

Nine Benefits of Going to Confession Frequently

FR. WADE L. J. MENEZES, CPM



During my priestly ministry, I have discerned several reasons why people hesitate to approach the Sacrament of Confession. Here are the most common:

- **Fear:** Though the vast majority of priests are kind and understanding confessors, many potential penitents fear being judged or scolded.
- **Pride:** Confessing sins means confronting that we've genuinely done wrong and need God's help to heal. Our personal pride rebels against this.
- **Shame:** Though a well-ordered guilt should impel us to the Sacrament of Confession, shame can keep us away because of the realization that we have to admit our sins to another—and speaking our sins out loud feels unbearable.

- **Ignorance:** This is twofold. First, we can be ignorant of the reality of sin in our lives and its devastating consequences if it goes unchecked. Second, we can be ignorant of the necessity of sacramental Confession for the forgiveness of mortal sins.
- **Unavailability:** Too often there simply aren't enough times offered for Confession at local parishes, or there is no option for anonymity, which is the right of every penitent according to the Church's discipline of this sacrament.

A different kind of objection to the sacrament is the claim that we can and **should go “straight to God”** with our sins to have them forgiven. Well, you can do that for venial sins, but **mortal sins require the Sacrament of Confession. Furthermore, did we go “straight to God” for our Baptism? Did we go “straight to God” for our Confirmation? Matrimony? The Anointing of the Sick or the other sacraments?**

“The graces from frequent Confession can help ignite a renewed spiritual fervor that will help make your daily spiritual life grow stronger and more committed every day.”

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— Fr. Wade Menezes, *Overcoming the Evil Within*

The truth—that Catholics usually understand in other contexts—is that the Church, **Her ministers, and sacraments mediate God’s grace, and this is as God designed it.** Consider the **Old Testament, which is shot through with mediation in the form of the prophets, who bring God’s saving message to the people.** And in the New Testament, **God sends the chief Mediator, the God-Man, Jesus Christ, as Savior of the world.**

On how to approach Confession faithfully and confidently, St. Faustina tells us:

As regards Holy confession ... before I approach the confessional, I shall first enter the open and most merciful Heart

of the Savior. When I leave the confessional, I shall rouse in my soul great gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity for this wonderful and inconceivable miracle of mercy that is wrought in my soul. And the more miserable my soul is, the more I feel the ocean of God's mercy engulfing me and giving me strength and great power. (Diary, 225) — *Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska: Divine Mercy in My Soul, 225*

Indeed, we should not be afraid to return again and again to the Tribunal of Mercy. Some of the following is a review from our first chapter, but it's worth repeating given that **the Sacrament of Confession is closely related to growth in self-knowledge and a strong spiritual life.**

Recall that the grace of the sacrament can protect us from sin by strengthening our resolve and reforming our habits. So, although we are required by Church law to go to Confession at least once a year if we are conscious of mortal sin, we still benefit from the time-honored tradition of going monthly (say, on First Friday in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, or on First Saturday in honor of the Immaculate Heart of Mary). A faithful, monthly penitent most likely never, or at least infrequently, has mortal sin to confess, because the fervent practice of monthly Confession keeps him from committing mortal sin. And remember that Pope Pius XII recommended the practice of frequent Confession, even if only venial sins are in question:

By it, genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and grace is increased in virtue of the Sacrament itself. — Mystici Corporis Christi, no. 88.

Here we see **nine benefits of the sacrament**, whether it be just venial sins or mortal sins, or a combination, that are confessed.

Let's look briefly at each of these benefits:

Self-knowledge is increased.

Many saints make clear in their writing and teaching that self-knowledge is needed to grow in holiness. This means knowing and admitting your virtues so you can advance them in your life, and knowing and admitting your vices so you can uproot them out of your life.

Christian humility grows.

Humility is the “moral virtue that keeps a person from reaching beyond himself. It is the virtue that restrains the unruly desire for personal greatness and leads people to an orderly love of themselves based on a true appreciation of their position with respect to God and their neighbors,” (Fr. John Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary*).

Not only does the practice of frequent Confession help us to grow in humility, but the very act of making a good examination of conscience (required before even stepping into the confessional) is humbling—and it helps us to grow in self-knowledge.

Bad habits are corrected.

Little by little, through frequent Confession and honesty with one's confessor, who will offer advice accordingly, **bad habits can be overcome.** Frequent, worthy reception of the Sacrament of Confession means frequent graces received from that sacrament for those bad habits.

Spiritual neglect is resisted.

Let's say you are struggling to establish the practice of praying the daily Rosary or daily Chaplet of Divine Mercy, or even just making a Morning Offering upon rising each day. Your failures to practice these devotions would be examples of "spiritual neglects" that cause your spiritual life to suffer. Frequent Confession can help you get back on track, especially if your confessor assigns them to you as a penance and so you begin to carry them out more faithfully on your own.

Spiritual tepidity is resisted.

Let's say you do, indeed, carry out such spiritual practices—but only infrequently. In other words, you carry them out in a tepid or lukewarm manner. The graces from frequent Confession can help ignite a renewed spiritual fervor that will help make your daily spiritual life grow stronger and more committed every day.

Conscience is purified.

Confession of one's sins brings with it a purification and, importantly, peace of conscience. This is tied to the healing aspect of Confession. Indeed, Confession is one of two "healing" sacraments, along with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

The will is strengthened.

Whereas our intellect is what helps us "to know," our will is what helps us "to choose" (based on properly ordered love). Through the practice of frequent Confession, our wills become

strengthened to help us more frequently choose good over evil, virtue over vice, and the beneficial over the malicious.

A salutary self-control is achieved.

Only you can control you. Frequent Confession makes us simply want to “do better” in all aspects of daily living. It’s the grace of the sacrament that propels us to control our lives better by practicing an ordinate love toward persons, places, and things and not an inordinate, or disordered, love toward them.

Grace is increased in virtue of the sacrament itself.

Every sacrament, when it is received worthily, increases sanctifying grace in the soul. For Eucharist and Confession—the only two sacraments that can be received both repetitiously and frequently—this is especially true. In fact, the Sacrament of Confession can even help to perfect the grace of our Baptism. This is because Baptism, while wiping away the Original Sin we inherit from our first parents, also wipes away any personal sin (also called “actual sin”) we might have (i.e., any venial or mortal sin). Confession always helps rid us of personal sin.

We should add, though, that going to Confession out of scrupulosity is not helpful to the penitent, nor is it the intention of the sacrament. Scrupulosity is seeing sin where there is no sin at all but rather, say, a simple fault; or, seeing mortal sin when, in reality, it is a venial sin. Indeed, scruples can stunt one’s growth in the spiritual life. Don’t be your own savior; let Jesus Christ be your Savior.

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This article is adapted from a chapter in Fr. Menezes’s book, *Overcoming the Evil Within: The Reality of Sin and the*

[Transforming Power of God's Grace and Mercy](#), available from [Sophia Institute Press](#).

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By [Fr. Wade L. J. Menezes, CPM](#)

Fr. Wade Menezes is currently the Assistant General of the Fathers of Mercy and has served as Director of Vocations and Director of Seminarians for the community. Fr. Wade has also served as the Chaplain-in-Residence at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament of Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Hanceville, Alabama. Both the Monastery and Shrine are affiliated with EWTN, the Eternal Word Television Network. Fr.

Wade has been a contributing writer for *The National*

Catholic Register, *Our Sunday Visitor*, *Catholic Faith and Family*, *Pastoral Life*, *The Catholic Faith*, *Lay Witness* and *Christian Ranchman* publications. Several homiletic series of his have appeared in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, an international journal for Priests. Fr. Wade has also been a guest on various episodes of EWTN's "Mother Angelica Live" and "Life on the Rock" programs during which he discussed such topics as the sanctification of marriage and family life, vocations, and the Sacred Liturgy. He has also hosted several televised series for EWTN, which have covered such topics as the necessity of the Spiritual Life, [The Four Last Things](#), [The Ten Commandments of Catholic Family Life](#), and [The Gospel of Life vs. the Culture of Death](#). He is also the host of the EWTN segment series "[The Crux of the Matter](#)" and "[The Wonders of His Mercy](#)." Fr. Wade's many theological and doctrinal presentations have been featured on EWTN Radio, Ave Maria Radio, Guadalupe Radio Network, Covenant Network Radio, Catholic Broadcasting Northwest, and Voice of Virtue International. He is the author of two books: [The Four Last Things: A Catechetical Guide to Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell](#) and [Overcoming the Evil Within: The Reality of Sin and the Transforming Power of God's Grace and Mercy](#); both books are available from EWTN Publishing. Fr. Wade is also the Host of EWTN Global Catholic Radio's "[Open Line Tuesday](#)" which airs every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. EST.