often thought about Christ's passion. It has caused me great sorrow to realize the agony that my sins inflicted on my Lord. It is not wrong to examine our conscience and our sins, as when we are aware of what we have done wrong, we are able to change these behaviours, with God's help. What made doing this unhealthy for me, is the fact that I focused totally on my sins and forgot to also consider God's countless mercy. Jesus, while he suffered greatly for our sins, also exhibited incredible mercy in the face of this suffering! In the depths of His torment, while hanging despised and humiliated on the cross, He called out to the Father saying, "forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)." He called out and asked the Father to forgive those who so callously spit on him, whipped him, mocked him, demeaned him, and cast lots for his belongings! Jesus then forgives the thief hanging on the cross next to Him. After the Good Thief defends Jesus' innocence, acknowledges Jesus as Lord and expresses sorrow for his misdeeds, Jesus tells him, "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43)." What incredible mercy! Mercy for all of us!

This Lent, I would encourage you to genuinely open your heart to God's forgiveness, as He desires nothing more than to offer you this gift of His tender love. If you do not go to Confession regularly, I invite you to make the decision to go during Lent. I did not always value Confession. I know how daunting this sacrament can be after a long time away from it. I've been there. It has taken me a lot of courage and humility to admit my wrongdoings to another. I'm sure that this is quite common, but I believe that this can start the healing process. I can personally testify that the Sacrament of Reconciliation has helped me to be able to let go of so many hurts. I have come to learn that instead of beating myself up for my mistakes, I can confess them, know that I am forgiven and loved by God, and let them go. God does not want us to dwell on our past. That's why He's provided this grace-filled and transformative sacrament for us. He knows that, as His children, we need it. I certainly need it! I want to consistently and conscientiously work on becoming more Christ-like. For me, Confession is a vital part of this process.

When contemplating my sins and God's mercy and love, I have found Luke 7, verses 36-46 to be extremely comforting. This passage tells the story of when Jesus was invited to dine with a Pharisee named Simon. A woman, known to be a great sinner, came to see Jesus while He was at Simon's home. She proceeded to wash Jesus' feet with her tears, dry them with her hair, kiss them and anoint them with oil. The Gospel says that Simon was repulsed by this and, "*spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner.*" Jesus responds to this with a parable about a creditor and two debtors. One of the debtors owed "5 hundred pence and the other fifty." The creditor forgives them both. Jesus then asks: "*Which therefore of the two loveth him most?*" The Pharisee responds: "*I suppose that he to whom he forgave most.*" Jesus concurs and defends the woman saying: "*Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she with tears hath washed my feet, and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no kiss; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she with ointment hath anointed my feet.*" Jesus then explains that because this woman has been forgiven many sins, she loves God even more intensely.

So do not be discouraged, because "*if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool (Isaiah 1:18).*" Also, give thanks, because the Gospel confirms that those who have repented and who have been forgiven much, love God even more! Saint Catherine of Siena had a vision of heaven that also confirms this. During the vision, she said that she noticed that the saints in heaven expressed their love for God in their wholehearted singing. She said that Saint Mary Magdalene, known for having been a great sinner before her conversion, had one of the loveliest and loudest voices of all the saints!

Saint Therese of Lisieux explains this love in her autobiography, "Story of a Soul," with the following analogy (that I have paraphrased): A person is walking on a sidewalk. There is a huge, gaping sinkhole in this sidewalk ahead. While the person remains unaware, God mends the sidewalk and saves this person from falling into it. Another person, walking on the same sidewalk, falls into the sinkhole before it is repaired. God then saves this person from the sinkhole. Tell me, who is more grateful? Who loves God more? The one who was saved in advance of falling, but is unaware of it, or the one who needed saving after having fallen?

Always remember that Jesus loves you dearly despite your faults. You are not your past and with God's help, you can do all things!

I have learned that I must forgive myself also. This is harder to do in my experience and I will address what it was that made it so difficult to forgive myself in my commentary for next month, so stay tuned...

Your sister in Christ,

Jocelyne