

Repentance and Confession

Fr. Jacob Nadian

The sacrament of Repentance and Confession is one of the seven church sacraments. This sacrament has its roots in the Old Testament and became the work of the apostles and their successors in the New Testament.

There are many questions about this sacrament that, with the grace of God, I will answer all of them in this article including:

1. What is baptism of repentance and confession?
2. How was forgiveness given at the time of John the Baptist?
3. Did People confess during the Apostolic age?
4. What is the meaning of: Confess your trespasses to one another?
5. Why did the Bible say “elders” and not “priests”?
6. What is wrong with confessing directly to God?
7. What is the meaning of: Stewards of the mysteries of God? Who are these steward of God?
8. What is the meaning of: There is one God and one Mediator between God and men?
9. What is the meaning of: God has committed to us the word of reconciliation?
10. What is the meaning of: The faithful and wise steward?
11. What are the responsibilities of the stewards?
12. What is the meaning of: Give them their portion of food in due season?
13. To whom do we confess?
14. Who can bind or loose anything on earth but the Lord Himself?
15. Should the priest call on people to confess and repent?
16. Is there a word priest in the New Testament?
17. Was there any confession in the Old Testament? How was it performed?
18. What is the meaning of: We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous?
19. What is the meaning of: Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven?
20. How can we confess?
21. Are there any spiritual exercises so we don't go back on our sins?

Let us start answering these questions in a simple way as much as we can.

1. What is baptism of repentance and confession?

Baptism is very much related to repentance and confession; as evidence in the Holy Gospels in the service of John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostles and their successors after the ascension of the Lord.

As the Lord established the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of Holy Communion, He also established the sacrament of baptism and all other church sacraments.

To show how baptism is related to repentance and confession, let us read from the Gospel according to St. Mark about John the Baptist:

✠ “John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins” (Mark 1: 4-5)

And we all know that He who sent John the Baptist before the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the God the Father; as it is written:

✠ “As it is written in the Prophets: Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight’” (Mark 1: 2-3)

The Scripture “I send My messenger before Your face”, is a statement from the Father “I” to the Son “Your face” saying that the Father will send a messenger or an angel who will prepare the way before the Son.

Therefore, the direct result of the Baptism of Repentance was the forgiveness of sins for those who came forward “confessing their sins”. The same was repeated in the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

✠ “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’. For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight’. And John himself was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3: 1-6)

2. How was forgiveness given at the time of John the Baptist?

The time of John the Baptist was a transition between the Old and New Testament and he was called the prophet of both testaments, a descent of Aaron, a priest, the son of Zachariah the priest.

Although he was a priest, he did not practice priesthood of the Old Testament of offering sacrifices. He practiced the Baptism of Repentance to prepare the way before the Lord, who will take away the sin of the world:

✠ “Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ’... The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1: 19-29)

So, he turned people’s hearts and minds away from animal sacrifice to get ready for the Lamb, the true sacrifice. When the Lamb was baptized by John the Baptist, He established the sacrament of Baptism, the new birth, by which we deserve forgiveness of sins through the shedding of the Lamb’s blood on the cross. Therefore, forgiveness of sins at the time of John the Baptist was giving through baptism.

3. Did People confess during the Apostolic age?

Repentance and confession started from the Old Testament to the time of John the Baptist who baptized people the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written:

- ✠ “Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins” (Mark 1: 5)
- ✠ “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3: 2)

This calling continued during the ministry of the Lord, who also called people for repentance:

- ✠ “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4: 17)
- ✠ “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1: 14-15)

The same was done by the apostles and their successors.

- ✠ “And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits...So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6: 7-13)

This ministry continued during the time of the apostles and their successors. The Book of Acts tells us that many believers used to come to the apostles and confess their sins. They didn't come to the apostles just for baptism for believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also confessing their sins:

- ✠ “And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds” (Acts 19: 18)

4. What is the meaning of: Confess your trespasses to one another?

Some people misinterpret the following commandment by St. James the Apostle (James 5:16); as if it indicates that we should confess to one another:

- ✠ “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16)

They totally ignore reading the verses right before this one that say:

- ✠ “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the (elders) presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15).

So, the right interpretation is that if anyone is sick, he must call for the priest to receive his confession (Sacrament of Repentance and Confession) and anoint him with oil (Sacrament of Unction of the Sick) and pray for him fervently. So, when St. James said, “And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”, he continued immediately saying, “Confess”. Therefore, the sins of the sick will not be forgiven, without confession.

If the sick doesn't need a priest and can just confess to any brother or an elder who could be at home or in the neighborhood, why would he call the “presbyter of the church”? Let us answer this question.

5. Why did the Bible say “elders” and not “priests”?

When St. James said, “And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven”, he continued immediately saying, “Confess”. Therefore, the sins of the sick will not be forgiven, without confession to a priest.

But why the Bible doesn't say explicitly “priests” and says “elders”?

The term *πρεσβύτερος* ‘presbyters – priests - intercessors’ in Greek is translated into as ‘elders’ in James 5:14 while the same exact Greek word in Acts 20:17 was translated into presbyters and priests as in the Arabic version that was translated by the Office of the Holy Bible in Beirut:

✠ “From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the presbyters of the church” (Acts 20:17)

So, why that difference in the translation? It is sadly intended to remove the presence of priesthood, the authority of the church and the exercise of sacraments giving room to anyone to come up with his own teaching and interpretation of the Bible while staying far away from the right teaching of God.

To elaborate more, why did St. James mean by saying “pray for one another?” Did he mean that the sick will pray for the presbyters, or the presbyters pray for the sick? It is clearly understood that the presbyters pray for the sick, not the other way around. The Bible says, “Pray for one another, that you may be healed” and “call for the presbyters of the church, and let them pray over him.” ‘One another’ here does not mean an interchange between the two parties; but ‘one’ refers to the presbyter, while ‘another’ refers to the sick.

The same applies to the phrase, “Confess your trespasses to one another”. It is understood that the presbyters will never come to the sick to confess their sins. Rather the sick will confess to the presbyters, because St. James added,

✠ “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:15)

Hence, the phrase, “he will be forgiven”, applies to the sick. From the above-mentioned passage we can identify what is known as ‘confession to another’.

6. What is wrong with confessing directly to God?

Some people argue, ‘Why do we not confess to God secretly, or in our personal prayers?’ In response, we refer to the following Scriptures:

✠ “Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds” (Acts 19:18)

✠ “Confess your trespasses to one another” (James 5:16)

As we explained above, ‘one’ refers to the sick, while ‘another’ refers to the presbyters of the church. Therefore, St. John the Apostle said:

✠ “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9)

Therefore, “If we confess our sins”, does not mean confessing directly to God without the presence of a priest, simply because the Bible never indicated that we should confess directly to God. There are several verses that mention confessing before a priest. Even in the Old Testament, one had to confess his sins in the presence of a priest. Moreover, confession was sometimes practiced by a multitude, if the sin was common or general. Let us review few examples.

In the Book of Proverbs, we read the following Scripture,

✠ “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13)

In that verse, it was not mentioned that confession was practiced secretly or inside the heart, instead it is written, “Whoever confesses and forsakes them (the sins) will have mercy.”

If confession is made secretly and not verbally before a priest, then the sins are retained, and “He who covers his sins will not prosper”. However, the Bible says, “...whoever confesses and forsakes them”; meaning whoever practices verbal confession, mentioning the sin and confessing it, will have mercy. Thus, it is not enough to forsake one’s sins, but one should forsake his sins and confess them.

In the Book of Wisdom of the Son of Sirach, we read,

✠ “Be not ashamed to confess your sins” (Sirach 4:31)

Some people consider the Book of Wisdom of the Son of Sirach as one of the apocryphal (Second Canonical) books, but despite this, no one denies that the book carries beneficial teachings within it. So, when the Son of Sirach said, “Be not ashamed to confess your sins”, he was giving an insight into the circumstances of his days where people were practicing confession.

Many difficulties and shortcomings arise as a result of secret confession within one’s heart. Yet this does not mean that one should not question himself. Of course it is important for us to examine our actions, and feel within our hearts that we are sinner, as St. Paul said:

✠ “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Meaning, we must examine ourselves before communion (repentance) and then going to the practical step of confession; as the prodigal son did:

✠ “When he came to himself (*repentance*), he said: How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him (*confession*), ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants’” (Luke 15: 17-19)

So, self-examination is something that no one refuses, but everyone demands. The point is: what happens after self-examination? We should arise and go to our father the priest to confess to God in his presence and receive the absolution for the remission of our sins.

Do you remember the story of the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7?

✠ “And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying: This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner ...Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. Then He said to her: Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:37-48)

The Lord Jesus Christ according to His divinity is omnipresent. Even when the Lord Jesus was on earth, He occupied the heavens, the earth, and all places, by the glory of His divinity. He told Nicodemus:

✠ “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13)

When He was speaking, the Lord Jesus gave Himself the title, ‘Son of Man’. He wanted Nicodemus to understand that the Son of Man who was speaking to him, was at the same time present in heaven, according to His divinity. The divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ occupies the heavens and the earth.

The sinful woman knew that Christ the Lord occupied the entire universe according to His divinity. Thus if she desired, she could have confessed in her private room. In this case, she could have said, ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me’, and would have believed that her sins were forgiven. However, what happened is that she entered in the presence of those who attended the Pharisee’s invitation for the Lord, wept, and “washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.” It was a public confession which indicated that she desired forgiveness. In verse 37, it is written, “a woman in the city who was a sinner.” This tells us that all citizens in the city were aware of the woman’s sinfulness. Still, she didn’t care about what people will say or do, she went to meet with the Lord, the High Priest, and confessed to Him, not in her private room.

7. What is the meaning of: stewards of the mysteries of God?

It might be said that the sinful woman confessed at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this is different to confessing before any priest. We answer saying that Jesus Christ forgave sin while He was on earth, but after His ascension to the heavens, He appointed stewards to forgive sins on His behalf.

St. Paul said,

✠ “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

St. Paul was a steward of the mysteries or sacraments. Before the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, He chose stewards or ambassadors for Himself on earth. A steward can perform specific duties given to him by the owner. For example, if a person would like to sell a piece of land but does not have time to go to the department of real estate to negotiate, he authorizes someone to represent him by authorizing what is commonly known as “power of attorney”. This representative, agent, or steward, will carry out the necessary steps to sell the land on behalf of the owner. The land is not the steward’s to sell and he does not sell it by his own authority. Rather, he completes what is required, due to the authority given to him by the owner. This authority is powerful and effective.

The Lord said in the Epistle of Saint Paul to Titus,

✠ “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God” (Titus 1:7)

Here he speaks of the bishop as a steward of God. St. Paul, St. Peter, and all the disciples were not the only stewards of God, but their successors became stewards also. Saint Paul was not one of the twelve disciples, nor one of the seventy; on the contrary, he was a persecutor of the church. However, the Lord Jesus Christ called him and the church laid hands on him, so he obtained his discipleship to become a steward of God; as it is written:

✠ “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:2-4)

How were they sent by the Holy Spirit? They were sent by the Holy spirit through the church who laid hands upon them. Later, St. Paul told his disciple Titus,

✠ “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint presbyters in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5)

Hence, Saint Paul appointed Titus as a bishop, and reminded him to appoint presbyters in every city as he instructed. This is the pastoral work of the church.

Thus St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians said,

✠ “And God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing” (1 Corinthians 12:28)

So God has appointed people in the church. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Saint Paul also wrote,

✠ “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11)

8. What is the meaning of: There is one God and one Mediator between God and men?

Some people object to the idea of the presence of a mediator between man and God saying,
✠ “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5)

This verse means that there is no one except the Lord Jesus Christ has the ability to forgive sin through the shedding of his own blood, to be a mediator between the Father and human beings for the forgiveness of sin, and to ransom us so that we may receive forgiveness. Who can claim that he can atone the sin of man through self-sacrifice except the Lord Jesus Christ? Who can save and wash with His blood except the Lord Jesus Christ? We all agree on this.

However, the Lord Christ has appointed stewards. These stewards do not have the same authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive through their own blood, but they grant forgiveness through the Lord’s blood. They are only stewards; they do not give from what is theirs, but by the power of the Holy Spirit they take what is Christ’s and give it those whom they serve. This is why St. Paul said called the apostles and their successors as “stewards of the mysteries of God”.

9. What is the meaning of: God has committed to us the word of reconciliation?

God has given the stewards of His mysteries to carry the word of reconciliation:

✠ “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ committed to us to reconcile men with God since we are called His ambassadors:

✠ “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

But what does it mean that He “*has committed to us the word of reconciliation*”? It means that as priests, when we pronounce the phrase, ‘You are absolved’, forgiveness is not granted by our individual power, but through the merits of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This word of reconciliation was committed to us, the stewards, and not to all people.

10. What is the meaning of: The faithful and wise steward?

When the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel of St. Luke spoke of being vigilant, watchful, and prepared for the coming of the Groom on the last day, He said,

✠ “And you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his

house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:36-40)

In the above passage, the Lord addressed all those who believed in Him. Then St. Peter asked,

✠ “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?” (Luke 12:41)

By this, St. Peter was asking, ‘Are these words directed to the apostles, or to everyone?’ The Lord answered,

✠ “Who then is that faithful and wise steward” (Luke 12:42)

From this point onwards, the Lord started to address the apostles.

The previous discourse was directed towards all people, because Jesus said, “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching.” He also said, “and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master” However, when the Lord was asked if this speech was for the apostles only or for everyone, He started to speak about the steward, and said,

✠ “Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his master will make ruler over his household” (Luke 12:42)

This steward, having been made ruler over others, was distinguished from them.

He was not distinguished in a manner which implied that he was superior to others, or preferred by God; but he was distinguished because he possessed a different level of responsibility. A person entrusted with a responsibility must be answerable concerning how well the responsibility is carried out; and because of this risk, some avoid responsibility. On the other hand, the one who labors, will receive a reward. If a steward is found faithful, he will be rewarded for his faithfulness and will receive great reward for his efforts. But the one shunning responsibility due to feelings of incapability, or out of fear of being later questioned, will not receive the reward of a faithful steward.

Still, it must be noted that the danger lies in accepting responsibility whilst being unfaithful. The account of such a person will be difficult. When God appoints a steward, He does not show preference to one person over another, rather He chooses the steward according to the person’s willingness to accept the responsibility out of his love for others.

When the Lord Jesus Christ said to Saint Peter,

✠ “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord; You know that I love You. He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs’” (John 21:15)

The Lord was saying, ‘If you love me, feed my lambs; tend my sheep’. St. Paul indicated that pasturing should be motivated by love when he said:

✠ “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11)

11. What are the responsibilities of the stewards?

There is a great warning in the Lord Jesus Christ's words when He said,

✠ “Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his master will make ruler over his household (note here, that he should not only be faithful, but wise) to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers” (Luke 12:42-46)

From this we see that it was better for the servant not to have become a steward. St. Paul told his disciple Timothy,

✠ “If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1)

In other words, it is good to desire the position of a bishop, but as a bishop a person is required to be wise and faithful. If you are going to carry out the responsibility, are you capable or not? If not, remember the words, He “*will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*” Many flee from the honor of the episcopacy; knowing its seriousness and the gravity of the responsibility before God.

At the ordination of a bishop, he is handed a pastoral staff and told, “God has entrusted you with the souls of His flock, and from your hands their blood is demanded”. One might say, ‘I cannot fulfill this appointment’ or ‘Why should the blood of others be demanded of me?’ This is why it is also written,

✠ “And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was” (Hebrews 5:4)

The divine call should be sensed, and one should respond to it, motivated by love. As the Lord said to St. Peter,

✠ “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me...Tend My sheep...Feed My sheep” (John 21: 16-17)

12. What is the meaning of: Give them their portion of food in due season?

The Lord Jesus Christ said,

✠ “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life...For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life” (John 6:27-48).

Therefore, the most important thing that a steward of God can offer to people, is the body and blood of the Son of God. When the Lord said, “give them their portion of food in due season”; he meant that the priest should hasten to give the body and blood of the Lord to people before they die; as He said:

✠ “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53)

How can a steward be faithful and wise if he does not reconcile people to God, by leaving them without repentance or communion? Thus it is written that He,

✠ “Has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18)

A bishop must lead people to repentance so that they are able to approach the holy table to receive the bread of life, of which we say in the liturgy, “Given for us for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake it”. If a bishop neglects a person and the person dies before receiving communion, the bishop will be questioned. He will be asked, ‘How did you leave this person?’ or ‘Why did you not call him to repentance and for the table of life?’ The Lord said,

✠ “He who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:57)

This responsibility should not hinder the bishop’s obligation towards the poor, and his duty to respond to their materialistic needs; as the Lord said:

✠ “For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:35-40)

Therefore, a bishop should also look after the financial needs of the poor, and He should pasture his flock in all areas.

We must also ask, what is benefit of providing earthly bread without also giving people the Bread of Life? After performing the miracle of feeding the multitude, the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked the people saying,

✠ “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled” (John 6:26)

The people did not seek the Lord out of their hunger for the Bread of Life; but instead, they labored for the food which perishes. The Lord Jesus Christ rebuked them because they were seeking earthly food rather than the Bread of Life.

13. To whom do we confess?

Confession should not take place simply before any lay person, because the Lord has appointed stewards or priests to carry out the responsibility. When the Lord Jesus Christ said to St. Peter,

✠ “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:19)

He did not speak lightly, but in all seriousness. This was not only said to St. Peter, but to all of the disciples. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Lord addressed all disciples saying:

✠ “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18)

Some people may interpret this to mean that the apostles had the authority to forbid or permit certain types of foods, but this interpretation is inaccurate. As mentioned in the Gospel of St.

John, during the Lord Jesus Christ's manifestation to His disciples after the resurrection, He told them,

✠ “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20: 21)

We expect that upon hearing these words, the disciples may have felt afraid or overwhelmed due to the seriousness of the mission at hand.

✠ “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23)

Therefore, when the Lord said, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18:18), He was not speaking primarily of food or any other action. It must be noted however, that this verse can be applied to the guidelines concerning food. For example, in the Book of Acts we read,

✠ “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things, that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled” (Acts 15:28-29)

Even in such matters whatever the apostles bound was binding, and whatever they loosed was loosed. However, this is not what the Lord spoke of in the Gospels of Matthew and John, for when He gave them the authority of the Holy Spirit, He said,

✠ “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:23)

The authority given to the apostles to bind and loose did not concern food only, but more importantly, the forgiveness of sin. This did not happen without ritual or a formal proceeding, but, “He breathed on them...”

So, the Lord breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit...” (John 20:22). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the entire church which was gathered in the upper room. But when the Lord breathed on the disciples, He did so on the day of His resurrection, forty days prior to His ascension to heaven, and fifty days prior to Pentecost. When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to the disciples for the first time after His resurrection, it occurred exactly on the day of the resurrection, while they were gathered together, He said,

✠ “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21)

Because redemption had been fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ, things became serious. He appointed His disciples and sent them; but this time the ministry was for a new purpose it took a new scope, which was the forgiveness of sin. This did not take place without proceedings, but through the breathing of the Holy Spirit on them.

The Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost, but this was different. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon every believer including men and women. It came upon all those who were in the upper room. This is known as the sacrament of Chrismation, which we call the Myron. In the upper room on the day of the resurrection however, the Lord gave the apostles **the gift of priesthood**, with the power and authority of the Holy Spirit, in a distinct fashion. It

varied greatly from the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The gift of priesthood which was granted to the apostles enabled them to become stewards of the mysteries of God, including the authority to forgive sins.

14. Who can bind or loose anything on earth but the Lord Himself?

As we have mentioned, a bishop is a steward of God, and he can grant absolution with the authority of the Holy Spirit. As the Bible says,

✠ “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23)

In the Gospel of St. John it is also written,

✠ “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: Peace be with you. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again: Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:19-23).

If a bishop or priest does not hear the confession of sins, how can he ascertain whether or not a person is repentant? And how can he forgive some sins and retain others if he has no knowledge of the sin itself?

If the Bible only went as far as to say, ‘If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them’, then a person could request absolution from a priest, receive forgiveness, and the matter would conclude at this point. However, the Lord completed the verse saying, “*if you retain the sins of any they are retained.*” Therefore, forgiveness requires the priest’s hearing of the confession, as well as his assessment of whether the person is repentant or not. For this reason, forgiveness is not granted to everyone.

Story:

At this point, we recall some stories that highlight the importance of listening to confessions. We hear the story of one of the priests who was a very kind man. This priest owned an old-fashioned gold watch which had been given to him as a gift. He would always place the watch in his side pocket, and fasten it to the button of his robe with a golden chain. One particular day, a young man went to him at the church for confession. The young man kneeled closely before him, and in humility, the old-aged priest also bowed. The youth confessed saying, ‘I have stolen; absolve me’. So the father being a kindly old man, prayed the absolution for the youth. After the young man departed from the church, the priest searched for his gold watch but could not find it; so He went to the bishop and related all that had happened. The bishop reprimanded him saying, ‘When the young man confessed that he had stolen, you should have asked him if he had returned what he had stolen before absolving him’.

When the Lord Jesus Christ entered the house of Zacchaeus,

✠ “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord: Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:8)

For this reason, the bishop told the priest that he should have at least asked the man to return the stolen item before praying the absolution.

This reinforces the importance of wisdom in a steward; as it is written,

✠ “Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?” (Luke 12:42)

The story also demonstrates that repentance and confession are related, and that the confession father should be wise. He should not only grant absolution, but lead a person to true repentance.

The priest must accurately evaluate a person’s repentance, and determine its genuineness. If an item was stolen, he must ask if it was restored to its owner. He must also ask if the person has rectified, to the best of his ability, the damage incurred. If the confessor cursed another person, the priest must ensure that there was an apology and reconciliation. All in all, the priest must evaluate the confession, and ensure that the repentance is true. Only then can absolution be granted, and the confessor can hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as was said to the paralytic,

✠ “Son, your sins are forgiven you” (Mark 2:5)

As a steward of God, the priest says, ‘God absolve you’. It is not he who forgives sins, but through the authority of the Holy Spirit granted to him; and through the merits of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the priest is able to grant forgiveness.

Story:

Once a man went to see a bishop. The bishop did not know who this man was, because he came from a different country. The man confessed to the bishop saying, ‘I committed murder, and I want you to absolve me from this sin’. A court case was instigated and investigations were underway, but what the man really sought was absolution from a spiritual perspective. He confessed as though he had repented, but the evaluation of his repentance was an extremely difficult task. Here we will focus on a few key points in this story.

The bishop questioned the man, asking him what his motive was for murder. He responded saying that he killed the other person during a fight. When the bishop asked him why, he said that he and the other man had been involved in disputes over specific matters. So the bishop sensed hatred in the heart of this man towards the person whom he had murdered. The bishop started speaking to the man about one spiritual aspect concerning his case, but he was not able to address other aspects because of the way in which the case concluded. The bishop asked the man how he would react if the murdered man were to return to life. The man said quickly, ‘I shall kill him again’. For this reason, the bishop said, ‘I cannot grant you absolution, as you show no repentance’.

If the man who committed murder, returned to the bishop in repentance, the bishop would have forgiven him; but in the first instance, the elements of repentance were not evident. The confessor failed to demonstrate his repentance during his answer of the first question. And so the man was not forgiven, and the bishop since has never seen the man.

15. Should the priest call on people to confess and repent?

On the last day, the Lord Jesus Christ will do the following,

- ✠ “Will say to those on the left hand: Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41)
- ✠ “I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:27)

A bishop should be tender-hearted, kind, and full of love towards a repentant person who regrets his sin. However, he should also demonstrate,

- ✠ “the wrath of God...revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18)

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said to the Jews,

- ✠ “I tell you, unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5)
- ✠ “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins” (John 8:24)

Saint John the Baptist told the Jews,

- ✠ “And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:9)

A priest or a bishop should then exhort people and call them to repentance. Listen to what St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy,

- ✠ “Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20).

We all see that same warning, and its difficult results if not followed, in the story of Ananias and Sapphira. When they withheld a portion of the proceeds from the possessions which they had sold, St. Peter asked Ananias:

- ✠ “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God. Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things” (Acts 5: 3-5)

When Sapphira came three hours later, St. Peter asked her,

- ✠ “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? She said, Yes, for so much. Then Peter said, How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet

of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out” (Acts 5:8-9)

Ananias and Sapphira fell at the feet of Saint Peter and died for lying to God; although they lied to St. Peter. This brought great fear upon all the church because lying to the Holy Spirit is a sin which should not be taken lightly.

16. Is there a word priest in the New Testament?

In a specific dialogue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in the Monastery of Mar Ephrem the Syrian (Maarat Sydnaya in Syria), discussions were held on the Sacrament of Priesthood. The dialogue took place under the invitation of His Holiness the Antiochene Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zaka I. A Coptic delegate headed by H.E. Bishop Bishop were attending.

During the meeting, some denominations’ leaders claimed that the expression ‘priest’ was never applied to the apostles in the New Testament. They said that the words ‘presbyter’ and ‘bishop’ are mentioned, but not ‘priest’. They also believe that there is no priest in the New Testament in heaven and on earth, other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

Everything previously mentioned concerning priestly authority, demonstrates that priesthood exists. For example, when the Lord Jesus Christ gave His body and blood to the disciples on the eve of his crucifixion, He said,

✠ “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” (Luke 22:19)

He gave them the authority to perform the sacrament of the Eucharist (Holy Communion). Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ was called,

✠ “High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:10)

The order of Melchizedek is the offering of bread and wine. So the Lord Jesus Christ is considered the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, because priests offer bread and wine in the New Testament. Being a High Priest or Archpriest means a chief and head of other priests. Otherwise why is He called Archpriest? Also, practicing the forgiveness of sins is performed by the bishops and presbyters as stewards of the sacraments of God.

However, there were many objections since the word was not explicitly mentioned and known to many of the attendees. Therefore, they referred to the Greek copy, since New Testament was written originally in Greek. In the Epistle to the Romans Saint Paul says,

✠ “that I might be a priest (minister) of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:16)

In the Greek version, we read the word *ἱεουργοῦντα* from the verb *ἱεουργέω*. The verb means ‘to officiate as a priest’, because it consists of the word *ἔργον* meaning ‘work’ or ‘job’; and the word *ἱερός, α, ου* which means ‘sacred rites, holy, divine’. The word *ἱερεύς* meaning “a priest, one who performs sacrificial rites” [Ref: Wesley J.Perschbacher, *The New Analytical*

Greek Lexicon, Hendrikson Publishers, fifth printing, 1996] is derived from *ἱερός* This is different from *πρεσβύτερος*

Again in the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul says, ‘*my offering of the Gentiles*’ because his ministry was for the gentiles. St. Paul also wrote,

✠ “They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles” (Galatians 2:9)

Thus he was ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that the offering of the gentiles might be acceptable. This is similar to saying that a certain bishop is the bishop of a specific diocese. The bishop would say that he is the minister of Christ for that city or diocese; and he would ask that is acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the Pope of Alexandria might say that he, ‘ministers for Christ to Alexandria’. By saying this, he sets the boundaries of the area for his ministry.

For the offering of the people to be acceptable and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, a priest must be present. If there is no priest, the offering will never be accepted. How can one offer a donation, or how can he raise a divine sacrifice in the liturgy if he is not a priest?

One might comment saying, how can an ordinary person be a high priest if Christ the Lord is considered the high priest (see Hebrews 5:10)? It is written that the Lord Jesus Christ is called a priest:

✠ “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6)

Therefore a high priest is a priest, just as the head of soldiers is a soldier, or the head of doctors is a doctor.

17. Was there any confession in the Old Testament? How was it performed?

In the Old Testament, when a person sinned, he was required to present a sacrifice, put his hand on its head, and confess his sins before a priest. In turn, the priest would slay the sacrifice, spread its blood, and atone the sin. An innocent soul was to be killed in the place of a sinful soul.

To help us in understanding the concept of forsaking sin publicly, and confessing sin during the offering of the sacrifice, a range of biblical verses follows below.

✠ “If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed. And he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill the sin offering at the place of the burnt offering. Then the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all the remaining blood at the base of the altar. He shall remove all its fat, as fat is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offering; and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a sweet aroma to the Lord. So the priest shall make atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him. If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish. Then he shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering, and kill it as a sin offering at the place where they kill the

burnt offering. The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour all the remaining blood at the base of the altar. He shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the lamb is removed from the sacrifice of the peace offering. Then the priest shall burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire to the Lord. So the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him” (Leviticus 4:27-35)

- † “And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing; and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin” (Leviticus 5:5-6)
- † “Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the children of Israel, ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the Lord, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged” (Numbers 5:5-7)

In other words, a person was required to lay his hands on the head of the sin offering and confess his sins, so that the priest could make atonement for him. This shows the necessity of the confession of the sins.

18. What is the meaning of: We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous?

Do you remember the story of the scapegoat that was released in the wilderness? It is written that Aaron would offer it as a sacrifice on behalf of the people,

- † “Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:21-22).

In the laws and commandments of the Old Testament, the offering of the sacrifice was connected to both the confession, and the act of placing the hand on the head of the offering. This meant that the sin would pass from the sinful person to the innocent sacrifice. Moreover, the archpriest was required to confess all of the sins of the children of Israel. One goat was slain and the other was sent away into the wilderness. Why did they have two goats? Because one symbolizes the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice, while the other symbolizes His resurrection. They could not slay a goat, and expect it to come back to life because this could never happen.

Thus it is written,

- † “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1)

Since the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens, He has continually advocated with the Father on our behalf. In the Old Testament, the symbol of the resurrection would not have been fulfilled if a goat was slain. This is because the life that

symbolized the living Lord, Who rose from the dead, advocating our case before the Father, would not have been present.

19. What is the meaning of: Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven?

Some people object to calling the priest as Father because of what the Lord said to His disciples in the Book of Matthew:

✠ “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ” (Matthew 23:9-10)

To fully understand this verse, we must read the whole Scripture related to these verses,

✠ “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’. But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:1-12).

If we carefully read the Scripture, we should see that there are parts directed to the multitude, while others directed to the disciples only; as was clearly stated in the first verse “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples”. This is why the Lord said to the disciples, “...*do not be called ‘Rabbi’...do not be called teachers...*” He was prohibiting them from asking the people to call them ‘Rabbi’ like the Pharisees, “...*who love greetings in the Market and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’.*” He also told them, “...*he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*”

The Lord was teaching His disciples to resist pride, and for this reason, He told them never to ask people to call them rabbi or master. If a person called the disciples master, this was permitted; but they were not permitted to ask someone to call them master. In other words, respect from people was to be earned, and not imposed on others by force. The Lord Jesus Christ did not say, ‘do not call anyone Rabbi’, but rather he said, “*Do not be called ‘Rabbi’...* ” and “...*do not be called teachers...*” By this, He did not want the disciples to ask people to call them by these titles. The Pharisees on the other hand, liked being called master and teacher.

Does this then contradict what is written in the Bible?

✠ “And God has appointed these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28)

Here St. Paul mentioned that God has appointed teachers. If God has appointed them teachers, why then does He tell them, “...*do not be called teachers*...”? God gives specific people the gift to become teachers, but with this gift, they are not permitted to ask people to call them master. God gives gifts, as it is written,

✠ “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them, if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8)

The Holy Spirit bestows many different gifts; and one of these, is the gift of teaching. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul writes,

✠ “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11)

God Himself gave some to be teachers, so they should not oppose those who call them teacher, since God Himself gave them this title.

So, the intent of the verse in Matthew 23 was for the Lord to speak His disciples about humility. A bishop, for example, should not tell his disciple, ‘Go and inform such and such a person that the master would like to tell you something.’ This is unsuitable. He should refer to himself as weak, miserable, and lowly, but not as ‘master’. In the letters of St. Abraam of Fayoum, he used to conclude his letters with, “As many thanks as possible, from our lowliness.”

When a person speaks of himself, he should not say he is the master. Rather, he should feel in his heart that he does not deserve this title. However, if someone were to call him master, father, or grandfather this would not be wrong. In Upper Egypt, people call the grandfather ‘master’, because the grandfather has a respected place in the family as the father of fathers. Yet when the grandfather deals with others, he should feel that they are his brothers.

The Lord said, “*Do not call anyone on earth your father*”. Unlike the verse in which the Lord said, “*do not be called ‘Rabbi’ ...do not be called teachers*”, in this verse He said, “...*do not call*”. The meaning is different here, because the Lord was speaking to our fathers the apostles, and His words were directed specifically to them. When a person is speaking to a group of people, it is not uncommon for him to direct and redirect his words to specific people, or groups, within the group.

So, when He said “do not call anyone on earth your father”, He was addressing the disciples the first patriarchs of Christianity, who should have no father on earth because their father is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Patriarchs for instance, are fathers of fathers, and they also have no father. The Greek word *πατριάρχης* which means ‘patriarch’ consists of two words – patria, meaning ‘lineage’, ‘descent’ or ‘race’, and *ἀρχή* meaning ‘head’. So the patriarch is the head of the fathers, no father is superior to him because he is the father of fathers. Here the Lord wanted to tell the disciples, “Do not call anyone father” because you are fathers. Thus, there are varying degrees of fatherhood.

Also, the Lord Jesus Christ did not say, ‘Do not be called father’, but He said, “...*do not be called ‘Rabbi’... do not be called teachers...*” By this He meant that He did not want the disciples to seek the glory associated with being teachers. But concerning fatherhood, He did not say, ‘Do not be called father’, because fatherhood is an admirable and superior role.

When directing his words at the Corinthians, St. Paul the Apostle said,

✠ “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15)

He was telling them that they may have had ten thousand instructors but not ten thousand fathers; he was their father who had begotten them through the Lord Christ’s gospel. He similarly says to the Galatians,

✠ “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” (Galatians 4:19)

In other words, St. Paul labored painfully; serving them until he could clearly see the image of the Lord Jesus Christ in them. This pain was likened to that of a woman in childbirth.

St. Paul also said to his disciple Timothy,

✠ “To Timothy, a true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2)

✠ “This charge I commit to you, son Timothy” (1 Timothy 1:18)

He spoke to him as a father would speak to a son calling him, “...*son Timothy...*” This is because he was an apostle, a father of fathers, while Timothy was a young bishop. St. Paul also addressed Titus in the same manner saying,

✠ “To Titus, a true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4)

So, he spoke to both Timothy and Titus calling each of them ‘son’. Furthermore, St. Paul spoke to the Corinthians telling them that he was their father.

The disciples followed the same and freely used the expression, ‘son’ when addressing their spiritual sons. St. John the Beloved frequently and repeatedly said, ‘My children’. He said,

✠ “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1)

✠ “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake... Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour... And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:12, 18, 28)

✠ “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous” (1 John 3:7)

✠ “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 John 5:21)

✠ “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18)

Saint John used the title ‘children’ at least seven times at the beginning of the epistle when addressing all people in general, or when making a general speech directed to everyone. It differed from advising children to be obedient to their parents, or distinguishing parents from children; he was addressing all people.

If we applied the words, *“Do not call anyone on earth your father...”* literally, would all people stop calling their fathers at home ‘father’? Let us ask people all over the world, if one of them did not ever call his own father ‘**father**’. If they call their **biological** fathers ‘father’, then **what about their spiritual fathers?** Therefore, in this verse, the Lord was only addressing the apostles when He said, *“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”*

Even the Lord Jesus Christ was called Father:

✠ “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6)

We clearly comprehend the fatherhood of the Lord Jesus Christ for us; and the fatherhood of a priest, stems from this fatherhood of the Lord Christ.

20. How can we confess?

Many people don’t know what to say to their confession father and hence consider confession as a heavy laden. This may cause people either to forget about confession or to go to confession and leave as they were before. Some sit in confession forgetting what they were supposed to say and some have doubts about whether they confessed some sins before or not.

To help you out, here are some guidelines that ease confession (I hope). All in all, please remember that these are just guidelines; but your confession father will be the one to determine what is right for you.

Before confession:

1. Sit with yourself in prayer before going to confession.
2. Examine yourself and mark the sins that the Holy Spirit rebukes you for and get ready to confess them without hesitance.
3. You must feel regretful for committing these sins since they are against the holiness of God.
4. Do not let that Satan of shyness prevent you from confession lest you lose forgiveness.
5. You must be vigilant and serious about correcting your errors and not going back to these sins.

When you go for confession, bring with you:

1. Your daily reading schedule.
2. Your retreat notes where you record your contemplations.
3. Your spiritual notes where you record spiritual activities.
4. Summary of what to say in confession, just writing reminding words lest it falls in someone’s hands.

If you have to wait:

1. Sit in prayer asking God to remind you with sins you may have forgotten before.
2. Don't get involved in discussion and jokes with people around you.
3. Consider waiting time as training for patience and don't murmur or complain.
4. Make use of the waiting time for your spiritual benefit, e.g., reading the Bible, reviewing and memorizing verses and psalms, etc.

How to examine yourself?

1. Bible Reading: Do you feel and enjoy the presence of God in your readings? Do you hear His voice? Do you read daily?
2. Prayers: Do you feel that you are speaking with God in prayers? Do you thank Him for everything, concerning everything and in everything? Do you share with Him all your problems, work, family, projects and all life in general?
3. Fasting: Do you fast all church fastings? Do you have your own fastings that life's tribulations may dictate or your confession father may ask of you? Do you abstain from food during fasting according to your confession father's recommendations? Do you fast from food only or from bad habits and deeds as well? Is fasting accompanied by prayers, almsgiving and good deeds?
4. Church Attendance: Do you feel the presence of God in the church and praise Him with all your heart, mind and soul? Do you attend all church services including liturgies, meetings, Bible study? Do you respect the House of God in your way of dressing and talking to others or do you cause them to stumble? Do you respect the elders and everyone in the church or do you mock them and treat them as low class? Do you serve everyone in love and humility? Do you feel that you serve the Lord of the House or the House of the Lord by showing off and sinful pride?
5. Confession: Do you confess regularly? Are you honest in your confession? Do you confess your own sins or the sins of others by proving your innocence and their guilt?
6. Communion: Do you partake of the Holy Communion in reverence or just something you got used to? Do you reconcile with your brethren before communion? Do you faithfully try hard to get rid of your sins before communion or you just forget about them? Do you come for communion humbly feeling unworthy or do you feel others unworthy?
7. Spiritual Books: Do you read spiritual books? Do you benefit from these books? Do you use some advice from these books that can make a difference in your life, with the approval of your confession father?

Your relationship with people:

1. Love and hatred: Do you love people the love of God, meaning caring about their salvation and eternity? Do you hate anyone and wish him bad things? Do you treat all people fairly? Do you discriminate against some people or look down on them?
2. Anger and nervousness: Do you always get angry? Do you get nervous and lose control of yourself hurting others' feelings? Do you scare people with your angry loud voice?
3. Cursing and hurting others: Do you curse and swear imitating ungodly people? Do you want to show your friends that you are "cool" by cursing others forgetting that they are all created on His image and likeness?

4. Judging and gossiping: Do you judge others? Do you speak and gossip about every detail others do? Do you go to church to see who attended and who did not? Do you participate in prayers and enjoy every sermon you hear or do you judge your church, your priest, your servants and everyone that could have a different opinion from yours?
5. Lack of forgiveness and reconciliation: Do you apologize to those whom you hurt? Do you forgive and accept apology of those who come forward offering their apology to you or do you resist and speak harshly to them? Do you reconcile with everyone all the time or your pride is always in the way of reconciliation?
6. Enmity and strife: Do you argue and fight all the time with everyone at home, work, parents, spouse, and children or do you take the lead of offering love and appreciation? Do you force people to follow your ideology or do you respect everyone's way of thinking as long as it is godly and according to God's commandments? Do you enjoy peace with everyone or do you make enemies day and night?
7. No submission to authority: Do you submit to authority in the church, work and godly government and society? Do you submit to your confession father, biological parents, teachers, and work supervisors or do you empower your own authority, breaking family values and rules, driving rules, moral rules, and ethical rules?
8. Purity of senses: Do you keep your eyes pure as well as your hearing, thoughts, deeds, words and all your senses? Do you fight back every evil thought of defiling your senses of watching and hearing inappropriate things on TV, internet, movies and all new technological devices? Do you make sure that your family watch and hear godly things at home or do you allow profane language and scenes because "everybody does it"?
9. Humbleness: Do you practice humbleness and meekness of heart as the Lord asked us to learn it from Him? Are you prideful? Do you admire yourself and put everybody down? Do you respect the opinion of those whom you may think less than you?
10. Faithfulness: Are you faithful at work, school, home and church? Do you lie? Do you steal? Do you commit adultery? Did you kill anyone? You must take understand these commandments in all its literal and spiritual meanings. For example, about killing, did you kill literally, psychologically, or morally? Did you kill anyone in his reputation, his family and his friends? Did you kill anyone in his self esteem? Did you kill anyone in hurting his business and way of living and income?
11. Life of thanksgiving: Do you thank God at all times, even in sickness and losses? Do you accept tribulations with thanksgiving? Do you express your thanksgiving in service, love and tithes or is it only in drinking, dancing and ungodly parties?
12. Lack of service: Do you truly love and cherish serving God and His brethren? Do you give time to God's service or do you waste it in watching TV, phone calls, gossiping and internet surfing? Do you feel that there is more you should have done but didn't do it and God is now telling you through reading this article that it is time to go back and do it?

21. Are there any spiritual exercises to keep us going and not return back to our sins?

Daily Retreat

1. Objective: learning how to spend time with God alone through daily reading of the Bible and prayers; as the Lord did, day and night “When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself” (Matthew 14: 13), “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1: 35), “Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place” (Luke 4: 42).
2. Practice: Read at least one full chapter in an orderly fashion (finishing one book at a time without jumping between books). You can supplement these readings by additional readings from other Bible books. Readings will give you the opportunity to contemplate on God’s words during your retreat time. Readings will also give you a clear view of your sins and guide you on how to repent. So, during retreat time speak to God about your sins, offering repentance and asking for His help to overcome your weakness, greediness, judgment, etc. If you don’t know how to pray, ask Him to teach you how to pray. If your readings were about one of the Bible characters that you liked, ask God to give you strength to be like him or her. If it was a promise from God to bless those who ask Him, ask God to fulfill that promise with you.

Prayers with Agpeya

1. Objective: remember what David the prophet said “Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalm 119: 164)
2. Practice: Praying with Agpeya gives us the chance to praise God according to His way and the way He accepted from His people. Personal prayer is one part of prayers where you express your needs for yourself, your family and loved ones. However, with Agpeya we learn how to share with all the creation in praising, thanking and even complaining to God about life and its tribulations. We can start gradually by few psalms from the morning and evening prayers and then add more psalms, more prayers of the remaining hours, memorizing psalms, gospels, and litanies so we can pray anywhere we go, while driving, etc.

Fasting

1. Objective: To deprive ourselves from dairy product and for periods of time to learn self control for it is written “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4: 4).
2. Practice: As we practice how to control ourselves through not eating specific kinds of food, we will go the extra mile of learning how to control ourselves in other behaviors and actions like controlling anger, cursing, swearing, gossiping, judging, etc. In fasting, we learn how to abstain from food for a period of time determined with our father of confession. During this abstaining period, we will definitely remember our needy brethren, the poor, and our attitude towards others in general. Fasting should be accompanied by prayers, almsgiving and reading of the Gospels and spiritual books.

Love

1. Objective: learning the fact that “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4: 8)

2. Practice: we can practice love through respect to all God's creation. We shouldn't discriminate against anyone, hate anyone, disrespect anyone or not forgive anyone. We should love people as they are since they all are created on God's image and likeness. Apologizing to anyone whom you hurt is one way of showing love and respect. Accepting apology from anyone who could have hurt you shows that you are strong in your love. A loving person can always offer words of comfort and support instead of criticism and destruction.

Judgment

1. Objective: learning not to judge others to avoid being judged by God; as He said "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7: 1-2).
2. Practice: Judging is one form of sinful pride because we put ourselves in God's place. We ought to learn to humble ourselves and pray for those who fall in sin or weakness; as St. Peter said "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4: 8). If you sit with people who gossip take the lead of changing discussion into positive things about the person they judge or change subject into a spiritual talk about humbleness and humility. If you fail to do so, gently withdraw from this ungodly discussion.

Anger

1. Objective: learning that anger is against God's righteousness "for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1: 20).
2. Practice: We must avoid the reasons and causes of anger like inherited hard temper, pride and selfishness, not appreciating others and their feelings, etc. We must learn that strength and power of a person is not in dictating his authority over others but in gentleness, love and respect of others' views even if they are in disagreement.

Purity

1. Objective: learning that purity gets us closer to God for "He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend" (Proverbs 22: 11).
2. Practice: We must remind ourselves with God's commandments towards purity and not being drawn and fascinated by this world's lust and defiled scenes and talks. We must remember that our body is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3 and 6). Some times Satan tricks us to show our maturity by leading others to try wrong things. We should remember what St. Paul said "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4: 12). Replace that feeling of lust into a feeling of love to God's creation by respecting all and consider them as brethren. Think about marriage and how great is this mystery (Ephesians 5: 32). If Satan keeps fighting you, fight his wrong thoughts with good thoughts by reciting what young man, Joseph the righteous, said "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (Genesis 39: 9).

Humbleness

1. Objective: learning that humbleness brings grace from God for "He gives more grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4: 6).

2. Practice: We must learn from God about humbleness and meekness (Matthew 11: 29). We should also learn from His saints like how humbled was St. Mary and what she said about prideful people “He has shown strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly” (Luke 1: 51-52). Thinking about the grace and exaltation by God should help us to work hard at humbling ourselves and not losing this eternal reward. If you did something great, say to yourself “the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4: 7). If people praise you, say “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Philippians 3: 12-13). Consider yourself to be the least among your brethren and do the things and services that people may consider as lowly.

Faithfulness

1. Objective: learning that faithfulness in our sayings and our deeds will help us in our efforts toward heaven where we must “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness” (Psalm 37: 3).
2. Practice: We must learn to make our “yes” to be a “yes” and our “no” to be a “no” (Matthew 5: 37). Do not be afraid of telling the truth for “the truth shall set you free” (Matthew 8: 32). What would be the end of telling the truth and being faithful? Will people kill you for it? Well, in that case, rejoice and say that I am not worthy to die like my fathers the martyrs. Remind yourself with God’s promises to the faithful “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2: 10). If you lied to someone, go and offer apology. If you stole anything, return it back or offer compensation if you lost it.

Life of Thanksgiving

1. Objective: learning how to live the life of thanksgiving in all things and conditions; as the Bible commanded us “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5: 18).
2. Practice: Many times we complain during our tribulations that God has forsaken us, while the truth is that we are the one who ran astray from Him. We ask where is God when we hear about shootings and massacres in schools and at work while at the same time we punish anyone who mentions the name of God in public because it is “against” public and government policies and school regulations. What we should do is to bring God into our lives and thank Him for all things because if He is in control, He can turn bad things around to our benefits. He can change Satan’s plan to beneficial lessons in our lives. Just thank God at all times so you can “Taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him” (Psalm 34: 8).

Hope

1. Objective: To learn not to give up or surrender to Satan and his helpers because our afflictions, no matter how heavy it may be, God will reward us for enduring it as St. Paul

said “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4: 17).

2. Practice: Remember that your life will always be in struggle against Satan and his helpers and their tricks. Don't lose hope when you fall in sin. It is written about sin in the Book of Micah “Do not rejoice over me, my enemy. When I fall, I will arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me” (Micah 7: 8). Just get up and go for confession to see the light again. Heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents (Luke 15: 7, 10). Make God happy, not Satan. It is not late to start all over again. For you to read this article, it means you are still alive and have all the opportunities to come back to God. He is waiting and He will never let you down. Trust in His promise “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6: 37).

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