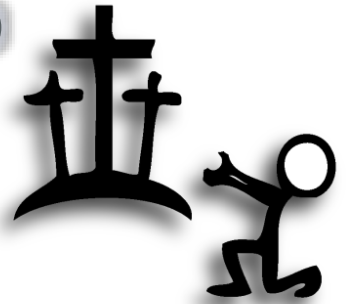




Why is going to confession important?



GOSPEL



ANSWERS

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

– John 20: 23

Saints & inspirational stories

Blessed Jozef Kowalski

Fr Jozef Kowalski lived in Poland during a time when being a priest was a danger thing because of the Nazi persecution and hatred of the faith. This did not stop Fr Jozef from working with youth and administering the sacraments. This eventually was the reason he ended up imprisoned and sentenced to death at a concentration camp. Even then, he still heard confession and helped those die in grace.



Maria Orsola Bussone

Maria's life was cut short by a tragic accident but the short time she lived on earth she made sure she prayed daily and regularly received the sacraments, especially confession. This helped her to be prepared to meet the Lord.



Team discussion

After reading over the YOUCAT numbers on the following pages, how do you think the Youth Catechism answers the question of the week? Were there any words or ideas that you did not fully understand that you would like to understand better?

Answer in your own words:



YouCat numbers for this week

#224 Why did Christ give us the sacrament of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick?

Christ's love is shown in the fact that he seeks the lost and heals the sick. That is why he gave us the sacraments of healing and restoration, in which we are freed from sin and strengthened in our physical and spiritual weakness.

#225 What names are there for the sacrament of Penance?

The sacrament of Penance is also called the sacrament of Reconciliation, of forgiveness, of conversion, or of confession.

#227 Who instituted the sacrament of Penance?

Jesus himself instituted the sacrament of Penance when he showed himself to his apostles on Easter day and commanded them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22a-23). Nowhere did Jesus express more beautifully what happens in the sacrament of Penance than in the parable of the Prodigal Son: We go astray, we are lost and can no longer cope. Yet our Father waits for us with great, indeed, infinite longing; he forgives us when we come back; he takes us in again, forgives our sins. Jesus himself forgave the sins of many individuals; it was more important to him than working miracles. He regarded this as the great sign of the dawning of the kingdom of God, in which all wounds are healed and all tears are wiped away. Jesus forgave sins in the power of the Holy Spirit, and he handed that power on to his apostles. We fall into the arms of our heavenly Father when we go to a priest and confess.

#228 Who can forgive sins?

God alone can forgive sins. Jesus could say "Your sins are forgiven" (Mk 2:5) only because he is the Son of God. And priests can forgive sins in Jesus' place only because Jesus has given them that authority. Many people say, "I can go directly to God; why do I need a priest?" God, though, wants it otherwise. We rationalize our sins away and like to sweep things under the rug. That is why God wants us to tell our sins and to acknowledge them in a personal encounter. Therefore, the following words from the Gospel are true of priests: "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:23).

#226 But we have Baptism, which reconciles us with God; why then do we need a special sacrament of Reconciliation?

Baptism does snatch us from the power of sin and death and brings us into the new life of the children of God, but it does not free us from human weakness and the inclination to sin. That is why we need a place where we can be reconciled with God again and again. That place is confession. It does not seem like a modern thing to go to confession; it can be difficult and may cost a great deal of effort at first. But it is one of the greatest graces that we can receive again and again in our life—it truly renews the soul, completely unburdens it, leaving it without the debts of the past, accepted in love, and equipped with new strength. God is merciful, and he desires nothing more earnestly than for us, too, to lay claim to his mercy. Someone who has gone to confession turns a clean, new page in the book of his life.

#239 What are the positive effects of confession?

Confession reconciles the sinner with God and the Church. The second after absolution is like a shower after playing sports, like the fresh air after a summer storm, like waking up on a sunlit summer morning, like the weightlessness of a diver. . . . Everything is contained in the word "reconciliation" (from a Latin verb meaning "to bring back together, to restore"): we are at peace with God again.



CONQUEST WEEKLY ACTIVITY GUIDE

#312 How does a person know that he has sinned? A person knows that he has sinned through his conscience, which accuses him and motivates him to confess his offenses to God.

#229 What prepares a person for repentance? The insight into one's personal guilt produces a longing to better oneself; this is called contrition. We arrive at contrition when we see the contradiction between God's love and our sin. Then we are full of sorrow for our sins; we resolve to change our life and place all our hope in God's help. The reality of sin is often repressed. Some people even think that guilt feelings should be dealt with in a merely psychological way. But genuine guilt feelings are important. It is like driving an automobile: When the speedometer indicates that the speed limit has been exceeded, the speedometer is not responsible, but the driver is. The closer we come to God, who is all light, the clearer our dark sides come to light also. Yet God is not a light that burns but, rather, a light that heals. That is why repentance impels us to go into the Light in which we will be completely healed.

#230 What is penance? Penance is making restitution or satisfaction for a wrong that has been committed. Penance must not take place exclusively in my head; I must express it in acts of charity and in solidarity with others. One does penance also by praying, fasting, and supporting the poor spiritually and materially. Penance is often misunderstood. It has nothing to do with low self-esteem or scrupulosity. Penance is not brooding over what a bad person I am. Penance frees and encourages us to make a new start.

#231 What are the two basic elements required for the forgiveness of a Christian's sins to occur in the sacrament of Penance? What is required for the forgiveness of sins is the person who undergoes conversion and the priest who in God's name gives him absolution from his sins.

#232 What must I bring to a confession? Essential elements of every confession are an examination of conscience, contrition, a purpose of amendment, confession, and penance. The examination of conscience should be done thoroughly, but it can never be exhaustive. No one can be absolved from his sin without real contrition, merely on the basis of "lip-service". Equally indispensable is the purpose of amendment, the resolution not to commit that sin again in the future. The sinner absolutely must declare the sin to the confessor and, thus, confess to it. The final essential element of confession is the atonement or penance that the confessor imposes on the sinner to make restitution for the harm done.

#458 How confidential is the secret of the confessional? The secret of the confessional is sacred. It cannot be violated for any reason, however weighty. A priest must not report even the most heinous crime. He has the option of refusing absolution unless the penitent turns himself in to the police. Not even trifles from a child's confession can be revealed by the priest, even under torture.

ABSOLUTION (from Latin *absolvere* = to loosen, acquit): The absolution of the priest is the sacramental forgiveness of one or more sins after the penitent's confession of sins. The formula of absolution reads: God, the merciful Father, by the death and Resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church may he give you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



#313 Why must a sinner turn to God and ask him for forgiveness? Every sin destroys, obscures, or denies what is good; God, however, is all-good and the author of all good. Therefore every sin goes against God (also) and must be set right again through contact with him

#233 What sins must be confessed? Under normal circumstances, all serious sins that one remembers after making a thorough examination of conscience and that have not yet been confessed can be forgiven only in individual sacramental confession. Of course there will be reluctance before making a confession. Overcoming it is the first step toward interior healing. Often it helps to think that even the Pope has to have the courage to confess his failings and weaknesses to another priest—and thereby to God. Only in life-or-death emergencies for instance, during an airstrike in wartime or on other occasions when a group of people are in danger of death) can a priest administer “general absolution” to a group of people without the personal confession of sins beforehand. However, afterwards, one must confess serious sins in a personal confession at the first opportunity.

#234 When is a Catholic obliged to confess his serious sins? How often should one go to confession? Upon reaching the age of reason, a Catholic is obliged to confess his serious sins. The Church urgently advises the faithful to do this at least once a year. At any rate one must go to confession before receiving Holy Communion if one has committed a serious sin. By “the age of reason”, the Church means the age at which one has arrived at the use of reason and has learned to distinguish between good and bad.

#237 Are there sins that are so serious that not even the average priest can forgive them? There are sins in which a man turns completely away from God and at the same time, because of the seriousness of the deed, incurs excommunication. When a sin results in “excommunication”, absolution can be granted only by the bishop or a priest delegated by him, and, in a few cases, only by the Pope. In danger of death, any priest can absolve from every sin and excommunication. A Catholic who commits murder, for example, or cooperates in an abortion automatically excludes himself from sacramental communion; the Church simply acknowledges this fact. The purpose of “excommunication” is to correct the sinner and to lead him back to the right path.

#235 Can I make a confession even if I have not committed any serious sins? Confession is a great gift of healing that brings about closer union with the Lord, even if, strictly speaking, you do not have to go to confession. In Taizé, at Catholic conferences, at World Youth Day celebrations—everywhere, you see young people being reconciled with God. Christians who take seriously their decision to follow Jesus seek the joy that comes from a radical new beginning with God. Even the saints went to confession regularly, if possible. They needed it in order to grow in humility and charity, so as to allow themselves to be touched by God’s healing light even in the inmost recesses of their souls.

#238 May a priest later repeat something he has learned in confession? No. Under no circumstances. The secrecy of the confessional is absolute. Any priest who would tell another person something he had learned in the confessional would be excommunicated. Even to the police, the priest cannot say or suggest anything. There is hardly anything that priests take more seriously than the seal of the confessional. There are priests who have suffered torture for it and have gone to their deaths. Therefore, you can speak candidly and unreservedly to a priest and confide in him with great peace of mind, because his only job at that moment is to be entirely “the ear of God”.