

## A MISSION IS COMING: BE PREPARED TO ENTER THE ROOM

ONCE UPON A TIME, Bd. Raymond of Capua, the spiritual director of St. Catherine of Siena, was doubting the special favors granted to St. Catherine so he put her to the test, asking her for the favor of feeling a “great and extraordinary contrition for his sins”. He knew that “when contrition for sin rises up in our hearts this is always a great sign of the grace of God.” The devil would never grant such a request.

The next day, as he was talking to the saint, there came before his mind an unusual vision of his sins such that ... “the cataracts of my flinty heart were loosed and fountains of water overflowed to lay bare the depth of my sins: I burst out into tears, so violently that (I say it with shame) I almost felt my heart would break. Catherine in her wisdom, having come for this very purpose, no sooner saw the state I was in than she stopped talking and let me go on crying and sobbing. After a while, still crying, I began to wonder about this strange event, and then I remembered what I had asked her for the previous evening and the promise she had made. ‘Is this the [contrition] I asked for yesterday?’ I said. ‘It is,’ she replied, and getting up, and, if I remember rightly, tapping me on the shoulder, she said, ‘Never forget the graces of God!’” St. Catherine had a way about her of making people remember their sins. What if this same grace were granted to us? What would it be like? Imagine finding yourself in a certain room...

I FOUND myself in the room. There were no distinguishing features save for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones we used to find in libraries listing titles by author or subject in alphabetical order.

But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read “*People I Have Liked*.” I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then, in a flash, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn’t match.

A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named “*Friends*” was next to one marked “*Friends I Have Betrayed*.”

The titles covered everything and were exact. “*Books I Have Read*,” “*Lies I Have Told*,” “*Consolation I Have Given*,” “*Jokes I Have Laughed At*,” “*Things I Have Done in Anger*,” “*Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath*.” I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Alas, other times there were fewer than I hoped.

I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my 30 years to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my own signature.

When I pulled out the file marked “*Songs I Have Listened To*,” I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly and yet after two or three yards, I hadn’t found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not only by the quality of music, but also by the vast amount of time I knew that file represented.

Nearby I saw the file bearing the title “*Time I Have Spent in Prayer*.” The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could easily count the cards it contained.

When I came to a file marked “*Lustful Thoughts and Actions*,” I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke upon me. One thought dominated my mind: “No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!” In a frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn’t matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge any cards. I became desperate and pulled out a single card with great effort, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it.

Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot, leaned my forehead against the wall, and let out a long, self-pitying sigh. I cried out, “No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key.” But then I saw someone come in. I knew immediately it was the Lord. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn’t bear to watch. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His Face, I saw a deep sorrow. He seemed to go intuitively to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one?

Finally He turned and looked at me with compassion in His eyes from across the room. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and then the sorrow came. I began to weep. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of sorrow and from the overwhelming shame of it all. I wept for having offended God so deeply.

He walked over and said, “Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.” Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Groaning, He started at one end of the room and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card in an ink that was a rich, dark red. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His Blood. I don’t think I’ll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, “It is finished. Your sins are forgiven you! Arise! Go and sin no more.”

I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There were still cards to be written. ♣

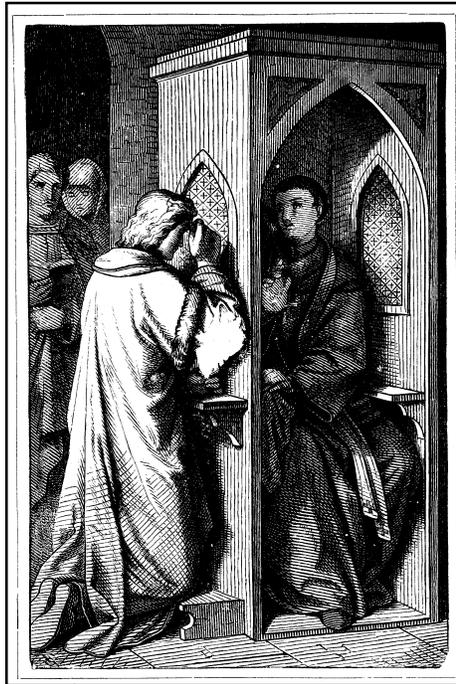
**T**HE ROOM helps us see how the Sacrament of Confession really works. There are five parts to consider.

1. We acknowledge our sins through an **EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE**. Our Blessed Lord taught us: **“know the truth, and the truth will make you free”** (John 8:32). The first step in our being set free from the bondage of sin is the recognition of our sins in complete humility and truth. The story indicates this when the man acknowledges the cards as belonging to himself and not to someone else: *“Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my own signature.”*
2. We are sorry for our sins. This **SORROW** must be of the will and not just the emotions. In other words, even if we do not *feel* sorry for our sins, we must *be* sorry for them in our will at least for each and every mortal sin. The story displays this when the man weeps over his sins: *“And then the sorrow came.”*
3. We must **CONFESS** our sins to a priest who acts *in persona Christi capitis*, that is, in the person of Christ the Head. Did not our Blessed Lord give this power to the Apostles who in turn passed it on so that we could have access to it even today? We read in St. John’s Gospel: **“[Jesus] breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained’”** (John 20:23). This part of the Sacrament is represented in the story by the fact that Our Lord read the cards: *“I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards.”*
4. If our confessions are to be valid, they must be **INTEGRAL**. An integral confession is one in which we confess all our Mortal Sins in kind and number (e.g., I missed Sunday Mass so many times). Never forget—the only mortal sin that cannot be forgiven in the confessional is the one that is not brought to confession or the one that is purposely left out! How can our Blessed Lord sign His name over ours if we are not willing to give the sin to Him in the Confessional? In the story, this part of confession is represented as follows: *“Why did*

*He have to read every one?”* and *“He started at one end of the room and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card ... It was written with His Blood.”* We too can have Our Lord, “write off” our sins by taking advantage of the Sacrament of Confession. In this Sacrament, the Precious Blood of Our Savior is applied in time to our souls to wipe away all sins present there. Note that we can confess our venial sins inside or outside of the confessional and receive forgiveness as long as we are sorry for them. This is not true, however, of mortal sins. They must be brought to the confessional. St. Jean Vianney once said, “The sins we try to hide, always reappear. To hide one’s sins well, one must confess them well.”

5. We must complete the confession by doing **PENANCE** and resolving to **AMEND OUR LIVES**. We must satisfy the justice of God by at least starting the process of paying the debt of punishment incurred by our sins. This we can do by performing penances. We must also strive not to commit the same sins over again by amending our lives. The story represents this by saying: *“There were still cards to be written.”*

**F**EAR NOT to approach the confessional by keeping in mind that the Lamb awaits you there to remove your sins. St. Therese of Lisieux expressed it in this way: Our Lord “is the perfection of perfectness;



nevertheless He has one great infirmity, if I may dare say it—He is blind! And there is one thing He does not know—arithmetic! If He could see and calculate properly, our sins would surely constrain Him to annihilate us; but instead His love for us makes Him positively blind ... But to produce this blindness and prevent Him from making a simple addition sum you must know how to capture His heart ... That is His weak side.”

We capture His Sacred Heart in the confessional. Once this Merciful Heart has bled for us, God becomes blind and unable to add up our sins. Take advantage of the Sacrament of Confession now by confessing **ALL** your sins to Him Who takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but

rather that he should turn from his way and live (cf. Ezek. 18:23).

Let us work toward making our minds and hearts places for God and God alone, even as we go about our daily affairs so that on the Day of Judgment, we will not be ashamed to walk with Our Blessed Lord through all the thoughts and actions of our entire lives. May He may find us faithful in all things. ✠