

I. Introduction

A. Upper Room on Easter Sunday Evening

1. Just as the Father sent me, so I send you
 - a. The Father had sent Jesus to save the world from its sins.
 - b. Jesus was going to send out the apostles with the same mission.
2. Receive the Holy Spirit
 - a. The apostles were inadequate to the task on their own.
 - b. No one can forgive sins but God alone.
 - c. He breathed on them the power of the Holy Spirit. "God the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins."
3. Those whose sins you retain are retained; those whose sins you forgive are forgiven.
 - a. The only way they would know which to forgive and which to retain is if people told them their sins.
 - b. They were not given, as a whole, the power to read people's minds and hearts.

B. So we see the importance of the sacrament of penance, confession, reconciliation, in God's plans.

1. It was so important that it was something he did on the night he rose from the dead.
2. Every reconciliation is meant to be a resurrection. "My son was dead, but has come back to life again."
3. The way for people to experience the full power of Christ's resurrection, the rising from the dead of sin and living through, with and in Christ Jesus, is through this sacrament.
4. He gave sinners — his apostles — his own power to forgive sins, the power we now have. And he commissions us, "I send you, just as the Father sent me" (Jn 20:21).
5. In St. Luke's version it would be so that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:47-48).
6. RP 24. In order to promote penance and reconciliation, the Church has at her disposal two principal means which were entrusted to her by her Founder himself: catechesis and the Sacraments. Their use has always been considered by the Church as fully in harmony with the requirements of her salvific mission and at the same time as corresponding to the requirements and spiritual needs of people in all ages
7. This is the mission of priests in particular.
8. If we're really going to be an "Easter people," then we must be a people who experiences resurrection through reconciliation.

C. This talk is about getting people to experience that resurrection, getting them to the confessional.

1. It's obvious to everyone that the sacrament of confession has been experiencing a crisis for over 40 years.
 - a. Stats are thin because in many places records are not kept.
 - b. According to the surveys we have, it says that, of ACTIVE weekly-Mass-going Catholics, 26 percent never go to confession, and 38 percent rarely go.
2. 23 years ago, there was a Synod of Bishops to study what was obvious already then.
3. In olden days, every priest in a parish would hear confessions for hours. Now, even well meaning priests complain that they'll get a few on a Saturday.
4. It's not as if sins have disappeared. It's just that the sense of sin has disappeared.
 - a. Story of Peter Harmon in Illinois getting to his new parish.
 - b. After he had been there for a couple of months, a group of parishioners asked him what he thought of the parish.
 - c. He replied that it's the most incredible parish he had ever been to. He in fact didn't think that parishes like it existed anywhere.
 - d. The people were impressed. They thought they had a good parish, but they couldn't believe the superlatives Peter was using. They asked him, why he thought it was so

- incredible. They never forgot his response: "Because there are obviously no sinners here!"
- e. They looked at him quizzically, before he explained that he had been sitting in the confessional on Saturday afternoons for a couple of months and no one was coming. They got the point.
5. Causes of the crisis of the loss of the sense of sin
 - a. Deformation or deadening of the conscience — no longer linked to God's presence. A denial of God. To sin is to live as if God doesn't exist.
 - b. Secularism — trying to build a world without God. Practical atheism.
 - c. Bad psychology — trying to eliminate guilt, blame society, limit freedom and responsibility.
 - d. Historical relativism — relativizes the moral norm, exceptions, considering the circumstances
 - e. False notion of sin — morbid sense of guilt, or mere transgression of legal norms and precepts.
 - f. Too much of a shift from excesses of the past — Even in the field of the thought and life of the Church certain trends inevitably favor the decline of the sense of sin. For example, some are inclined to replace exaggerated attitudes of the past with other exaggerations: from seeing sin everywhere they pass to not recognizing it anywhere; from too much emphasis on the fear of eternal punishment they pass to preaching a love of God that excludes any punishment deserved by sin; from severity in trying to correct erroneous consciences they pass to a kind of respect for conscience which excludes the duty of telling the truth.
 - g. Confusion on moral teaching — And should it not be added that the confusion caused in the consciences of many of the faithful by differences of opinions and teachings in theology, preaching, catechesis and spiritual direction on serious and delicate questions of Christian morals ends by diminishing the true sense of sin, almost to the point of eliminating it altogether?
 - h. Defective confessional practice — Nor can certain deficiencies in the practice of sacramental Penance be overlooked. These include the tendency to obscure the ecclesial significance of sin and of conversion and to reduce them to merely personal matters; or vice versa, the tendency to nullify the personal value of good and evil and to consider only their community dimension. GENERAL ABSOLUTION.
 - i. Routine ritualism — There also exists the danger, never totally eliminated, of routine ritualism that deprives the Sacrament of its full significance and formative effectiveness
 6. Our question is how we respond to the "crisis."
 - a. St. Josemaría used to say that every crisis the Church faces is a crisis of saints.
 - b. This is, I think, one of those crises.
 - c. While we can talk about some of the obvious things that need to be done to improve the situation — and we will in this talk, about catechesis and availability — but I'd like to start out by saying that the implementation of those ideas, while they will certainly help, is not enough.
 - d. The rebirth will take new saints of the confessional.
 1. JP II mentions that part of the crisis of the sacrament of reconciliation is a "dwindling of our own enthusiasm and availability for the exercise of this delicate and demanding ministry" (2001 letter).
 - e. Over the course of this talk, I will try to focus on several of the great saints of the confessional, in the hope that their example might inspire us.
 - f. There's a great story in the life of St. Ignatius Loyola, after having had his leg blown to bits by a cannon ball and during his convalescence, he exhausted all of the romance and chivalrous books in the castle. Two books remained. One the Bible. The second the life of the saints. He chose the latter. After having read those lives, however, he experienced his great conversion. "Why can't I do what they did? Aren't they made of the same substance as I?"

- g. I hope that in the mentioning of these saints, each of us might ask the same question: Why can't I do what they did? Can't God use me and help me the same way he used and helped them?
- h. I'll focus on four saints in particular, those that Pope John Paul II mentioned in Reconciliation and Penance 29 as the "extraordinary apostles of the confessional":
1. St. John Nepomucene (1330-1383) – Bohemia, Holy life as a priest led to appointment as chaplain to the court of Emperor Wenceslaus. The empress consulted him. Among those who sought his advice was the virtuous empress, who suffered much from her husband's unfounded jealousy. Saint John taught her to bear her cross with joy; but her piety only incensed the emperor, and he tried to extort an account of her confessions from the Saint. He threw Saint John into a dungeon but gained nothing; then, inviting him to his palace, he promised him riches if he would yield, and threatened death if he refused. The Saint was silent. He was racked and burnt with torches; but no words except the holy names of Jesus and Mary fell from his lips. At last set free, he spent time in preaching and preparing for the death he knew to be near. On Ascension Eve, May 16th, Wenceslaus, after a final and fruitless attempt to alter the constancy of the faithful priest, ordered him to be cast into the river. That night the martyr's hands and feet were bound, and he was thrown from the bridge of Prague into the Moldau River. Heavenly lights shining on the water and from under it, revealed the whereabouts of the body, which was soon buried with the honors due to a Saint.
 2. St. John Vianney (1786-1859)
 - i. JP II This is where he bases his desire to do everything to save the souls ransomed by Christ at such a great price, and to bring them back to the love of God. Let us recall one of those pithy sayings which he had the knack of uttering: "The priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus."(4)
 - ii. Like Christ, he has a love for his flock that leads him to extreme pastoral commitment and self-sacrifice. Rarely has a pastor been so acutely aware of his responsibilities, so consumed by a desire to wrest his people from the sins of their lukewarmness. "O my God, grant me the conversion of my parish: I consent to suffer whatever you wish, for as long as I live."
 - iii. The bishop had warned John Mary Vianney: "There is not much love of God in that parish, you will put some there." But quite soon, far beyond his own village, the Curé becomes *the pastor of a multitude* coming from the entire region, from different parts of France and from other countries. It is said that 80,000 came in the year 1858.
 - iv. To a priest who complained about the indifference of people in his parish, St. John Vianney answered: "You have preached, you have prayed, but have you fasted? Have you taken the discipline (a self imposed scourge)? Have you slept on the floor? So long as you have done none of these things, you have no right to complain.
 3. St. Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860)
 - i. He inspired young St. John Bosco while Cafasso was just a seminarian and Bosco was 12. John called, "I met him, I met him!" "Who?" his mother asked. "Joseph Cafasso, mother. He's a saint, I tell you." Mrs. Bosco smiled and nodded gently.
 - ii. He became a theology professor. Father Cafasso became known as the priest who believed in the gentle and loving mercy of God. Because he was so kind himself, he gave people courage and hope. He guided many priests, religious and lay people.
 - iii. There were many social needs in Father Cafasso's time. One of the most urgent was the prison system. Prison conditions were disgusting. But what most moved Father Cafasso was the custom of hanging in public prisoners sentenced to death. Father Cafasso went to them and heard their confessions. He stayed with them, telling them of God's love and

mercy until they died. He helped over sixty convicted men. All repented and died in the peace of Jesus. Father Cafasso called them his "hanged saints."

4. St. Leopold of Castelnuovo

- i. ST. LEOPOLD MANDIC (1866-1942) — Born in Castelnuovo in southern tip of Dalmatia. Baptized Bogdan (God-given-one). At the age of 16 years, Bogdan left home for Italy where he put himself under the tuition of the Capuchins at Udine as a student in the Seraphic School and an aspirant for the Order. Life was not easy for him there, since he was physically malformed and still delicate in health. Nevertheless, he applied himself to his studies with great enthusiasm. He was ordained in Venice on 20th September, 1890. Now wishing to fulfill a childhood ambition of becoming a missionary in Eastern Europe, torn apart by much religious strife, he was denied this by his superiors because of his frailty and general ill-health. This was assuredly a testing-time for the new Father Leopold, but God had other work for him to do.
- ii. From 1890 to 1906, Father Leopold was stationed at various Friaries in the Venetian Province, including Friaries in his homeland of Dalmatia, where the Italian friars had a mission. In 1906, he was posted to Padua, where, except for one year which he spent in a prison camp during World War I, because he would not renounce his Croat nationality, he remained for the rest of his life. It was in Padua that he took up the apostolate of Confessor and Spiritual Director... a work which proved to be the means through which God used his servant, Father Leopold, for almost forty years, and for which Leopold Mandic is best known. He died in the Friary at Padua on 30th July, 1942. And soon after his death a strong veneration of his memory began to flourish culminating in his beatification by Pope Paul VI on 2nd May, 1976, and, his canonization by Pope John Paul II on 16th October, 1983.
- iii. The life of Saint Leopold Mandic is characterized by the contrast between his physical frailty and his spiritual strength. He was born physically weak, and spent the whole of his life in that condition. He only reached 4ft 5ins in height and his general health became worse as he grew older. He suffered from abdominal pains, and was gradually deformed by chronic arthritis in later life, making his frame stooped and his hands gnarled, giving him much pain. He also suffered from a stammer in his speech. But spiritually, Leopold Mandic was a giant, full of Christian strength. It was his humility and faith in God's Goodness and Providence that enabled him to recognize and accept his poor physical condition. And this in turn led him to a greater realization of his own lowliness in relation to God's mighty power - that without God he could do nothing. This strong faith was communicated to others when they came to Father Leopold for spiritual advice. He would say: "Have faith! Everything will be alright. Faith, Faith!"
- iv. Realistically, however, Leopold was not able to preach because his speech was slow, jagged, and belabored, almost stuttering. His health always posed a legitimate concern. His body was short in stature (4' 6"), curved, pallid, and extremely fragile. He suffered from poor eyesight, stomach ailments, and crippling arthritis.
- v. Leopold's cell and confessional were spared the bombing of World War II, even though the church and part of the friary were demolished. Leopold had predicted it, "The church and the friary will be hit by the bombs, but not this little cell. Here God exercised so much mercy for people, it must remain as a monument to God's goodness." Paul VI beatified Leopold on May 2, 1976. He was canonized by John Paul II on

October 16, 1983 during the Synod of Bishops considering the theme of reconciliation. Leopold is hailed as the "Apostle of Unity.

- vi. Paul VI: In the 1962 decree regarding the Beatification of Fr. Leopold wrote as follows: "This was his daily routine; after saying Mass early in the morning, he used to sit in the confession room and stay there the whole day long hearing confessions. He kept this up for about forty years without any complaint." This is, we believe, the primary reason that has won for this humble Capuchin the Beatification which we are now celebrating. He became holy principally in the exercise of the Sacrament of Penance.
- vii. Like St. Therese with the missions, he was the great apostle of the East.
 - i. The devil said that if there were three like the Cure D'Ars in all of France, it would be converted. We're not sure if we can ever believe anything the Father of Lies says, but think about it. Imagine if we made that commitment.
 - j. RP 29. JP II also says: But I also wish to pay homage to the innumerable host of holy and almost always anonymous confessors to whom is owed the salvation of so many souls who have been helped by them in conversion, in the struggle against sin and temptation, in spiritual progress and, in a word, in achieving holiness. I do not hesitate to say that even the great canonized saints are generally the fruit of those confessionals, and not only the saints but also the spiritual patrimony of the Church and the flowering of a civilization permeated with the Christian spirit! Praise then to this silent army of our brothers who have served well and serve each day the cause of reconciliation through the ministry of sacramental Penance!
 - k. RP 31. He says we are committed to the sacred ministry of Penance by the very fact of our priesthood and our vocation as pastors and servants of our brothers and sisters. "I therefore address an earnest invitation to all the priests of the world, especially to my Brothers in the Episcopacy and to pastors of souls, an invitation to make every effort to encourage the faithful to make use of this Sacrament. I urge them to use all possible and suitable means to ensure that the greatest possible number of our brothers and sisters receive the "grace that has been given to us" through Penance for the reconciliation of every soul and of the whole world with God in Christ.
 - l. 2003 Letter: to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine charity and true pastoral justice, (5) and we should remember that the faithful, when they have the proper interior dispositions, have the right to receive personally the sacramental gift.

D. Very brief outline of the structure

- 1. This talk will be divided into three main parts, describing the three things that I think everyone recognizes must be done to bring people back to confession.
 - a. Preaching or Catechesis about the Sacrament — This involves many aspects, but many people today are unaware of their need for the sacrament.
 - b. Availability — We need to preach by our body language the importance of the sacrament.
 - c. Having penitents encounter Christ and desire to return — When they come to confession, we must do what we can, by our becoming like the Father of the Prodigal Son, becoming like the Good Shepherd, like the Divine Physician, so that they experience what the sacrament really means and discover why Christ instituted it for them as one of the two sacraments they can — and should — receive over and over again. If they have this experience, we'll see that they in turn will begin to become apostles of the confessional and start to bring back their friends and family members, people whom we priests will seldom have access to through our preaching.

II. Preaching and Catechesis about the Sacrament of Confession

A. Christ's preaching about the sacrament — He preached about it a lot

- 1. His first homily was all of 19 words with a clear action item: "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel."

2. In his last homily, his first two words were about forgiveness: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they're doing" and, to one repentant thief in particular, "Amen, amen I tell you today, you will be with me in paradise."
3. He preached about it in his parables
 - a. Prodigal Son
 - b. Lost coin
 - c. Lost Sheep
 - d. Unjust steward, who wouldn't forgive others
 - e. Pharisee and the publican
4. He preached about it directly
 - a. When he taught us how to pray — forgive us our sins as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.
 - b. How many times must I forgive? Seventy times seven times.
 - c. Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful.
5. He showed it in his actions
 - a. Forgiving the paralytic's sins before healing his paralysis
 - b. Forgiving the woman caught in adultery
 - c. Forgiving the woman who washed his feet with her tears in Simon's house
- B. Christ has, in some sense, continued to preach about it through the centuries when it was underemphasized
 1. Sacred Heart devotion with St. Margaret Mary Alacoque
 2. Divine Mercy Devotion to St. Faustina in the 1930s.
 3. Both showed a real devotion to his mercy, to make the teaching of his merciful love pass from head to heart. These are things that often we can forget.
 4. Divine Mercy Devotion
 - a. Prayers to his mercy.
 - b. Chaplet, which unites the sacrament of mercy to the sacrament of the Eucharist.
 - c. Feast of the Mercy, preceded by a novena in which we now are.
 - d. Uniting oneself to his passion at 3 pm for sinners.
 - e. Image of Christ's merciful love with the expression "Jesus I trust in you!"
 5. There were three main parts to this devotion:
 - a. Jesus' merciful love and our need for it, since we are sinners in need of forgiveness.
 - b. Our need to come to him to receive forgiveness.
 - c. Our need to share that forgiveness with others.
 - d. All three are very Biblical. But we forgot them.
 6. It's intriguing that these messages were given to young nuns and not to priests, that he found that the young nuns would be more fitting instruments to bear this message to the world.
 7. I had a conversion about the Divine Mercy Devotion.
 - a. When I was a seminarian, my own thoughts were that I don't really need another devotion. I prefer to use Rosary beads to pray the Rosary instead of another devotion.
 - b. The canonization of St. Faustina was April 30, 2000.
 - c. I celebrated Mass that morning in the basilica. Normally I would just go over to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel, get a surplice and distribute Holy Communion. I wanted to see what it was like, though, to be present in the square.
 - d. I Heard confessions non stop from 7:45 to 10:30 in the square in various languages. I saw from within what only a priest can and the tremendous fruits that this mercy had borne in people from various continents, in various cultures.
 - e. During that Mass, John Paul II preached on Mercy and declared the Second Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday. What we're celebrating on Sunday.
 8. There's a great book by Fr. George Kosicki on the Divine Mercy Devotion for priests. It gives us the essential points in seventy pages what it takes the Diary 700 to give us. One point that Jesus stressed over and over again was that if we preach on his merciful love, great sinners will come to confession. I have to say that every time I have, great sinners have come.
 9. Whether it be a devotion to Christ's Sacred Heart or to his Divine Mercy or just to Christ as a whole, the key is mercy is central to his mission and when we don't preach about, he does, and sometimes he uses nuns to do it, those who are truly receptive to his words.

C. How do we preach about it?

1. Use many media – from the pulpit, to the bulletin, pastoral letters, pamphlets, websites, question-and-answer sheets, newspapers, television, radio, billboards, location of our confessionals.
 - a. We can and should use whatever works.
 - b. Here I'll focus for the most part on the direct communication between a pastor and his people, either oral or written.
 - c. Three bishops have recently issued pastoral letters on confession
 1. Archbishop Gomez in San Antonio
 2. Archbishop Wuerl in Washington, DC
 3. Bishop Murphy in Rockville Center
2. Asking direct questions
 - a. One great way would be for a priest to say, "Would you need/want/like to go to confession?"
 - b. Fulton J. Sheen story about the woman at his door, not "asking" her to go to confession.
 - c. Story about St. Leopoldo: A man on a bicycle drove up by him. He looked at him intently, with great love. The man, who hadn't been to church for 40 years, asked if there was something he could do for him. Leopold said, "I want you to come into Church immediately with me." He led him to the confessional and heard his confession.
3. Style – We have tried many ways, from fire and brimstone, to divine mercy. With certain people, one approach works better than another.
 - a. Fire and brimstone is geared toward imperfect contrition.
 - b. Mercy is more toward perfect contrition.
 - c. So the first may be useful with certain people who don't really love God very much, but if we keep hammering away on hell and mortal sins with them, even when they come to confession, there will still be much work to do.
4. Stressing the positive
 - a. The success stories, the weight lifted off of people.
 - b. Things like the Boston Catholic Men's Conference site, describing the experiences.
 - c. These sites have the added bonus of being testimony from penitents rather than from priests about penitents.
 - d. Cure D'Ars
 1. My children, we cannot comprehend the goodness of God towards us in instituting this great Sacrament of Penance. If we had had a favour to ask of Our Lord, we should never have thought of asking Him that. But He foresaw our frailty and our inconstancy in well-doing, and His love induced Him to do what we should not have dared to ask.
 2. It is a beautiful thought, my children, that we have a Sacrament which heals the wounds of our soul!
 3. Value of a soul healed is so much more valuable than a physical cure: "In reality," Jeanne-Marie Chanay writes, "he made but small account of miraculous cures. 'The body is so very little,' he used to repeat. That which truly filled him with joy was the return of souls to God."
 4. M. Prosper des Garets relates: "I asked him one day how many big sinners he had converted in the course of the year. 'Over seven hundred,' was his reply.
5. Without neglecting the negative
 - a. Catechism of Cure D'Ars: Unmistakably did he declare in his sermons that "to be a Christian and to live in sin is a monstrous contradiction. A Christian must be holy."
 - b. 1986 JP II Letter: The Cure had the courage to denounce evil in all its forms; he did not keep silent, for it was a question of the eternal salvation of his faithful people: "If a pastor remains silent when he sees God insulted and souls going astray, woe to him! If he does not want to be damned, and if there is some disorder in his parish, he must trample upon human respect and the fear of being despised or hated." This responsibility was his anguish as a parish priest. But as a rule, "he preferred to show the attractive side of virtue rather than the ugliness of vice," and if he spoke - sometimes in tears - about sin and the

- danger for salvation, he insisted on the tenderness of God who has been offended, and the happiness of being loved by God, united to God, living in his presence and for him.
6. We can preach about ourselves as a penitent.
 - a. Both in terms of our frequency.
 - b. As well as our joy in being absolved.
 - c. We identify with them rather than make them think we'd never understand their problems.
 7. Pope John Paul II stressed catechesis.
 - a. Many people have not received a solid catechetical formation and just need to hear the basics.
 1. The Catholics love all seven sacraments, because we believe Jesus founded them because we need them.
 2. A Catholic needs to go to confession at least once a year and as soon as possible after mortal sins.
 3. Good Catholics go to confession.
 4. If we're not sinners, then we don't need a savior, we don't need Jesus, who saves us from our sins.
 5. What it takes to make an integral confession
 - i. Thorough examination of conscience and confession of all mortal sins in number and kind.
 - ii. True sorrow
 - iii. First purpose of amendment that shows itself in a game plan to try to overcome these and all sins and do penance/satisfaction.
 6. That we should never receive Holy Communion if we're in a state of mortal sin. That we first need to go to Jesus in the sacrament of confession before we try to go to receive him at Mass.
 - i. God cleanses us and feeds us, just like any parent must do with children.
 - ii. He washed the feet of the apostles before he fed them.
 - iii. 2002 letter: For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor 11:27-29). In line with this admonition of Saint Paul is the principle which states that "anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1385).
 - b. JP II himself did catechesis
 1. Dives et Misericordia
 2. Reconciliatio et Penitentia
 3. Letters to priests in 1979, 1986, 2001, 2002
 4. Redemptor Hominis, Familiaris Consortio, Veritatis Splendor, Evangelium Vitae
 5. He used the figure of the prodigal son, Zacchaeus, woman caught in adultery.
 - i. The prodigal son, a fictional character in the parable, sinks to the depths of degradation through serious habitual sin, but nonetheless is forgiven when he approaches his father, confesses his sin, and asks for forgiveness. It is important to note that the father, who represents God the Father, comes out to meet him and rejoices wonderfully, showering his son with gifts and affection. This is how we as Catholics should view the Sacrament of Penance, a joyful opportunity to convert through confessing our sins, expressing sincere contrition, doing penance, and preparing to unite ourselves more closely to Christ through the sacraments, primarily the Eucharist and prayer
 - c. JP II talked specifically about the type of catechesis we need to do.
 1. *Mysterium pietatis* – My invitation then was to make every effort to face the crisis of 'the sense of sin' apparent in today's culture. But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ as *mysterium pietatis*, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament

- of Penance, which for the faithful is 'the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism'
2. JP II 2001 letter: In the sacrament, the penitent first meets not "the commandments of God" but, in Jesus, "the God of the commandments"
 3. Then there is also the fundamental problem of catechetical teaching about the moral conscience and about sin, so that people can have a clearer idea of the radical demands of the Gospel. Unfortunately, there exists a minimalist tendency which prevents the Sacrament from producing all the benefits that we might hope for. Many of the faithful have an idea of sin that is not based on the Gospel but on common convention, on what is socially "acceptable". This makes them feel not particularly responsible for things that "everybody does", and all the more so if these things are permitted by civil law
 4. DM: Conversion is continual throughout life. Live in state of being continually converted to him.
- d. JP II more specifically in RP
1. Catechesis on reconciliation
 - i. From the Pastors of the Church one expects, first of all, catechesis on reconciliation.
 - ii. This must be founded on the teaching of the Bible, especially the New Testament, on the need to rebuild the covenant with God in Christ the Redeemer and Reconciler.
 - iii. And, in the light of this new communion friendship, and as an extension of it, it must be founded on the teaching concerning the need to be reconciled with one's brethren, even if this means interrupting the offering of the sacrifice.
 - iv. Jesus strongly insists on this theme of fraternal reconciliation: for example, when he invites us to turn the other cheek to the one who strikes us, and to give our cloak too to the one who has taken our coat,[134] or when he instills the law of forgiveness: forgiveness which each one receives in the measure that he or she forgives,[135] forgiveness to be offered even to enemies,[136] forgiveness to be granted seventy times seven times,[137] which means in practice without any limit.
 - v. From these biblical data on reconciliation there will naturally derive a theological catechesis, which in its synthesis will also integrate the elements of psychology, sociology and the other human sciences which can serve to clarify situations, describe problems accurately, and persuade listeners or readers to make concrete resolutions.
 2. Catechesis on penance
 - i. The pastors of the Church are also expected to provide catechesis on penance. Here too the richness of the biblical message must be its source.
 - ii. With regard to penance this message emphasizes particularly its value for conversion, which is the term that attempts to translate the word in the Greek text, *metanoia*,[138] which literally means to allow the spirit to be overturned in order to make it turn towards God.
 - iii. These are also the two fundamental elements which emerge from the parable of the son who was lost and found: his "coming to himself"[139] and his decision to return to his father. There can be no reconciliation unless these attitudes of conversion come first, and catechesis should explain them with concepts and terms adapted to people's various ages and their differing cultural, moral and social background.
 - iv. This is a first value of penance and it extends into a second: penance also means repentance. A good catechesis will show how repentance, just like conversion, is far from being a superficial feeling but a real overturning of the soul.
 - v. A third value is contained in penance, and this is the movement whereby the preceding attitudes of conversion and repentance are manifested

- externally: this is doing penance. To do penance means, above all, to re-establish the balance and harmony broken by sin, to change direction even at the cost of sacrifice.
- vi. A catechesis on penance, therefore, and one that is as complete and adequate as possible, is absolutely essential at a time like ours, when dominant attitudes in psychology and social behavior are in such contrast with the threefold value just illustrated. Contemporary man seems to find it harder than ever to recognize his own mistakes and to decide to retrace his steps and begin again after changing course. He seems very reluctant to say "I repent " or " I am sorry ". He seems to refuse instinctively, and often irresistibly, anything that is penance in the sense of a sacrifice accepted and carried out for the correction of sin.
 - vii. POSITIVE. LOVE FOR GOD. It is not uncommon for non-Christians to be surprised at the negligible witness of true penance on the part of Christ's followers. It is clear, however, that Christian penance will only be authentic if it is inspired by love and not by mere fear; if it consists in a serious effort to crucify the "old man" so that the "new" can be born by the power of Christ; if it takes as its model Christ, who though he was innocent chose the path of poverty, patience, austerity and, one can say, the penitential life.
3. Catechesis on conscience
 - i. As the Synod recalled, the pastors of the Church are also expected to provide catechesis on conscience and its formation.
 - ii. This too is a very relevant topic, in view of the fact that, in the upheavals to which our present culture is subjected, this interior sanctuary, man's innermost self, his conscience, is too often attacked, put to the test, confused and obscured.
 4. Catechesis on the sense of sin
 5. Catechesis on temptation and temptations
 - i. the Lord Jesus himself, the Son of God, "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin",[147] allowed himself to be tempted by the Evil One[148] in order to show that, like himself, his followers too would be subjected to temptation, and in order to show how one should behave when subjected to temptation.
 - ii. For those who beseech the Father not to be tempted beyond their own strength[149] and not to succumb to temptation,[150] and for those who do not expose themselves to occasions of sin, being subjected to temptation does not mean that they have sinned; rather it is an opportunity for growing in fidelity and consistency through humility and watchfulness.
 6. Catechesis is also expected on fasting
 - i. This can be practiced in old forms and new, as a sign of conversion, repentance and personal mortification and, at the same time, as a sign of union with Christ crucified and of solidarity with the starving and suffering.
 7. Catechesis on almsgiving
 - i. This is a means of making charity a practical thing, by sharing what one possesses with those suffering the consequences of poverty.
 - ii. Catechesis on the intimate connection which links the overcoming of divisions in the world with perfect communion with God and among people, which is the eschatological purpose of the Church.
 8. Catechesis on the concrete circumstances in which reconciliation has to be achieved
 - i. (in the family, in the civil community, in social structures)
 - ii. and particularly catechesis on the four reconciliations which repair the four fundamental rifts:

1. reconciliation of man with God,
 2. with self,
 3. with the brethren
 4. and with the whole of creation
9. A constant catechesis on what the traditional Christian language calls the four last things of man: death, judgment (universal and particular), hell and heaven
 - i. In a culture which tends to imprison man in the earthly life at which he is more or less successful, the pastors of the Church are asked to provide a catechesis which will reveal and illustrate with the certainties of faith what comes after the present life: beyond the mysterious gates of death, an eternity of joy in communion with God or the punishment of separation from him.
 - ii. Only in this eschatological vision can one realize the exact nature of sin and feel decisively moved to penance and reconciliation
 10. Catechesis on the sacrament of reconciliation itself
 - i. Divine foundation
 - ii. Priestly instrumentality in persona Christi
 - iii. Confession within God's eternal plan
8. What not to do
 - a. Be careful about preaching about confession.
 - b. Story of penance service for kids in Virginia, where there basically was an indirect violation of the seal. No kids wanted to come.

III. Availability

- A. Actions speak louder than words. We need to preach about confession by our body language, by our showing what a priority it is in our priesthood. We need to make it available.
- B. It must be a priority for us.
 1. B16 during a Feb 19 meeting with the confessors of the Papal Basilicas, said: "How many penitents find in confession the peace and joy they were seeking for so long. Christ has chosen us, dear priests, to be the only ones with the power to pardon sins in his name. This then, is a specific ecclesial service to which we must give priority."
 2. The faithful have a right to confession.
 3. Canon 986 §1: "All to whom by virtue of office the care of souls is committed are bound to provide for the hearing of the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them, who reasonably request confession, and they are to provide these faithful with an opportunity to make individual confession on days and at times arranged to suit them [the faithful]."
 4. Pastors and bishops have the obligation "...to see to it that the number of confessors does not become too small by reason of the fact that some priests neglect this outstanding ministry [of penance] while involving themselves in temporal matters of spending their time on other less necessary ministries"[8].
 5. Paul VI: "Other works, for lack of time, may have to be postponed or even abandoned, but not the confessional"[9].
 6. JP II: "Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses from such confession, in which case reconciliation can be obtained in other ways"(12). b) Therefore, "all those of whom it is required by virtue of their ministry in the care of souls are obliged to ensure that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them are heard when they reasonably ask, and that they are given the opportunity to approach individual confession, on days and at times set down for their convenience"(13). Moreover, all priests with faculties to administer the Sacrament of Penance are always to show themselves wholeheartedly disposed to administer it whenever the faithful make a reasonable request. An unwillingness to welcome the wounded sheep, and even to go out to them in order to bring them back into the fold, would be a sad sign of a lack of pastoral sensibility in those who, by priestly Ordination, must reflect the image of the Good Shepherd.
 7. 2001 Letter. At the same time, let us make every effort to be true ministers of mercy. We know that in this sacrament, as in others, we are called to be agents of a grace which comes not from us

but from on high and works by its own inner power. In other words – and this is a great responsibility – God counts on us, on our availability and fidelity, in order to work his wonders in human hearts

8. 1986 Letter – There is an urgent need to develop a whole pastoral STRATEGY of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This will be done by constantly reminding Christians of the need to have a real relationship with God, to have a sense of sin when one is closed to God and to others, the need to be converted and through the Church to receive forgiveness as a free gift of God. They also need to be reminded of the conditions that enable the sacrament to be celebrated well, and in this regard to overcome prejudices, baseless fears and routine (9). Such a situation at the same time requires that we ourselves should remain very available for this ministry of forgiveness, ready to devote to it the necessary time and care, and I would even say giving it priority over other activities. The faithful will then realize the value that we attach to it, as did the Curé of Ars.
- C. John Paul II stressed that it should be available for the convenience of the penitents, not for the convenience of the priest. We need to lower the inconvenience for people.
1. We can hear on Sundays, even during Masses.
 - a. The often asked question, ‘Are priests able to hear Confessions during Holy Mass?’ comes from a misunderstanding of a statement in the Sacred Congregation of Rites’ Instruction of 1967 entitled, ‘Eucharisticum mysterium’ which states the faithful should be encouraged to go to confession outside Holy Mass.
 - b. In October 2001 the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW), in an Official Latin text in Notitiæ, nos. 419-420, explained that this 1967 Instruction’s statement is not conflicting and does not in any way prohibit priests from hearing Confessions during Holy Mass. The Notitiæ goes on to teach: “Consequently, it is clearly lawful, even during the celebration of Mass, to hear confessions when one foresees that the faithful are going to ask for this ministry. In the case of concelebrations, it is earnestly to be desired that some priests would abstain from concelebrating so as to be available to attend to the faithful who wish to receive the Sacrament of Penance [Confession].”
 - c. JP II in *Misericordia Dei*, instructed bishops, priests, and rectors of churches and shrines to: “...Periodically verify that the greatest possible provision is in fact being made for the faithful to confess their sins. It is particularly recommended that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertised times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses, and even during Mass if there are other priests available, in order to meet the needs of the faithful.”^[10]
 2. The Father of the Prodigal Son was always looking out for his Son’s return.
 3. Archbishop Gomez encouraged pastors to find new ways to make the sacrament accessible to people given the current situation of their lives, including offering it during the week over lunch and offering more family-friendly schedules.
- D. The great saints of the confessional were there for hours and always available.
1. St. Philip Neri, outside his box at San Giovanni dei Fiorenti and San Girolamo della Carità
 - a. The church of S. Girolamo was much frequented even before the coming of Philip, and his confessional there soon became the centre of a mighty apostolate. He stayed in church, hearing confessions or ready to hear them, from daybreak till nearly midday, and not content with this, he usually confessed some forty persons in his room before dawn. Thus he labored untiringly throughout his long priesthood. As a physician of souls he received marvelous gifts from God. He would sometimes tell a penitent his most secret sins without his confessing them; and once he converted a young nobleman by showing him a vision of hell. Shortly before noon he would leave his confessional to say Mass.
 2. Curè D’ars, up to 16-18 hours a day.
 3. St. Peter Claver, 12 hours a day.
 - a. Would be there from 5:00 until noon. Hundreds of penitents every day. He would begin at 8 or 9 pm and hear through the next morning. Generally seven hours in the morning; four in the evening.
 4. St. Joseph Cafasso, 8-10 hours a day

- a. At all times of the year he spent many hours hearing the Confessions of the faithful, and it was not uncommon for him to enter the Confessional at seven in the morning and remain there until twelve o'clock. After remaining there for so long, even in the very cold weather, when he came out to go to the sacristy the people could see that he trembled all over and was compelled to lean for support on the benches to prevent himself from falling; often when halfway down the church, he had to rest either by kneeling or sitting down. The people were very much moved by such a sight, and several of them wanted to buy at their own expense a heated footstool in order to lessen a little the effect of the cold. The sacristan decided to buy one, but fearing that Don Cafasso would not allow him if told beforehand, he bought the footstool without telling him and put it in the Confessional before Don Cafasso arrived there. As soon as he saw the luxury, as he called it, he kicked it with his foot into a corner of the Confessional, and afterward told the sacristan not to put it there again, saying that these things are useless and that they give people the idea that a priest, who, he said, does not need such things, is too careful about himself. Various reasons were given him why he should use it, but neither in this nor in any other circumstance was it possible to persuade him to moderate the severity of his penances, which certainly contributed to consume a life so precious.
5. St. Leopoldo, 12-18 hours a day.
 - a. A compassionate man, Father Leopold gave tremendous encouragement to many people, especially those despairing of hope because of an enslavement to sin. He was truly an apostle. For although he did not go to the mission territory, his long service in the Confessional proved to be his own distinct apostolate. For nearly forty years, twelve hours a day, he received, counseled and absolved thousands of penitents. In this work he was a herald of God's love and forgiveness.
 - b. He once said of priests, "A priest must die from apostolic hard work; there is no other death worthy of a priest.
 - c. He never turned a penitent away for coming at an inconvenient time, nor rebuked any for being too importunate. They would ring a bell for him if he was away, and he would exclaim, "Here I am, Sir, here I am." He would hear if someone interrupted in the middle of the night.
 - d. Sometimes he heard confessions for whole days while his body burned with fever and high temperature. Someone counseled him to rest, "How can I? We were born to fatigue; we shall find rest in heaven.... How can I go to bed when, outside there, many poor souls are in need of the little help I can give them? Ask Our Lady to show herself a Mother to me and obtain for me sufficient health to bear up under fatigue and do something for the good of souls."
 - e. He would stay in the confessional during meals: "How can I desert so many poor sinners on the excuse of seeking food for my body?"
 - f. "It is my duty, my desire, to die in harness."
- E. We clearly send a message about the lack of the importance of the sacrament when we advertise 45 minutes on a Saturday or by appointment.
 1. We're certainly not advertising it's a priority of our time if it takes up 1/168 of our week. And if it's not a priority for us, it won't become one for the average Catholic.
 2. Sometimes it's important to remember the history of Saturday confessions to understand how we got there.
 - a. Priests used to hear for hours on Saturday afternoon and evening, because there were no Masses of anticipation.
 - b. When the Masses of anticipation came, the confessional hours were generally just reduced.
 - F. Imagine the message we would send to our parishioners if we said that every day from 1-5, or from 5-8 pm, we will be hearing confessions.
 1. At first, I think, many of them would think we're wasting our time. Why would father be spending so much time in the confessional?

2. But over the course of time, if those became his priorities, it would start to influence the whole tenor of the parish, because he would be saying that confession comes before so many of the other things that often occupy his time.
 3. It would certainly be an inconvenience at first, but over time, people would come. We all instinctively know this.
 4. Our parishes would change. It took the Curé D'Ars eight year to convert 60 families, 240 individuals. That's an average of two whole months just on every family over the course of those eight years. He prayed at night. They saw the candles burning. They saw his tears. He preached against the particular sins they were prone to, to supplanting Sunday with the taverns or with work, to dancing, etc. Over the time, once his parish was converted, others started to come. That's when the ministry grew.
 5. God made the great saints great saints through the confessional. And people were attracted. Ars was in the middle of nowhere. They had to get eight day passes for the train. But they came.
- G. Is there a good reason why we cannot hear confessions every day?
1. What about before or after daily Mass?
 2. There are arguments in favor of before (for people to be able to receive Holy Communion).
 3. There are arguments in favor of after (not getting ambushed by penitents requiring a lot of time).
 4. There's a Mass in the parish anyway, so it's not like it would be blocking off a whole series of time away from other things.
 5. The simple fact is that priests are the only creatures in the entire universe capable of hearing confessions and giving absolution in the name of the Trinity.
 6. This would be an alternative type of Holy Hour.
- H. Campaigns
1. The Light is on for You in Washington, DC, every Wednesday night through Lent. A wallet size card with an act of contrition and a how to.
 2. Reconciliation Weekends in Philadelphia and St. Louis
 - a. Confessions are heard all weekend long in every parish.
 - b. In Philadelphia a few years back, 1100 priests heard the confessions of over 100,000 penitents that weekend.
 3. Reconciliation Days in parishes. "24 hours of grace" at a parish in the Archdiocese of Chicago.
 4. Rockville Center
 - a. Monday of Holy Week, 3-9
 - b. One additional hour per week besides Saturday afternoon
 5. Opening up centers in malls for confessions, like the Catholic Center in the Citadel Mall in Colorado Springs. They heard 1,534 confessions last year.
 - a. The Cynics in us can say, "only five a day".
 - b. But for Christ, 100 out of 100 matter.
 - c. Over the course of a week, they hear on average 35 confessions which is more than many parishes do.
 6. In one place in San Antonio, they have three confessors hearing during lunch and they can't hear all of the confessions in 90 minutes.
 7. JP II in NMI calls us to have "courage, confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate the sacrament" (37).
- I. Hearing confessions at wedding rehearsals, wakes
1. Ask couples to get to their friends ahead of time. They know them. This is a great way to thank Jesus for bringing you together because he wants to welcome his good sheep home. "It would really mean so much to us if you were capable of receiving holy Communion at our wedding Mass. There's a nice young priest who will be hearing confessions before our rehearsal. It would be great if you could go, get back to good graces with God and the Church, and be able to share our full joy. "
 2. Wakes are great times. People are thinking of their own death. The first reading in the ritual, about not knowing the day or the hour, can bring many of them with imperfect contrition. It's a start.
- J. John Paul II and Benedict XVI
1. When they go to the basilica, they show its importance.
 2. Even just once a year.

3. People think that there's something special about going to the Pope, but they begin to realize it's about the sacrament.
- K. Difficulties with confession (St. Joseph Cafasso)
1. He began with the privilege of being a confessor: The power of forgiving sins attached to the office of confessor is the greatest and most exalted among all the powers that can be exercised by man on earth. A gift not even given to Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha.
 2. Then he took on the difficulties:
 - a. Ministry is wearisome and fatiguing — It is, but so is all other types of priestly work. There are real aches and pains. "Let him have a little courage." The Lord will repay us for all our sufferings. Once someone tried to get St. FdS to slow down: "It is not necessary that I live, but while I live it is necessary that I labour."
 - b. I am not obliged — He must work for the salvation of souls
 - c. Few priests hear a lot — We consider the bad example of others too often. We condemn it in lay people. When death comes, what would you have wished you had done.
 - d. It's a waste of time — penitents are always the same, same defects and sins, no sign of fruit. Can there be a more fruitful way to stop people from sinning and to get them to do good.
 - e. I'm not good at it and it's a danger to my soul — Take precautions, but be not afraid.
 3. He said: We are like the good Samaritans. We cannot abandon those in sin.
- IV. Getting people to come back and bring others
- A. Being merciful, an icon of the Father's merciful love, when they come.
 - B. John Paul II: "The priest is the witness and instrument of divine mercy... a special witness... a steward of the invisible and priceless treasures belonging to the spiritual and supernatural order... He should go regularly to confession himself and receive spiritual direction... It is in the confessional that His spiritual fatherhood is realized in the fullest way" (Gift and Mystery, 1996, p. 86-87).
 1. 2001 Letter: Here too, it is important that the minister of reconciliation should fulfill his role correctly. His ability to be welcoming, to be a good listener and to engage in dialogue, together with his ready accessibility, is essential if the ministry of reconciliation is to be seen in all its value. The faithful and uncompromising proclamation of the radical demands of God's word must always be accompanied by great understanding and sensitivity, in imitation of Jesus' own way of dealing with sinners.
 - C. Take away their fear. Set them at peace and do not scare them during confession or scare them away.
 1. We've all dealt with people who have scared people away and that's one of the reasons why people don't come back for a long time.
 2. We have a group of priests in our diocese who do this and confuse people. It's a tragedy. Denying absolution to recidivists out of a mistaken reading of St. Alphonsus Ligouri.
 - D. Earning a reputation for being merciful.
 1. One way we can do this even before confession is from the pulpit, that we're perceived as someone full off Christ's love and mercy.
 2. Like Christ, being a "friend of sinners."
 3. That's obviously a challenge at times, but we do have to be careful about our tone.
 - E. Letting our joy overflow
 1. Heaven rejoices more for one repentant sinner than for 99 who didn't need to repent.
 2. "Your confession has made me a better priest." Thank you so much for coming.
 3. JP II: The joy of pardoning and being pardoned go hand in hand. All confessors have the great responsibility to exercise this ministry with benevolence, wisdom and courage. Their duty is to make lovable and desirable this encounter which purifies and renews us on the path to Christian perfection and on our pilgrimage to our home." 3/27/04 VIS
 4. JP II 2001 Letter: Our minds turn to the pages of the Gospel which reveal most directly the merciful face of God. How can we fail to think of the moving meeting between the prodigal son and his forgiving Father? Or the image of the sheep which was lost and then found, and which the Shepherd joyfully lifts onto his shoulders? The Father's embrace and the Good Shepherd's joy must be visible in each one of us, dear Brothers, whenever a penitent asks us to become ministers of forgiveness.
 5. St. Leopoldo Mandic

- a. Early on, Bogdan learned empathy for those who had lost their dignity, either social or moral. He understood their pain because of his own family's experience.
 - b. Some friars objected to the largesse Leopold showed to penitents. Leopold transformed the confessional into an experience of human dignity, a personal encounter of compassion, respect, and understanding. There every penitent experienced the mercy of God and the kindness of a priest. Leopold once remarked, "Some say that I am too good. But if you come and kneel before me, isn't this a sufficient proof that you want to have God's pardon? God's mercy is beyond all expectation." When accused of leniency in assigning penances, Leopold would respond, "If the Lord wants to accuse me of showing too much leniency toward sinners, I'll tell him that it was he who gave me this example, and I haven't even died for the salvation of souls as he did." Leopold would often remark, "Be at peace; place everything on my shoulders. I will take care of it." He once explained, "I give my penitents only small penances because I do the rest myself." At nighttime, he would spend hours in prayer, explaining: "I must do penance for my penitents."
 - c. From the start of his priestly life, Father Leopold was faithful to the ministry of hearing confessions; but once he was in Padua, his confessional was literally besieged by crowds. This apostolate answered one of his childhood desires. At the age of eight, one of his sisters had scolded him for a slight fault and led him to the pastor of the parish who made him kneel in the middle of the church: "I stayed there," he would later tell, "deeply saddened, and wondering within myself: Why treat so severely a child for such a slight fault? When I get big, I want to be a religious, a confessor, and treat the souls of sinners with much goodness and mercy." This desire was fully realized in Padua.
 - d. In order to procure the immense grace of divine forgiveness for those who came to him, Father Leopold made himself available, smiling, prudent and modest, an understanding and patient spiritual counselor. Experience had taught him how important it is to put penitents at ease and in confidence. One of them tells this significant fact: "I had not been to confession for several years. I finally decided to go and went to see Father Leopold. I was troubled and anxious. I had just come in, when he got up from his chair and greeted me joyfully like a long-expected friend: 'Please, come in.' Troubled as I was, I went to sit in his armchair. Without a word, he knelt down on the floor and heard my confession. When it was finished, only then did I realize my blunder, and so I wanted to excuse myself; but he said with a smile: 'It's nothing, it's nothing. Go in peace.' This show of goodness remained engraved in my memory. By it, he had entirely won me over."
 - e. A few days before his death he was able to say that, although he had been hearing Confessions for more than fifty years, his conscience did not reproach him for having been so ready to grant absolution; rather, he was sorry for the three or four times that he had not been able to grant it. "Perhaps," he said, "I did not do all I might have done to bring even those souls to repentance."
 - f. In the confessional, he thanked his penitents and sometimes even embraced them. He seemed almost to consider it the greatest condescension on their part to humble themselves at his feet; it was ever so, even with the poorest and humblest of people.
 - g. "I give such light penances to those who confess to me that I have to make satisfaction for them."
6. St. Joseph Cafasso
 - a. We must have charity in receiving penitents (rather than frustration or fatigue). We show it by giving our services to hear them with great promptness and good will; and by welcoming all equally without any distinction; by making sure to use some words of encouragement.
 - b. We must have charity in hearing the penitents, no matter how annoying.
 - c. We must have charity in disposing penitents for absolution — Even when one is ill-disposed and not repentant, what we say may influence his later conversion.
- F. Encouraging them and asking them to come back again soon.
 1. Training them to be frequent penitents for their own spiritual growth.

2. CCC §1458 - Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Cf. Council of Trent: DS 1680; CIC, can. 988 & 2.
3. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful.
4. Frequent confession is the school of sanctity (Archbishop Vaughn's point)
 - a. John Paul II: "It would be an illusion to seek after holiness, according to the vocation one has received from God, without partaking frequently of this sacrament of conversion and reconciliation. Those who go to Confession frequently, and do so with the desire to make progress, will notice the strides that they make in their spiritual lives.
 - b. Pius XII: "For a constant and speedy advancement in the path of virtue, we highly recommend the pious practice of frequent confession, introduced by the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; for by this means we grow in a true knowledge of ourselves and in Christian humility, bad habits are uprooted, spiritual negligence and apathy are prevented, the conscience is purified and the will strengthened, salutary spiritual direction is obtained, and grace is increased by the efficacy of the sacrament itself.
 - c. Paul VI – Frequent and reverent recourse to this sacrament, even when only venial sin is in question, is of great value. Frequent confession is not mere ritual repetition, nor is it merely a psychological exercise. Rather is it a constant effort to bring to perfection the grace of our Baptism so that as we carry about in our bodies the death of Jesus Christ who died, the life that Jesus Christ lives may be more and more manifested in us. In such confessions penitents, while indeed confessing venial sins, should be mainly concerned with becoming more deeply conformed to Christ, and more submissive to the voice of the Spirit.

G. Training them when they're young

1. Get them in the practice of going, even on their own.
2. Talking to first Communicants about growing up and being able to go on their own
3. Helping their consciences to mature through ever deeper examinations.
4. 2001 Letter: This sacrament, when suitably presented and celebrated, can have a broad appeal, even among the young. It does so by bringing the penitent into contact with the merciful heart of God through the friendly face of a brother.
5. Sacrament is one of growth:
 - a. 2001 letter: Seen in these terms, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the most effective instruments of personal growth. Here the Good Shepherd, through the presence and voice of the priest, approaches each man and woman, entering into a personal dialogue which involves listening, counsel, comfort and forgiveness. The love of God is such that it can focus upon each individual without overlooking the rest

H. Encouraging penitents to give witness to the power of a good confession

1. Sometimes they're so happy and don't know what to do to thank the priest or God.
2. "Do you know anyone who needs the sacrament like you do? One way to thank God would be simply to tell them how happy you are you finally went back and encourage them to bring another."
3. Great story from life of St. Joseph Cafasso: SJB: St. Joseph Cafasso had gone to the prison in order to prepare the prisoners for the celebration of a feast in honor of Our Lady, and had spent a whole week instructing them and exhorting them. This he did in a large room in which there were forty-five of the most noted criminals. Almost all had promised to go to Confession on the vigil of the feast. But when the day came, none of them could make up his mind to go to Confession. He renewed his invitation, recapitulated what he had said during the week, and reminded them of the promise that they had made. But whether it was through human respect, or the temptation of the devil, or some other vain pretext, none of them would consent to go to Confession. What was Don Cafasso to do? His ingenious charity and courage found a way out of the difficulty. With a smile on his face he went over to the man who appeared to be the biggest and strongest and most robust among the prisoners, and without saying a word, he caught hold

of his luxurious long beard. The man, thinking that Don Cafasso had acted through jest, said to him as courteously as could be expected from such people, "Take anything else from me you like but leave me my beard!" I will not let you go until you go to Confession," replied Don Cafasso. "But I don't want to go to Confession," said the prisoner. "You may say what you like, but you will not escape from me; I will not let you go until you have made your Confession," said Cafasso. "I am not prepared," said the prisoner. "I will prepare you," said Cafasso. Certainly, if the prisoner had wished, he could have freed himself from Don Cafasso's hands with the slightest effort; but whether it was respect for the holy man's person, or rather the fruit of the grace of God, the fact is that the man surrendered and allowed himself to be led to a corner of the room. Don Cafasso sat down on a bundle of straw and prepared his friend for Confession. But lo! In a short time there was commotion; the strong man was so moved by Don Cafasso's exhortation that his sighs and tears almost prevented him from telling his sins. Then appeared the great marvel; he who had been most vehement in his refusal to make his Confession went to his companions after it was finished and told them that he had never been so happy in his life. He became so eloquent in exhorting them that he succeeded in persuading them all to go to Confession. On that day Don Cafasso continued hearing Confessions in the prison until the night was far advanced. Locked in.

4. Experience at the Men's Conference this year. I was stopped four separate times by friends intervening for their friends who were too embarrassed to go in the big room because they thought they'd probably be balling their eyes out.
5. St. James: "My brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." (Js 5: 19-20)
6. JP II (DM): Confession is perhaps the most effective way for a Catholic to recover the lost sheep all around him, the millions of erring Catholics, your relatives and friends who are normally only one good confession away from reconciliation with Christ and the Church. You can be the instrument of God to bring them back; they will be eternally grateful. Start accepting yourself this great gift from God that is the Sacrament of Reconciliation

I. Avoid opposite extremes

1. JP II: It is a ministry always beset by two opposite extremes: severity and laxity. The first fails to take account of the early part of the story of Zacchaeus: mercy comes first, encouraging conversion and valuing even the slightest progress in love, because the Father wants to do the impossible to save the son who is lost: "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10). The other of the two extremes, laxity, fails to take into account the fact that the fullness of salvation, not just offered but also accepted, the salvation which truly heals and restores, involves a genuine conversion to the demands of God's love.
2. We must always be careful to maintain a proper balance in order to avoid falling into one or the other of these extremes. Severity crushes people and drives them away. Laxity is misleading and deceptive. The minister of pardon, who exemplifies for penitents the face of the Good Shepherd, must express in equal measure the mercy already present and at work and the pardon which brings healing and peace. It is on the basis of these principles that the priest is deputed, in dialogue with the penitent, to discern whether he or she is ready for sacramental absolution. Undoubtedly, the delicacy of this meeting with souls, at such a personal and sometimes difficult moment, demands the utmost discretion. Unless it appears otherwise, the priest must assume that, in confessing his or her sins, the penitent is genuinely sorry and is determined to make amends. This can be more readily assumed if there are suitable pastoral aids for sacramental Reconciliation, including a time of preparation for the sacrament, in order to help penitents come to a more mature and satisfactory sense of what it is that they are looking for. Clearly, when there is no sorrow and amendment, the confessor is obliged to tell the penitent that he or she is not yet ready for absolution. If absolution were given to those who actually say that they have no intention of making amends, the rite would become a mere fiction; indeed, it would look almost like magic, capable perhaps of creating the semblance of peace, but certainly not that deep peace of conscience which God's embrace guarantees.

J. Encouraging signs

1. Jubilee Year — JP II: We should accept this Jubilee indication as a sign from on high, and make it a reason for renewed boldness in re-proposing the meaning and practice of this Sacrament.

2. New Initiatives
- V. Conclusions
- A. Ambassadors for Christ, appealing for reconciliation.
 1. God has deigned to choose us for this gift.
 2. Need to rediscover our vocation as a "mystery of mercy."
 3. Sinner becomes a minister of mercy.
 - B. Segué to tonight
 1. For this very reason it is important for us to rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a fundamental means of our sanctification. Approaching a brother priest in order to ask for the absolution that we so often give to the faithful enables us to live the great and consoling truth that, before being ministers, we are all members of the same people, a "saved" people.
 2. Only those who have known the Father's tender embrace, as the Gospel describes it in the parable of the Prodigal Son "he embraced him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20), only they can pass on to others the same warmth, when after receiving pardon themselves they administer it to others.
 3. The holiness of the priest matters: JP II 1986 Letter: In a word, John Mary Vianney sanctified himself so as to be more able to sanctify others. Of course, conversion remains the secret of hearts, which are free in their actions, and the secret of God's grace. By his ministry, the priest can only enlighten people, guide them in the internal forum and give them the sacraments. The sacraments are of course actions of Christ, and their effectiveness is not diminished by the imperfection or unworthiness of the minister. But the results depend also on the dispositions of those who receive them, and these are greatly assisted by the personal holiness of the priest, by his perceptible witness, as also by the mysterious exchange of merits in the Communion of Saints. John Mary Vianney in a sense wished to force God to grant these graces of conversion, not only by his prayer but by the sacrifice of his whole life. He wished to love God for those who did not love him, and even to do the penance which they would not do. He was truly a pastor completely at one with his sinful people.
 4. That's the type of pastor, the type of ambassador, the type of minister Christ calls us to be and will help us to be.