

The Sacrament of Confession
DOW Synod September 2026

INTRODUCTION

Thank you to Bp. Hammond for the invitation and for John and Judy Creel for their support and arranging this.

I have been asked to speak to you today on the Sacrament of Confession.

When many people hear the word Confession, their mind goes to what they have either experienced in a Roman Catholic Church.

Or maybe less accurately, what they see on TV or in a movie.

The Priest sits on one side of an obscured mesh screen, and the penitent sits or kneels on the other.

Some of us have this precise set up in our own Churches. We do at St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

The Roman Church makes confession more mandatory and regular than Anglicans do generally.

And the Eastern Orthodox Churches, being closer to us in many ways, generally require confession once a year but encourage it to be done on a regular basis as well.

And yet it is much less used in Anglicanism. This is both interesting and unfortunate.

Confession is maybe one of the most misunderstood sacraments of the Church...

...*and* maybe one that is least taken advantage of or utilized.

This is unfortunate because in confessing our sins, we can find real and true freedom. True happiness and joy.

Confession is cathartic.

Most people would agree that sharing a problem we are having or sharing something we have done with a friend or a loved one can be very helpful.

We feel we have been heard and cared about.

We feel we have received support from someone. And we feel many times that a great weight has been lifted from us when we do confess something.

We many times find a great peace of mind after we have unburdened ourselves of something by sharing something with a friend.

This should be the same kind of experience we receive as we confess our sins to God in the presence of a priest.

God is going to be a much better friend, listener and sympathizer than any human is.

He understands our frailty.

He sent His Only Begotten Son to live with us and like us for a time.

So, He certainly understands us and sympathizes with our condition.

Confession is a sacrament, then, in which we approach God and He hears us and there we find what we can never find on the same level as confessing to a friend...a human friend.

And that is forgiveness, remission, and healing.

But it's much more than that.

Spirituality

To begin a talk on confession, it is important to first think about who we are as Christians.

Or who we are as human beings and what our ultimate end goal is.

Why were we created?

Do we have a purpose?

There are answers to these questions.

We are creatures, created by God in the image of God.

Adam and Eve, our first parents, were created by God and in the case of Adam, God breathed His life-giving Spirit into the body of Adam at first and made him a living creature.

Eve would be created out of the side of Adam a short time later.

Describing their creation this way with this word choice...

...there is an emphasis on the superiority of man, and it shows how we are of special interest to God.

The rest of creation is mentioned only as things coming into being.

Created by God and declared to be good.

The plants. The animals. The fish of the sea and so forth.

But not the same as the creation of man.

God creates man out of the earth. He breathes His lifegiving spirit into the man.

So, from this process, we can see that we are of a higher creation than the animals and the plants.

From there, man was given a task.

He was to tend the creation around him and to act on God's behalf.

Man was given responsibilities to fill the earth and subdue the creation...take responsibility for its flourishing.

This was God essentially giving the command to man, to function on earth in a similar way to how God functions in heaven.

As God created man, in His image, man is now to create as well.

He is to pro-create and have children.

He is to create by expanding the Garden of Eden outward to the world.

The world outside of Eden is chaos and unsettled.

Adam's role was to bring Eden to the world and form it after God's intent.

But man misused the gifts given to him and the original state of goodness he inherited by nature, and ignored that mandate given to him in Paradise.

He consequently fell from the great heights that God had first placed him.

He did not conform his actions to God's will.

The original goal for Adam and Eve was cut short by their sinful act of disobedience.

This stunted their growth toward maturity.

And St. Paul says in Romans that the whole creation, now affected by Adam's sin, and it waits in anticipation for *our* redemption.

The creation awaits the redemption of mankind.

More evidence that we are central to God's creation.

But because of sin, we fall short of what God intends us to be like.

Sin, from the Greek word *hamartia*, means "missing the mark" or "going off course."

Sin is anything that causes us to fall short of the life God desires for us.

Sin is disobedience toward God and God's will.

It is choosing to go in the way of death rather in the way of life.

In short, we can say, "sin is an unnatural state of man, a condition brought about by the destruction, distortion and loss of something good which was originally present."¹

One other thing Adam and Eve were to do as God's image bearers was to grow more and more into the likeness of God.

This is still what we are all to be doing as well as human beings and of course as Christians.

This goal is still in place for us to achieve.

¹ <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/spirituality/orthodox-spirituality/sin1>

We are to become more and more like God...like Christ.

This begins at our baptism when the image is restored to us. The restoration and the road back to the original state begins there.

The Prayer Books says we are regenerated at baptism.

From there we are to proceed from a *restored image* of God to the *likeness of God*.

We must strive for this all our life through personal holiness. Through prayer.

Through the receiving of the sacraments.

And as these things are practiced by us through the Grace of God...

...we are more and more able to reflect this to the world around us in our behavior.

This process is called by a another Greek word, *theosis*.

More often we hear or use the word *sanctification*.

But these two words are not exactly the same thing.

Theos means God. And *osis* which refers to a state or condition.

To be sanctified is a similar term. It means to be or become holy. *Sanctus* being the word for *holy*.

We use words like *sanctify*. To make holy. The bells we ring during Holy Communion are the *sanctus* bells.

They are rung at the time of the Consecration of the Bread and Wine, because they are becoming holy food and drink for us.

Theosis again is similar, but speaks more to our nature as God's image bearers.

We are imperfect creatures, but by God's grace, we are being made more and more like His Son Jesus Christ.

But before you get nervous about this word...some hear the word *theosis* and think it means we are in the process of becoming God.

We are not.

God is a unique person with certain attributes and powers that we will never attain.

We will never be equal to God.

We are however in the process of becoming so much more than we are right now.

We are in a process of becoming what Adam and Eve and all of us were intended to become.

This process is what was halted or stunted at the fall of Adam.

The purpose of our sanctification process all through our life, is to grow into that image of God...to become an icon of God...an icon of Christ...and to live for all eternity reflecting God. The primary source of this concept comes from St. Peter.

He writes in his second letter, (2 Peter 1:3–4), “[God’s] divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

[4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them *you may become partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” (ESV)

That is an amazing statement by St. Peter. We are becoming partakers of the divine nature.

God is working in us by His Holy Spirit, so that we become partakers in His divine nature.

This is *theosis*.

This is what we are becoming by God’s grace and in imitating Jesus Christ in our daily lives.

The early Church Fathers took St. Peter’s words very much to heart and devised phrases such as “God became human so that the human might become god.”

That quote comes from St. Athanasius. You know him as the main proponent of orthodox theology at the Council of Nicaea.

Athanasius is NOT saying we become equal to God.

But he is saying that there is a divinity in our nature that God is developing by His Spirit in us.

The Christian life is then to be one of constant growth, continuous effort leading to moral improvement and spiritual growth and maturity.

We are taught by Christ to “Be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48.

St. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1:3–4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and blameless before him*. (ESV)

And St. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:14–16, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy...

...you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (ESV)

So, by now you should be seeing where this is going. And how this relates to confession.

And why all this background is necessary to understand what is so important about confession and why we need to practice it.

You should be seeing why it is important to have this foundation as a set up for a discussion on confession.

SCRIPTURE

Our next stop should be the Scriptures.

The Bible has much to say about Confession and confessing our sins.

St. John writes in his first Epistle, 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...

...and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (ESV).

That is a bold promise.

If we confess our sins, God is *faithful* to forgive them and also *just* to forgive them.

God can forgive sins when He wants. He doesn’t need an elaborate mechanism to do so.

But He has instituted a process whereby we can and do confess our sins.

And when He does so, we can know that we have been cleansed from *all* unrighteousness.

That is so important.

All that we confess to him with a penitent heart is forgiven and no longer remembered.

No longer held against us.

This means that we must not leave our time of Confession holding on to doubt.

God has promised to forgive the sins you confess.

You must believe Him.

Early Church Confession

Now in the early days of the Church, Christians would stand within the congregation and confess their sins publicly.

You can imagine how this would have worked as a deterrent among other things.

If you had to stand up right now and tell all of us your sins, just for today or the past few days, you would most likely be horrified at the prospect.

St. James encourages us in chapter 5:16 – “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (ESV).

Keep that word “*healed*” in mind, as we go along, by the way.

But the early Church understood that St. James is calling on the members of the Church to do this publicly.

Confess your sins to one another so that you may be healed.

This is also conditional.

It is the means by which you are *healed* of your sins. If you wish to receive healing, confess your sins to one another.

To one another within the Christian community.

Acts 19:18 – St. Luke writes about converts to the Christian faith, “...many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. [19] And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them *in the sight of all*. [again, publicly].

Confessing their sins. Confessing their deeds. Renouncing sinful ways and practices.

But this again was all done as a public confession...a public practice.

We don't have a very clear timeline, but as the early church grew in numbers, it became more difficult for this type of public confession to occur.

Perhaps because as the congregation grew in size you might be spending an inordinate amount of time hearing everyone confessing one after another.

So, the process began to be narrowed down significantly.

Priests began to hear or witness confessions of sin privately on behalf of the Church.

The Priest was entrusted to hear the confession of a person and to offer council and advice and absolution on behalf of the entire community.

It is important for us to remember that Christians in the early Church did not see themselves as individuals as much as members of a community.

A community who are all going in the same direction.

All striving toward holiness.

They saw themselves as co-strugglers, co-laborers, laboring together for the kingdom. This is why the public confession.

It brought unity.

It brought accountability.

If you think about it, you can picture how this would have truly brought people together in love as a family.

A group of people all caring for one another and caring not to disrupt the rest of the community either with their sinful behavior.

This is why it would have worked as a deterrent as well.

When one is confronted by the whole community, knowing that his sin has affected the whole community, it makes one more careful in his life.

Repentance

At the very heart of the theology of confession is the concept of Repentance.

Repentance does not mean only to feel bad about something you have done or said.

It is not just saying you are sorry to someone.

It is not just apologizing.

Those are all important, but they are not the whole picture of repentance.

Repentance is a transformative process which happens over the entire life of the Christian.

It is not just a one-time thing.

It is ongoing practice until we die.

But the word ***Repentance*** means turning away from sin AND turning toward God.

Remember we are in a process of getting back to where we grow into the likeness of God.

Remember our theosis.

Repentance is a changed heart.

A heart that is sorry for the sins it has committed.

But it also includes a desire to change and grow in the way God desires us to grow.

Once Jesus began His public ministry, one of the things He said was, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” (Mt. 4:17).

This is another passage that sometimes goes right past us when we read it or hear it.

We probably think more about this Kingdom that Jesus is speaking of rather than focusing on the command to “repent.”

The Greek word there in Scripture is *metanoia*. It means *repent*.

What Jesus is saying, is, it is an active call to change your way of life...and be constantly doing so.

It is to continually be in pursuit of a life that is marked by holiness, and goodness and virtue and godliness.

The ultimate goal again, is being fully prepared for and worthy of inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven.

Confession is not just an act between us and God.

It also has implications reaching outward toward the wider Church community.

So, though we are not confessing our sins publicly by naming them in front of a group, like the early Church did.

We all still confess our sins together when we come together for Holy Communion...as well as when we do the Morning and Evening Offices.

When we sin, it is not just that we have violated a law of God.

It is a violation of the relationship we have with others.

It affects the relationship we have with the Church body.

The General Confession

In the Book of Common Prayer, on page 75 we recite the General Confession each time we gather for Holy Communion.

But first I want to mention the exhortation or the invitation to confession we find in the Morning and Evening Offices.

Here, our Prayer Book gives us the clearest reason for our confession.

I will read the whole thing, but notice the reason we do it in the Mass and in Morning and Evening Prayer.

We do so, “when we meet together.” So that corporate confession is still with us.

We do not do the individual practice, but we continue to do so publicly, in front of one another and with one another.

The invitation reads thus, “DEARLY beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us, in sundry places, to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy. And although we ought, at all times, humbly to acknowledge our sins before God; yet ought we chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.”

So, as they all are in the Prayer Book...perfectly crafted to cover all aspects of a topic or issue.

But to the General Confession on page 75 of the Prayer Book.

It's called the General Confession because it is made publicly, corporately and generally.

Meaning it is not specific in nature.

Though specific sins should or could be recalled if possible, when we are saying these words...certain sins might be coming to mind...it is the General Confession, because it is done as a group or a community.

And as such, it creates a different atmosphere than does an individual private confession.

It calls us to notice that we are, as a body, repenting of our sins and preparing as a body or a community to receive Holy Communion.

Just as Holy Communion is a group practice, so is the General Confession.

It allows each member to know that he is not alone, but a fellow sinner with the rest of the Church.

The text is very specific however in its intention.

It calls only those who truly and earnestly repent of their sins.

So we are right away called to be serious about it.

Liturgical worship can sometimes allow the mind to go into auto pilot and we can lose focus.

So more attention is needed, which is good because this means more effort is required on our part.

It calls us to a seriousness about our sinful nature and proclivities.

It calls us to be in love and charity with our neighbors, and the intention to lead a new life, once those sins are confessed.

We are to think about living a new life after we have confessed our sins, intending to go forward...

...trying once again to do all we can to follow the example of Christ.

It calls us to “draw near with faith.”

Faith in Scripture is really more calling on us to be faithful.

Faith in Scripture is not just a belief in something.

It is an action of trying to live faithfully toward God and neighbor.

We must believe certain things with mind, heart and soul, and then live by them in the course of everyday life.

The Priest or Deacon then says, “take this holy Sacrament to your comfort.”

This Holy Sacrament is sometimes understood to be the Holy Communion that is to follow, but the Sacrament of Confession should also be taken or done to our holy comfort.

For in confessing our sins and hearing the absolution, we should be comforted by this Sacrament as well.

It is a comforting thing for us to hear that God forgives us after we confess our sins to Him.

Finally, it mentions that we are to do so, “devoutly kneeling.” Or as other older Prayer Books say, “*Meekly kneeling upon your knees.*”

The understanding here is that much prayer was done standing in the early Church.

So, through the Prayer for the Whole State of Christ’s Church, you would be standing not kneeling.

So, it makes more sense when the Priest or Deacon turns and tells you kneel down....if you are actually NOT kneeling at the time than if you are.

THE CONFESSION

The confession itself is, as the Oxford Prayer Book Commentary says, “...less concise and objective

in tone than is customary for liturgical acts of contrition. It is fervent in emotion, almost overwrought in its expressions, as it endeavors to state our deep sorrow for sin and the grievous and intolerable burden of its remembrance.”

He does note there that the wording of the Prayer as being quite filled with emotion.

We *acknowledge* and *bewail* our manifold sins and wickedness.

Strong language. *Bewailing* sin.

In other words, this confession is not to be done lightly. It is to be done with real contrition and hatred for the sins we have committed.

It also describes us as *wicked sinners*...or the sins we commit as wicked.

This sometimes makes people uncomfortable, but it is truly how sin is described in the Bible.

We say that we commit them from time to time.

Notice that it does not emphasize that we are sinning all of the time, but from time to time.

This is not to lighten the importance of sin, nor is it to say that we are not sinners very much.

But it more emphasizes that we from time to time *most grievously* commit them.

Sometimes we sin.

Sometimes we *really* sin.

And we do so in thought, word and deed. In the things we think, speak and do.

Thinking can be sinful, depending on what it is we are thinking about.

But letting that sinful thought become an action or a word is even worse.

Words and deeds are of course not necessary to address.

We have all committed them by speaking harshly, cursing people, etc.

St. James (3:5–10) reminds us that, “...the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.

“The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. [7] For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.” (ESV)

Next it notes that our sins provoke God. They provoke His Divine Majesty. They provoke His wrath.

God’s holiness and majesty are not to in any way be associated with sin. God cannot look on sin.

We must cleanse ourselves by confessing our sins so that we may be an acceptable people before God.

When we sin, we defile ourselves and incur God's disfavor...or worse, His wrath and indignation.

Therefore, we "most earnestly repent."

This is not a casual act, but an earnest one, done from the heart.

Remember we are seeking to be more and more like Christ.

We are seeking theosis.

We are seeking sanctification.

We are seeking healing.

We must earnestly pursue Christlikeness in our lives.

We must be heartily sorry for our sins and "misdoings."

This must come from the heart. Our hearts must be continually watched for sinful thoughts and actions.

Jesus tells us that, we should hear and understand that "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." (ESV)

And "...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person."

The heart is the seat of all that we are.

The heart is the place of our thoughts.

It is the core of who we are.

And out of the heart comes the defilement.

So, the heart must be continually cleansed so that sin is managed by regular confession.

Jesus goes on, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. [20] These are what defile a person." (ESV)

Continuing with our Confession, we say, "the remembrance of our sins is "grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable."

The burden of our sins is intolerable. We cannot bear them on our own.

Since we are unable to bear them, we must confess them.

We may for a while or even a long time, bear the burden of unconfessed sins.

But this is unhealthy for us.

We should confess them, find absolution for them and then find ways to make right things we have done or left undone if possible.

Finally, we ask God to “Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy

Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake.”

Here we are asking God the Father to forgive us. Forgive us all that is Past.”

Here again we are asking God to cleanse us from every sin, remembered and not remembered by us.

Things recent and things in the distant past. We are asking God not just to forgive us the sins of the past week.

We are asking Him to cleanse us from all stain of sin.

To forgive us and cleanse us from all that is past.

Leave nothing to defile us.

All so that we may, “ever hereafter serve and please God in newness of life.”

The new life that we receive each time we confess our sins and receive absolution is like being born anew each time.

Each time we confess our sins, we are cleansed from all unrighteousness and back on that track toward holiness.

We will fall into sin again. It is inevitable. But knowing this should never lead us to despair.

We are always to remember that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We do this over and over and this is the fulfilling of the Law...or better Torah.

And finally, this is all to the “honour and glory of God’s Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

From the Oxford Prayer Book Commentary he writes, “The heinousness of sin, in whichever of its forms - thought, word, and deed' - and its terrible consequences, not only for this present life but also for the world to come, can only be fully realized as one faces and contemplates the ineffable holiness and matchless love of God here celebrated in this sacrament. The unworthy reception of this grace...

...by lack of true penitence, charity, and faith, involves the severe condemnation of God.”

All of this is just in preparation of receiving Christ’s Body and Blood.

This is why St. Paul will tell us in 1 Corinthians 11:28

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (ESV)

PRACTICE OF CONFESSION

At the start, I mentioned that the word Confession usually conjures up the confessional and the practices we are used to seeing and experiencing.

I have found that many times people that desire confession DO want to have not only an absolution, but advice, counsel and direction.

So, I have many times met with people and sat side-by-side with them in the Church, facing the altar and just having them confess their sins and then talking about it afterward.

In the Eastern practice, (before I had read about their style of Confession) the penitent stands with the priest, not divided by a screen, and they both face an icon of Christ for the confession.

The penitent is then asked to tell his sins to God, not the priest.

When the penitent is finished, the priest, having the authority of Christ, pronounces the forgiveness of God *toward* the sinner, not his own forgiveness *of* the sinner.

And there is also time for counsel by the priest and certain acts of penance are given to the penitent.

This may be a time of fasting.

A time of prayer and reflection.

An opportunity for almsgiving.

A time of reading something spiritual and Christian.

First, to stand side-by-side with the priest speaks to something important for both the penitent and the priest.

Both come before Christ as sinners. Equally sinners.

And the one making his confession is now being comforted by the friendship and support of his priest.

There is no anonymity here.

Penitent and sinner are at least together and if they know one another, all the better.

After the penitent confesses his sins, the priest can offer first absolution, which is primary.

But then he can or should call the penitent to a time of fasting.

This helps to focus the mind on God and the importance of what was confessed.

He may give them certain prayers to pray for further communication with God.

Personally, I have always wondered about what is assigned to people who go to confession in certain churches.

I have been told many times by people who have gone to confession that they were told by the priest simply to go out and say the Lord's Prayer 3 times.

They tell me that they have been assigned to pray the Lord's Prayer 3 times and to say the Hail Mary 2 times...or some combination of the two.

If this is what is being assigned, I don't see it being all that helpful.

I am sure there are many good priests who hear confessions and provide very good counsel to their parishioners.

This is not to pick on anyone in particular.

But so many tell me that their experience is somewhat unsatisfying when they have gone to confession.

They tell me that the penance that is usually prescribed is to go away from the confessional, pray the Lord's Prayer 3 times or recite the Hail Mary so many times. ..and this seems to be the end of the process.

Many times, there is no counsel given either. Just a quick task given.

First, the Lord's Prayer should not be assigned as a punishment or for penance. And why read it three times?

Because that is how it is viewed by the penitent at least many times.

The penitent needs to hear of God's forgiveness.

Each time they pray the Lord's Prayer in the future, wouldn't it just conjure up memories of sins committed and their assignment of penance?

Likewise, the Hail Mary?

The Lord's Prayer does include the line to "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

But, have those who have received this sort of advice or "penance" really received God's forgiveness?

We have to wonder, have they repented truly for their sins past?

Or do they know that they can confess their sins to a priest...

...and he only asks of them to pray the Lord's Prayer or a Hail Mary and all is set right?

What are they learning from that?

Are they learning anything about why they commit certain sins or how they might go forward trying not to do so in future?

Have they received the assurance of God's unending and unfailing love for them?
I sort of doubt it.

But again, if the request of the priest is to have the penitent go and pray for God's grace and power to overcome sin.

To go and find ways to make right what we have done wrong.

To find things to do and things to read that will occupy our minds with good and holy things.

These are not given to be punishments, but to assist the person to a quicker recovery, or healing and get them back on that track toward holiness.

Notice here that the intent is recovery. The intent is healing.

The language we should be using is more oriented toward healing rather than judgment.

We do not go to confess our sins to a judge who then renders a verdict....be it God or the priest.

We go to a divine physician, who desires to heal us and to bring us back to full health...

...and to see us fully recover and find our way toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus gave his Disciples the authority to forgive sins, which is why today priests and Bishops are the ones with which we make confession to...but maybe better to say...make confession *with*.

St. John tells us about one of the later acts Jesus did was to institute this power and authority.

When Jesus was making appearances on and off after His resurrection, He appeared at one point to the Disciples and said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." [22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "*Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.*" (ESV).

That authority continues in priests and bishops today.

Though we may be with the penitent and admit that God is the one who is confessed to, the priest still maintains the authority to offer absolution and remission...or to deny it if he believes the penitent to be...NOT penitent.

It's not the priest who can refuse the sacrament of forgiveness, but rather the circumstance of the person is in that makes it impossible.

The Priest is the Guardian of all of Christ's Sacraments.

He can't give absolution to a person who is in some sort of open and ongoing sin that he really doesn't want to stop doing.

Or if the person coming to confession is treating it like a legal transaction where you list your sins and then you expect automatic forgiveness regardless of your heart.

Remember our Prayer Book. Ye who do TRULY and EARNESTLY repent and UNFEIGNEDLY BELIEVE His holy Gospel.

As Anglicans, we have not really applied as much pressure...or maybe better to say encouragement and exhortation to our people as other Churches do to take part in the Sacrament of Confession.

So, I want us to look at confession today in maybe a new light, which I hope will encourage more people to take part in it.

And find real and true pardon, forgiveness, love, reconciliation and especially that *healing* in your future confessions.

Confession should not be just about admitting things we have done wrong and hearing that God forgives us after we do certain things.

It is a profoundly spiritual experience of forgiveness and healing. Or it can be.

You are not coming to a judge for pardon but to the Divine Physician for the healing of your soul.

Medicine is for health, not punishment...and Confession is the True Medicine for the Soul.