In the Name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Ghost ... Amen.

Today’s Gospel tells us of what occurred on Easter evening after several appearances to individuals during the day our Lord comes to the upper room on Easter evening to show himself to the ten Apostles gathered there and other disciples. And as the Gospel relates, He imparted to them the power to forgive sins; which is the Sacrament of Penance.

We see, therefore, that at the last gathering that our Lord had with the Apostles, before his death, He gave them the great gift of the mass, the Holy Sacrifice. And in order that the sacrifice be available to all men, for all generations, He gave them the sacred Priesthood; without which, of course, there can be no mass.

In His death and resurrection our Lord fulfilled His promise to give them the Sacrament of Baptism. It is, of course, in the death and resurrection of Christ that baptism finds its power. And from that great miracle, that it draws its power. And then on His return to them, our Lord, the great gift giver, has another gift; which is the Sacrament of Penance.

I’m sure that all of you have spoken to Protestants, and whether you have brought the subject up or the Protestants, they make a big thing out of protesting that: “It is not necessary for me to confess my sins to a priest; I confess my sins directly to Christ.”

The next time a Protestant says that to you, you should say: “What do you confess; and how often? And how do you know that your sins are forgiven? And how do you know that your contrition is sufficiently good? How are you so sure that God forgives you?”

The answer to the last question would probably be: “God always forgives because he is a good God. And all that one needs to do to have his sins forgiven is to repent of them.”

And to such an answer we would say: “The Church says ... ‘it is not bad enough that you are a sinner; worse, you are a proud sinner in that you are deciding what is necessary to have your sins forgiven’.”

What the scriptures indicate that, with regards to having one’s sins forgiven, God did not come to sinners he came to the Church. That little group there in the upper room was the embryonic Church. And it was to those who would have the power to forgive that He gave and set down the conditions of absolution. In other words, it is the Church which must decide who is worthy of forgiveness; not the sinner himself, who is not worthy essentially of being forgiven. It is only due to the great largest of God that he will be forgiven provided that he meets the conditions.
Furthermore, we would say to our Protestant friend: “Your problem is that you do not appreciate the full dimension of your evil. You are inclined to think that it is an easy task and that your sins are an insignificant matter. You Protestants, we would say, that all sins are equally great when you mean that they are all equally slight; something that can be forgiven when you make a move to say ‘I’m sorry’.”

The fact of the matter is sin, and we are speaking mainly of mortal sin because they are the great sins which must be forgiven in the confessional. Mortal sin cannot be forgiven simply because someone says “I’m sorry”. And let me stress this point, my dear people, this applies to those outside the Church as well as in the Church.

All mortal sin must be forgiven in the confessional; which is another reason why those outside the Church will not be forgiven. In order to have their sins forgiven they must dispose themselves for this forgiveness. They must meet those conditions. And the primary condition is to be disposed for this Sacrament; which those outside the Church cannot receive.

When we talk about sin, we must not imagine that it is a slight matter. We must not imagine that because God being omnipotent, and since nothing is difficult for God, that therefore, since He can effortlessly forgive sins, that it is a slight matter for Him to do it.

To begin with, we must always bear in mind that it cost him His own life in order that this sacrament have any potency whatsoever; and that was no slight matter.

As all of us know there is probably not a man on earth who would suffer the crucifixion for his own salvation. But, God would. And it took that much in order that sin, no matter how casually committed and easily forgotten, may be forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance.

The fact of the matter is that when we say that sin is an offence against almighty God; we mean that it is a tremendous affair. We mean that it is a grave disorientation of the sinner against the whole universe; God included. That when a man sins he alienates himself from all that is; God included. And in order that he might be reconciled the powers of heaven must move.

And we must never forget that there is no relationship between heaven and earth, between God and man, except through His sacred priesthood. And His sacred priesthood is operative only within the Church; His Church.

And just as there is no way to worship God worthily and satisfactorily except through the mass, which is offered within the Church, so forgiveness is not granted except through the Church, and through that channel of the holy priesthood, and through that cannel of the mass.

All the graces of heaven and all its forgiveness are derived from the mass. And those who despise the mass cannot say that they are sufficiently sorry.
On Confession

Father James F. Wathen

April 4, 1991 – Audio Transcript

When we think of mortal sin we must think of an attack of the individual upon all God’s creations, upon all God’s order. And one in establishing himself in a state of sin also establishes himself in a state of enmity between all that God has done, all that He does, and intends to do.

You know that at the time of the crucifixion, when men ganged up on Christ and put Him to death, the earth quaked, the wind roared, and the powers of heaven were shaken; as if to protest that: “We are not responsible for this ... it is They”. Nature does not offend him but men do.

And so, in order that sin to be forgiven the Holy machinery of the Church must act. And it must act through the Holy Priesthood and the Priesthood must act in two ways. And it can only be in the confessional that this occurs: By the power of Orders, and the power of Jurisdiction; which means that only the priest can forgive sin.

We know that the Protestants rebel at this but we say: “You are a sinner and you have no right to rebel. Your sins are your rebellion and your heresy makes it worse; it confirms it.”

And in the confessional you will know that the priest wears the Stole, the violet stole, the color representing the Church in mourning over the sad fact of even one sin; the Stole representing the jurisdiction of the Church in action because it is the sacred court of the Church that must act in order to forgive this thing. It is not sufficient for the sinner to get around to saying “I’m sorry”. He must present himself to the sacred court of Christ and he must do it before the priest who represents the whole world, the whole of creation. But, mainly, he represents the Church; which is power on earth of forgiveness.

Furthermore, the Church has given this man, a sinner himself but someone has to do it, the power of Christ whereby he may absolve.

And the Church designates this man to make the decision whether there is enough sign there that the man is worthy: “Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them. Whose sins you shall retain they are retained.” The priest must make the decision.

When, therefore, you go to confession, it behooves you to think what a great thing this is. And it behooves you to think what a great thing it is to reject, to deny, and to refuse as those outside the Church so lightly do.

When you go to confession make sure that you are worthy; that God and the Church forgive you. And to the extent that you labor to be worthy you will be disinclined to return to the same sin.

The more difficult it is for you to get forgiveness and to convince or be convinced that you are truly sorry; the more motive you will have for staying away from it in the future.

All of us know this but all of this, our Lord said, when he said on Easter Sunday, like the great flower grown out of the earth, on Easter Sunday morning “Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them. Whose sins you shall retain they are retained.”