

Discipline of Confession (Corporate)

Acknowledging one's sin with and to others in the community of faith (James 5:16)

Confession of evil works in the first beginning of good works. - Augustine of Hippo

At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive. Because of this, He sets into motion the entire redemptive process that culminated in the cross and was confirmed in the resurrection. The usual notion of what Jesus did on the cross runs something like this: people were so bad and so mean and God was so angry with them that He could not forgive them unless somebody big enough took the rap for the whole lot of them. Nothing could be further from the truth. Love, not anger, brought Jesus to the cross. Golgotha came as a result of God's great desire to forgive, not His reluctance. Jesus knew that by his vicarious suffering he could actually absorb all the evil of humanity and so heal it, forget it, redeem it.

Some seem to think that when Jesus shouted "*my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" It was a moment of weakness (Mark 15:34). Not at all. *This was his moment of greatest triumph.* Jesus, who had walked in constant communion with the Father, now became so totally identify with humankind that he was the actual embodiment of sin. As Paul writes, "*he made him to be sin who knew no sin.*" (Cor. 5:21) Jesus succeeded in taking into himself all the dark powers of this present evil age and defeated every one of them by the light of his presence.

This redemptive process is a great mystery hidden in the heart of God. The discipline of confession helps the believer to grow into "mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:3) Confession is a difficult discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of Saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We cannot Bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others.

Authority to Forgive

The followers of Jesus Christ have been given the authority to receive the confession of sin and to forgive it in His name. "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (John 20:23) What a wonderful privilege. Why do we shy away from such a life-giving ministry? If we, not out of merit but sheer grace, have been given the authority to set others free, how dare we withhold this great gift!

Counsel in the Receiving of a Confession

Like any spiritual ministry there is a preparation involved in being able to hear rightly the confession of a brother or sister. We begin by learning to Leah under the cross. Bonhoeffer writes, "Anybody who lives beneath the cross and who has discerned in the cross of Jesus the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart will find there is no sin that can ever be align to him. Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sin of a brother." This is the one thing that will save us from ever being offended in the confession of another. Finally, it is extremely important that you pray for the person and not just counsel with them. Before or during the prayer we should announce to them that the forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ is now real and effective for them. We can save this in words and tones of genuine authority Will we have all of heaven behind the absolution (John 20:22, 23) the discipline of confession brings into pretense. God is calling into being in a church that can openly confess it's frail humanity and know the forgiving and empowering grace of Christ. Honestly leads to confession, and confession leads to change. May God gives grace to the church once again to recover the discipline of confession.

St. Augustine of Hippo Biography

Name at birth: Aurelius Augustinus

Augustine was born in a Roman province in 354 and educated at Carthage. As a young man he became interested in philosophy, with little interest in Christianity until a religious experience in his early thirties. By 396 he had become bishop of Hippo, and his sermons and writings gained fame, notably his *Confessions* and the treatise *City of God*. His notions of God's grace, free will and Original Sin had a great influence on Christian theology. He died in 430.

Confess your sins to each other and

I. *Exomologeō* to confess

II. to profess

- A. acknowledge openly and joyfully
- B. to one's honor: to celebrate, give praise to
- C. to profess that one will do something, to promise, agree, engage

pray for each other so that you may be healed.

I. *Euchomai* to pray to God

to wish, to pray, to pray for

Type of Prayer to pray:

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.