

Heart of the World LI

For the last few of weeks we have been considering the practical advice that our Blessed Mother has given us at Medjugorje—the Five Stones of Prayer, Fasting, Mass, reading/praying with the Bible, and Confession. In giving these, she is drawing on the biblical account of David and Goliath (see 1Sam 17). She compares our attempt to live authentically Christian lives in this secularized society as a similarly mismatched fight. However, just as David went out to meet Goliath in battle armed with sling, five stones, and confidence in the Lord, so must we.

The fifth stone: **Confession:**

In part III of his Summa Theologica, St. Thomas Aquinas reasons that sin sets us on a trajectory away from God that we cannot arrest on our own. If we imagine sin as placing us on an inclined plain covered in pea-stones with nothing to grab onto or any way to stop our fall, we can begin to understand our plight. For us, the movement away from God resulting from one sin is unstoppable, never mind irreversible. Not only can we not stop, we cannot even *want* to stop(!) on our own.

Thomas goes on to reason that if the above is the case, then we cannot even repent (feel contrite) for our sins unless God placed that in our hearts. If God placed it in our hearts to repent, then it stands to reason that He is in the process of rescuing us—which means that He must have *already* forgiven us the offense!

To state it another way, God has already forgiven us the offense in order to arrest the fall and place repentance in our hearts. It therefore follows that all we need to do to complete the reconciliation is actually to apologize. If this is the case, then what in the world is the point of the Sacrament of Confession?! There *must* be more to it.

The ‘more’ that Thomas came to understand was healing. The Sacrament of Confession is necessary not so much for the forgiveness of sins, but the healing (from the sin) and strengthening (from God’s help) that results. This is why Jesus requires us to use the Sacrament.

God has no desire merely to treat our symptomatic sins, but to heal their root causes. We need to do some work and get to the roots of our habitual sins (the vast majority of which are compensation for these ailments). We can then give them to Christ and experience what the saints have referred to as an encounter with Redeeming Love.

It also helps to prevent us from an alternative where we run to the Sacrament in order to *feel* better, which very unfortunately, is more akin to using the Sacrament something like toilet paper. When you go to the doctor, would you rather be cured or *feel* better?

Confession is a *very* powerful stone against the Enemy as it strips bare his schemes and heals us of the damage.

*Fr. Michael*