



Sacraments 28/36: The Tri-partite Theory of Reconciliation

Sacramentum Tantum What the Sacramental Rite itself looks like. This includes the essentials of the ritual, including both the matter and the form. The penitent feels sorrow for their sin, they go to a priest, say aloud their sins, receive absolution, and then go and fulfill their penance.

Res Tantum What the immediate result of the Sacrament is, the grace given and its ultimate meaning. The purpose of Confession is ongoing cleansing from sin and the habits of sin. Our Baptismal purity is reinstated and we are once again in relationship with God, which sin had either damaged or broken. We are also in relationship again with the Church and each other.

Res et Sacramentum What the abiding, everlasting purpose of the Sacrament is. While Confession does not have a permanent “Character”, there is an abiding purpose. We do not know how to love until we are first loved. We do not know how to forgive until we are first forgiven. We do not know how to do penance for our sins until we are first forgiven them and see how Jesus did the penance for us. The everlasting purpose of Reconciliation is to create a contrite penitent. Having received this Sacrament, I now know how to feel true sorrow for what I have done and start to avoid such sinful situations in the future.

At the beginning of Mass, we have a Penitential Rite. In this confession and absolution, we are forgiven our venial sin. Yet we still must go to Confession to take care of mortal sin. Mortal sin has 3 parts to it: the sin is of a serious/grave nature in and of itself, we knew that it was serious and sinful, and we freely chose to do it anyway. If any one of these 3 is missing, the sin is still venial and needs cleansing. With venial sin, the relationship with God and each other is damaged. With mortal sin, the relationship is broken. While in mortal sin, we should not receive the Eucharist until we have received absolution for this sin.

For the validity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, at least one mortal or venial sin must be confessed. There has to be some “Matter” for the Sacrament, otherwise there is nothing for the priest to absolve.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Why do I have to go to confession?