

The Navigator



The Newsletter of the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan's

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A Disciplined Faith: Confession

Fr. Alan Andraeas, Prior

*"I have sinned greatly in what I have done.
But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of
Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly."
2 Samuel 24: 10b (NASB)*

As I've mentioned in earlier newsletters, the classic Christian disciplines that comprise our *Rule of Life* at Saint Brendan's fall into three broad categories: those that nourish our interior life, those that shape our exterior life, and those that can only be exercised in relationship with others—i.e., the 'corporate' disciplines of confession, worship, spiritual direction, hospitality, and celebration. We have finally arrived at this third category, the corporate disciplines, and it begins with the Christian practice of confession.

"Confession? Sounds pretty Catholic to me!" If by this you mean Roman Catholic, perhaps. But if you mean the dictionary definition of *catholic*—those practices and teachings that have characterized the universal, undivided Church from the very beginning—then, yes, absolutely. Confession has always been a part of Christianity's "arsenal of faith." And it didn't begin with Jesus describing its benefits in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:21). As far as God is concerned, the place of confession in the life of His children goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden.

Remember when God gave Adam and Eve the task of stewardship over everything around them along with the prohibition to

stay away from the Tree of Knowledge? Well, it didn't take too long before they ate the fruit, realized their guilt, and hid themselves from the Lord. We need to pay careful attention to what happened next. **"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden...Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'"** (Genesis 3:8-9). Of course God knew; God knows everything. Embedded within that question, however, is the correlate or related question: "Adam, *why* are you hiding?"

Guess what, God knows that, too. But God's desire is that we would yearn to walk with Him in an intimate relationship of holiness, truth, honesty, and love—and that often requires confession on our part. Otherwise the only thing we bring to the relationship is hypocrisy.

You see, unconfessed sin breaks that relationship by placing a barrier between us and the Lord. But our gracious God, ever faithful to His children who confess and repent, does all the "heavy lifting" to restore that relationship—**"Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made**

tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). In this action, we see God's beautiful foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice, death, and shed blood to cover our transgressions.

Confession is considered a 'corporate' discipline because while our sins are ultimately against the Lord (Psalm 51:4), sin also ruptures our relationships with our brothers and sisters, pre-



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venting us from rightly approaching God in worship (Matthew 5:23-24; Isaiah 59:2). Unconfessed sin provides a dark harbor for the works of the enemy and perpetuates the old nature of Adam. But the simple act of confession (and the proof of penance that follows—yes, it needs to be genuine confession!) puts these to death by burying them in the wounds of Christ who died for our sins. And because **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23), Scripture bids us to **“Confess [our] sins one to another, and pray for one another,...”** (James 5:26).

Okay, so what kinds of things should we confess? In short, everything. Yep, that’s right. Remember, Scripture says that **“all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”** (Isaiah 64:6) and that **“if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and truth is not in us”** (1 John 1:8). That means even our best efforts, noblest attitudes, purest intentions, and principled conversations will somehow “miss the mark.” That means no one is excused from the need to confess their sins. In fact, did you know that even the Pope has a personal confessor?!

With this in mind, Scripture presents us with three broad categories of confession that we can bring to the Lord:

- Confession of personal sins (2 Samuel 24:10; Psalm 32:5).
- Confession of personal sins that have brought suffering upon others (2 Samuel 24:17; 2 Chronicles 21:17; Luke 15:21).
- Confession on behalf of the sins of the Church and the world (2 Chronicles 29:6, Nehemiah 1:6-7; 9:2-3; Daniel 9:8-11).

Scripture is also quite particular about to whom we should make our confession:

- To God alone (Luke 18:13; Psalm 32:5; 41:4; 51:1-2ff).
- To the people we have wronged (Matthew 5:24).
- To one another (James 5:16).
- Corporately as a regular congregational act of specific or general confession (Nehemiah 9:2-3).
- To one who acts and speaks—particularly priests in the sacrament of confession—as God’s representative of forgiveness and absolution (John 20:23; cf., Leviticus 4:20; Numbers 15:28; 2 Corinthians 5:18).

“God does not dwell in places of hiddenness, secret sins, deception, and hypocrisy, but in places of righteousness and truth.”

As you’re already aware, the Monastic Fellowship of Saint Brendan’s is made up of an ecumenical membership. We have folks walking alongside this ministry from a wide variety of Christian traditions, practices, and denominations. For some, that means confession is very private. Others see it as a form of spiritual transparency with an “accountability partner”. For others still, it’s a sacramental grace imparted upon the penitent at the words of a priest in apostolic succession.

No matter our understanding of the *mechanics* of confession, the *practice* of confession should be made a regular part of one’s life of spiritual discipline; of putting to death the **“bitter root”** of sin (Hebrews 12:15) and seeking the healing of forgiveness—both spiritual and physical—that God offers us (Psalm 41:4; James 5:16).

For some this will be weekly; for others, monthly. For some it’s accomplished through frank admission and prayer with a trusted Christian friend. For those members who attend a church that practices the sacrament of confession and absolution, confession should be made at an absolute minimum of twice a year—once during Advent and once during Lent (particularly as part of your Holy Week observance). A regular discipline of confession, however, is the ideal.

Remember, God does not dwell in places of hiddenness, secret sins, deception, and hypocrisy, but in places of righteousness and truth. And as Jesus said, the truth **“shall set you free”** (John 8:32).

To learn more about what Saint Benedict said about confession, read his *Rule*, Chapter 46. In the next edition of *The Navigator*, we will examine the corporate discipline of worship.

Rejoice!
Fr. Alan Andraeas

MONASTIC MUSE

muse \ ‘myüz \ **1:** *vb* to turn something over in the mind meditatively,
2: to think reflectively, **3:** *n* a state of deep thought...

The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.

—St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

We must lay before him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

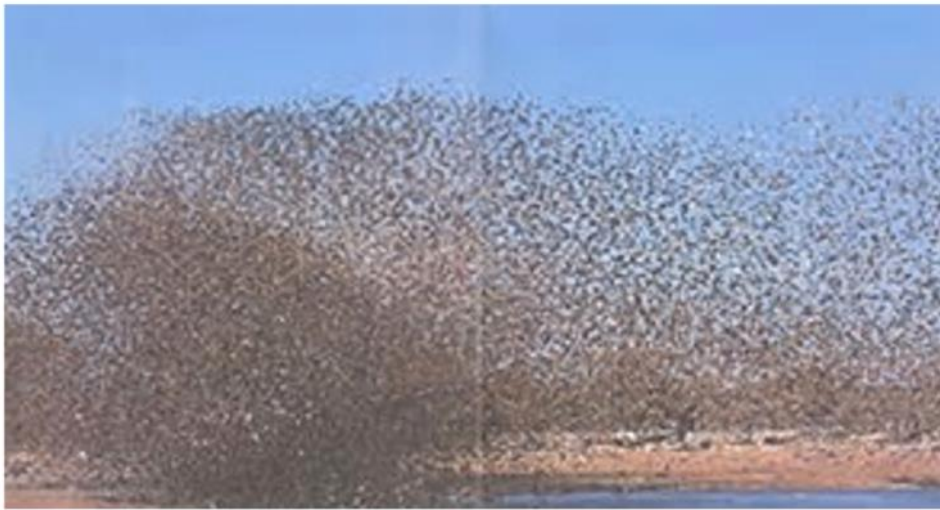
You Did WHAT?!?

Sue Andraeas

"You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways."

Psalm 139:1-3

Corporate Discipline and Confession don't really seem to belong together, do they? When I think of confession, I think of a one-on-one conversation that I hope will remain confidential. I look for someone who will listen with the intent to help me and not look down on me because of the things I think and do—or don't think and do but should. But none of this helped me to understand confession as a corporate discipline. So I asked the Lord for a parable. I need a visual image of what HE intends confession to be, and how confession is viewed, in HIS eyes, as corporate. The parables? Birds, fish, and mushrooms. Here we go...



I love watching nature documentaries where they show flocks of red tailed quelea flying around the African plains. I'm sure you've seen them, or flocks that fly like them. They are rather small noisy birds that flock in the millions. When they fly, they twist and turn so precisely, they appear to be one large animal, or perhaps a storm cloud. You can find videos on YouTube of these synchronized birds changing the path of elephants! There are certain species of fish that do the same thing. They swim with such unity of motion that a shark can't pick out just one fish. And that's the point. On their own, they are defenseless. But as a unified flock or school, they are safe from predators. There doesn't seem to be any specific leader but, rather, they seem to respond to some inner cue.

Do you see how, perhaps, God created these great 'congregations' of birds and fish to teach His Church how to act corporately? And why the first corporate discipline isn't wor-

ship but confession? You see, we are called to worship in unity. Without permitting our Heavenly Father to 'create in me a clean heart', (Psalm 51:10) I cannot hear clearly the direction the Holy Spirit is telling me to 'fly.' Without that information, I take off on my own trajectory and am no long part of the flock. I may be sitting with a whole congregation in a worship service, but without that unity provided by the Holy Spirit, I am flying in my own path, vulnerable to attack, and not very formidable as a congregation member. Without the cleansing that can only come by admitting that I have strayed from God, my worship may be only surface-deep while my heart is far from Him. If you want to know why the Church in many areas seems to have lost Her effectiveness, my first guess would be...a lack of unity due to a lack of confession.

Let's take a closer look at confession itself. What could *it* be compared to? You might be tempted to say it's like a student sitting in the principal's office after being caught doing something 'un-educational' in the classroom. The principal says, "What did you do?" "I don't know." "Yes, you do—tell me what you did?" (Not that I have any personal experience with this type of interrogation, mind you!) Once the confession is made, the next question is, "WHY?" (As a teacher, I have never EVER found a student capable of answering that one.) Finally, "What are you going to do about it?" The appropriate answer, as even a child knows—or should know—is, "Say I'm sorry."

For most of us, this is what comes to mind when we think of the discipline of confession. We are expected to articulate what we did, know why we did it, and that apologizing will make it all better. I don't know about you, but I do things all the time that I can't explain! I don't know why I'm doing

what I'm doing because I'm not even sure WHAT I'm doing. And an apology doesn't guarantee that I'll never do it again. Somehow, I think I'm not alone in this. I also think that the punishment/correction model of confession is a totally WRONG one, one that does not create corporate unity but instead leads to sneaky Christians who want to, at all costs, avoid being caught. The consequence is...godly people who, because of unknown sins, 'fly away' from the flock and get hurt, and then cause disunity within the congregation. Let's fix this view of confession right now.

Confession is not like being hauled in front of an authority figure for bad behavior because sin is *not* bad behavior. Sinfulness is the natural state of mankind. Our spiritual DNA contains sin just like our physical DNA contains the blueprint for our hair, eye, and skin color. We can change all three of those colors with dyes, contact lenses, and bleaches or tanning products, and we can change our spiritual DNA with a blood transfusion. The

blood of Christ can take away that sin nature of Adam—praise God! But hair grows, tans and bleaches fade, contacts must come out, and we are left with what our DNA created us to be. Likewise, we can be born again, but that sin nature will continue to ‘grow back’ because while our spirits are born again, our bodies, minds and hearts haven’t caught up yet. Not if we’re still on earth anyway! And so we need to keep checking to make sure the sinful nature of our bodies does not cause us to do things that will prevent our spirits from communing with our Savior.

You folks that dye your hair, have you ever gone back to the beauty parlor and hear your hair dresser say, “I can’t believe you let this color grow back. Didn’t I fix this for you last month? You can’t even keep it that color for four lousy weeks? *What did you do? What’s WRONG with you!?*” Of course not. That would be absurd! To be sure, Christ’s atonement of our spirits is permanent—we are a new creature! Scripture says so!! The purpose of confession is NOT salvation! It’s corporate unity. It’s the ability to be an effective witness of God’s love for us! That means, we need to look deeper than actions for a confession’s effectiveness because, like I said earlier, sin is not action. Transgression is action. Sin is deeper. And this brings us to our third and final parable or analogy.

You know that a mushroom is a fungus, right? But did you know it’s the fruit and not the main part of the fungus? Fungus lives almost invisibly underground, existing off rotting plant matter until the soil conditions, temperature, and humidity are optimal for the spreading of its spores and then, within a very short period of time, the mushroom ‘erupts’ above ground, just long enough to shoot off the spores, only to disappear again until next time. Sin is more like that. It lies dormant until conditions are right, and then it ‘blooms,’ spreading its ‘spore transgressions’ far and wide. It’s not enough for us to be sorry for the spore eruption/transgression. The hidden ‘root’ needs to be found out, and I can tell you already what yours is. It’s pretty much the same in all of us. It’s the right to be our own boss, the right to have things our way, to make decisions on our own behalf. All sin has its root in pride, in thinking—consciously or subconsciously—that we know what’s best for ourselves and that we can achieve that best on our own.

So, whether your ‘transgression mushrooms’ bloom as anger, fear, anxiety, gluttony, laziness, licentiousness, gossip, co-dependency, addictions, the need to control, to own, to devour,

or to manipulate, all of these transgressions come from one source only: it’s because Jesus is not the Lord of your life in that area, and through your self-will or your habits, you have placed something else in charge, probably without your even realizing it. A good confessor will help you look beyond the action—or inaction—and help you see, first of all, that you have not been tempted beyond anything common, COMMON, to man. (Your sin, in other words, is not original or unique.) Your sin is also unable to control Jesus.

I know that there’s a popular hymn with lyrics, “Behold the man upon the cross...it was my sin that held him there.” Don’t kid yourself. Your sin is not that powerful! Your sin can control and destroy you and hurt those around you, but it can NOT hold Jesus on a cross. It was love for His Father, and His Father’s love for HIM that held him there!! Not your sin. Hallelujah! What a relief!!



Thirdly, the transgression, be it action, inaction, or thought, will not stop unless you change the habit, desire, or will that provides the ‘compost’ for its survival. For example, you won’t stop worrying about finances until you realize that it is your God who will supply for all your needs according to His riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). You may know that intellectually, but you need to know it in your heart, and that’s a totally different matter. And until you do, you will continue to sprout ‘fear of a lack of

provision’ mushrooms and spread those spores throughout your congregation—and on those who do not know the Lord. And that will translate in their hearts as, “Here’s a Christian who says he trusts in God but then worries about money all the time. Hypocrite.” See how it works?

When we were children, we learned very early that it is wise if, after doing something wrong, we looked, and acted guilty—and ashamed—and sorry. We are often tempted to assume the same emotions as we confess our sin. But let me ask you this: when you go to the doctor for a diagnosis of symptoms that point to an illness, do you feel and/or exhibit guilt and shame? No. It doesn’t even make sense. Don’t misunderstand what I’m saying here! We should feel very sorry if we have hurt another through our transgressions. But sin is a sickness that needs to be kept under control, and our confessor, if he or she is a good

“All of these transgressions come from one source only: it’s because Jesus is not the Lord of your life in that area. “

one, is not looking so much at relieving the symptoms but is trying to figure out a way to heal the sickness that's causing them. And all of this is not for the sake of our pride, but for Jesus' sake—because our sin isn't what holds Him on the cross but it certainly does wound Him. We are His body on earth. When we are wounded, HE is wounded! That's why, in corporate confession, we pray, "For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us that we may delight in His will and walk in His way, to the glory of His Name. Amen." It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about Jesus. It's always about Jesus!



If you look at that opening verse again from Psalm 139, you'll be reminded that God already knows you inside and out. He knows what you're going to do. He knows what you're thinking. Later in this Psalm, David admits that He can't hide from God. We can't hide from God either. We can't hide our sin from God. Whether we confess or not, He knows. But without confession, without 'working out our salvation with fear and trembling' by 'confessing one to another,' (Philippians 2:12; James 5:16), WE may not know ourselves as well as we think we do. And when this is the case, we fly away from the flock, exposing ourselves to danger. We betray the safety of the rest of the

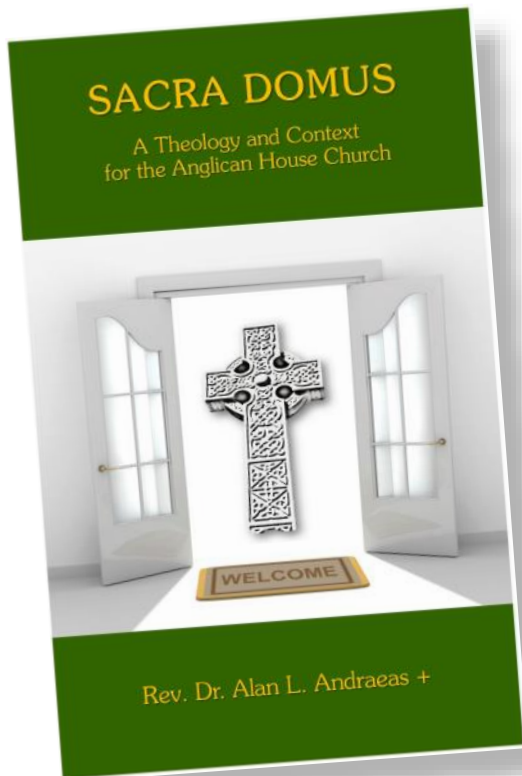
flock by creating our disunity. We inhibit our ability to receive the peace and comfort of the Holy Spirit, and that makes things much worse. All of this leads to defective corporate worship, wounded corporate praise, chaotic corporate intercession, divided corporate mission. And this affects our ability to glorify God as He is worthy of our best praise. Unity, after all, is not all believers belonging to the same denomination or believing all the same doctrine to the letter. Unity is all believers joining with one voice to praise, worship, and serve the One Holy God. True worship, then, begins with...confession.

Rejoice!
Sue Andraeas

Two excellent books that may help you in your journey through this discipline of confession are:

Catherine Doherty, *Beginning Again*, <https://publications.madonnahouse.com/collections/catherine-doherty/products/beginning-again>. (If you can find a copy of the original version of this book, *The Kiss of Christ*, you will be doubly blessed!)

James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, <http://bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/you-are-what-you-love/377770> (Thank you, Clayton and Marcia, for recommending this timely book!)



Sacra Domus now at Amazon!

Fr. Alan has released his second book, *Sacra Domus*, as a Kindle e-Book at Amazon. This book is an examination of the House Church Movement and how sacramental house churches can be a thriving part of this growing trend. And while you might not be a part of a house church, the first three chapters are a thoughtful and thorough review of the biblical history of worship and how it impacts our corporate, liturgical worship today. Great for use in a Bible study group or for an adult Sunday School class. Go to www.amazon.com and type "Sacra Domus" into the search bar. It's as simple as that. And if you don't have a Kindle Reader, you can download a Kindle Reader app that will simulate a Kindle on your computer, tablet, or mobile device. This application can be found directly under the picture of the book on the 'order' page.

**Search me, O God / and know my heart today /
Try me, O Savior / know my thoughts, I pray /
See if there be / some wicked way in me /
Cleanse me from every sin / and set me free.**

"Cleanse Me"

**Text, J. Edwin Orr (based on Psalm 139:23); Music, Edward J. Hopkins.
Written in 1936 while Orr was at a revival in Ngaruawahia, New Zealand.**

The Final Word: Clement — Bishop of Rome, 88-99 AD. Consecrated by Peter's hand and considered to be Peter's immediate successor; from his *First Letter to the Corinthians*.

Let us fix our attention on the blood of Christ and recognize how precious it is to God His Father, since it was shed for our salvation and brought the grace of repentance to the world.

If we review the various ages of history, we will see that in every generation the Lord has "offered the opportunity of repentance" to any who were willing to turn to Him. When Noah preached God's message of repentance, the ark was open to all who would listen to him. Jonah told the Ninevites they were going to be destroyed, but when they repented, their prayers gained God's forgiveness for their sins, and they were saved.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the ministers of God's grace have spoken of repentance; indeed, the Master of the whole universe Himself spoke of repentance with an oath; "As I live," says the Lord, "I do not wish the death of the sinner but the sinner's repentance." He added this evidence of His goodness: "House of Israel, repent of your wickedness. Tell My people: If their sins should reach from earth to heaven, if they are brighter than scarlet and blacker than sackcloth, you need only turn to me with your whole heart and say, 'Father,' and I will listen to you as to a holy people."

In other words, God wanted all His beloved ones to have the opportunity to repent and He confirmed this desire by His own almighty will. That is why we should obey His sovereign and glorious will and prayerfully entreat His mercy and kindness. We should be suppliant before Him and turn to His compassion, rejecting any works and quarreling and jealousy which only lead to death.



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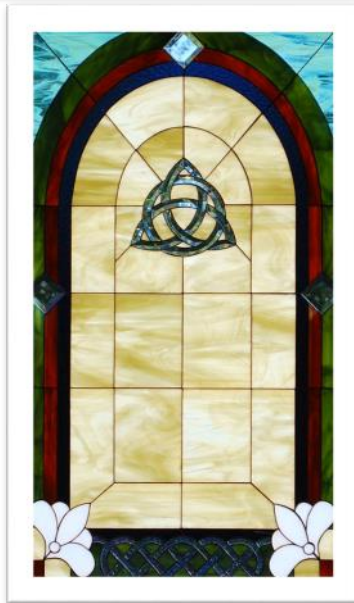
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WE COVET YOUR PRAYERS!!!

Please continue to pray for Saint Brendan's and these various needs:

- Praise God for our continued strength and healing.
- For strong and willing hands to come alongside of our labor; short-term or long-term.
- Praise God for the ability to minister to local people through the gifts of heating oil, fuel, food, transportation assistance, and hospital visits.
- For necessary remodeling of the Priory House so that we can host more retreatants and guests.

Life at Saint Brendan's



TOP LEFT: A local carpenter, Phil, helps us get started with the shingling of Holy Trinity Chapel. **TOP MIDDLE:** The kindergarten class from Edmunds Consolidated Grade School comes over to Saint Brendan's for a farm fieldtrip. Here the class is in the barn for introductions with our donkey, Chula. **TOP RIGHT:** Some personal friends—Ron, Bill, Kathy, and Paul—come over to help set up a new 20'x30' ribbed building which will become the Saint Brendan's woodshop. **MIDDLE LEFT:** Jasmine Reese was offered a night of hospitality at Saint Brendan's as part of her effort to cycle around the world. **MIDDLE CENTER:** Holy Trinity Chapel's new stained glass window arrived from California and was installed in the chapel over the altar. **MIDDLE RIGHT:** Until the chapel has its heating system installed, services were moved back over to the Priory House during the winter months. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Sue is holding one of our newest members (and a sure sign of Spring!), Beamish, a young goat buckling less than 24-hours old. **BOTTOM MIDDLE:** Bishop Richard Lipka speaks to the Holy Trinity Chapel parish during his annual visit to Saint Brendan's. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Fr. Alan 'squeezes' into his old Navy Dress White uniform as a part of his presentation at the local school for Veterans Day. He also gave a presentation on his participation in the search and rescue operation at the World Trade Center on 9-11.



Holy Trinity Chapel at Saint Brendan's now has the start of a basic Facebook page. If you would like to keep up with the happenings at the chapel of Saint Brendan's, you can find the page at:

[www.facebook.com/holytrinitychapel.maine.](http://www.facebook.com/holytrinitychapel.maine)

If this works out (this is our first attempt at any kind of social media), and if we can overcome the learning curve, we might be able to produce a Saint Brendan's Facebook page as well.

