

Dear Friends,

I suppose the announcement about expanding the confession schedule must have sounded like it came out of left field. Why would we want to do that? There are several interesting reasons I would like to share with you.

Last month, the priests of the Rockford Diocese gathered to hear a priest named Fr. Dennis McManus speak on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. While this wasn't a topic that thrilled me, I was very surprised by what he had to say. He spoke about the pain and anger that is going on in the world; much of it caused by sin – especially sins of pride, greed, and all the other deadly sins. He also spoke of the fact that the Church is supposed to be a place of healing and peace. However, as a reaction to the fact that over the last 45 years people have stopped going to reconciliation, parishes and priests have stopped offering opportunities for receiving the Sacrament as frequently as in the past. While there is a legitimate cause and effect truth here, the fact remains that Confession of Sins is still a vital and necessary Sacrament for the life of Catholics.

He spoke about a priest in a small Eastern European parish who was given the chance to study at a nearby university. He lived in a rectory and was asked to help out as much as he possibly could. He requested that the pastor allow him to hear confessions from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. every morning and the pastor refused. But this visiting priest persisted in making his request. Finally the pastor agreed, but he wanted an accurate report at the end of each week. The first week, no one came. The second week, four people came. The next week, six people came until by the end of the summer the visiting priest was hearing confessions from 7:00 A.M. (and he was greeted by a line going around the church sanctuary and that spilled outside of the church), until around 9:30 A.M. when he had to leave for his studies.

Things like this happen from time to time. But I have a more personal story to tell. Every year since I've been a pastor, I've always celebrated Communal Penance services during Advent and Lent. Inspired by Fr. McManus, I decided not to have a Communal Penance service this Lent and offered longer periods of private confessions instead. We had no readings, homilies, or long examinations of conscience. The first night, Fr. Heraty and I heard confessions from 6:30 P.M. until 8:30 P.M. The next night I heard confessions from 6:30 P.M. to 9:45 P.M. The time flew by. I had no idea I had been in the confessional for over three hours.

I believe that if we offer more opportunities for people to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they will come. Some people probably don't want to wait until 4:00 on a Saturday afternoon to go to confession. They might not want people waiting for Mass to start, to see them. I appreciate that. People are often running errands on Saturday mornings and they might find it much more to their liking to come to confession while they are out running around.

The church is a quiet place to be on Saturday mornings. By offering confessions at 11:00 A.M. you will have the opportunity to pray quietly and privately as you examine your conscience before going into the confessional and to fulfill your penance afterwards.

I hope you will find this expansion of our Confession schedule to be helpful for you.

The story of God's salvation continues.

In joyful hope,
Fr. Tim Seigel