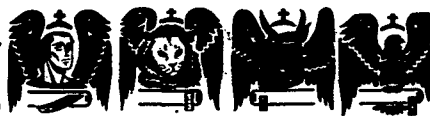


# Tribunal of mercy provides a word for Sunday remedy for sin's weakness



By Father Albert Shamon  
Catholic Courier columnist

Sunday's readings: (R3) John 20:19-31; (R1) Acts 5:12-16; (R2) Revelation 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19.

Our Lady has repeatedly been urging us in her messages given at Medjugorje to go to confession monthly.

She has been saying this because her Son Jesus instituted reconciliation by confession as one of the seven sacraments. He did this on the first Easter Sunday night.

What a master psychologist Our Lord was! Before making this sacrament, He waited until the apostles themselves were in need of forgiveness. During His Passion, all the apostles save John had failed Him. They had failed Him miserably and, as a result, were deeply miserable on that first Easter. Thus, when Our Lord came to them through closed doors, He greeted them with "Peace be with you." He was saying loud and clear: "I forgive you. Be at peace now." To prove He could forgive them, He showed them His hands and His side. He had nailed sin to the cross.

Then Our Lord said a second time, "Peace be with you." This second peace was not for them, but for all other sinners — for all others who would fail Him just as the apostles had done. For this reason, Jesus went on to say: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." The Father had sent Him as Savior: to save us from our sins. "Jesus" means "savior."

But only God can forgive sins. So, Jesus gave them God! "He breathed on them and said; 'Receive the Holy Spirit ...'"

But God cannot forgive our sins unless we want Him to. So Jesus continued, "... whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." In other words, Jesus instituted the forgiveness of sins as a judicial act — an act of judgment.

As a judge cannot pass sentence until he has heard all the evidence, so a priest cannot forgive sins unless one confesses that he wants to be forgiven and for what sins he wants to be forgiven. Thus Jesus built confession into the very act of the forgiveness of sins.

Yet the confessional differs greatly from a court of law. The court is the place for strict and rigorous justice; the confessional is the tribunal of mercy. The judge's sentence punishes; the priest's penance is not to punish, but to help the sinner repair the past and combat sin in the future. The penance is a sign of renewing one's personal commitment to begin a new life.

But why did Jesus make the forgiveness of sins depend ordinarily on a confession of sins? There are many reasons, but one reason is because God knows our makeup. The confession of sins is a safety-valve that enables us to let out the steam of guilt.

Confession is the human thing to do. Psychiatry says that many psychoses and neuroses are due to repressed sins. Sin is like a foreign element in the soul, like a sliver in one's finger. If the sliver is not removed, the finger festers and hurts. Sin is like constipation: without release, there is distress. Alfred Korzybski said, "God may forgive your sins, but your nervous system won't." A guilt-ridden person feels compelled to say, "I've got to tell somebody." Dr. Paul Tournier, a famous Swiss psychologist, wrote: "There are around us

vast numbers of people sick for confession."

Pontius Pilate had to wash his hands, because his soul needed washing. Lady Macbeth did the same thing. Sin destroyed her sleep. A physician called in to observe her night-walking, hearing her piteous cries, said, "More needs she the divine than the physician." Her problem, he diagnosed, was spiritual, not physical.

Take the cap off a tube of toothpaste and squeeze it. The paste glides out. Keep the cap on and squeeze it hard — the paste will break out in the weakest spot in the tube. Confession is the normal outlet for sin. However, shut off this outlet and the repressed sins and guilt will break out in one's weakest spot: in drugs, drink, the dumps, sex or violence.

This Sunday, the first after Easter, has been designated by Jesus as the Sunday of Divine Mercy. The soul that will go to confession several days before or after this Sunday and receive Holy Communion on this Sunday "shall obtain complete forgiveness of sins and punishment." What an Easter gift!

## Contriving a tale to obscure the Truth

By Cindy Bassett  
Catholic Courier columnist

"I think it's a disgrace that those closest to Jesus ran away," Mary Magdalene said to the other two women who walked with her toward the tomb.

"Somehow I think that Jesus would have understood," Mary the mother of James replied. "Besides, Jesus did not die alone. We were there with his mother and so was John."

"Yes, and it was good of Joseph of Arimathea to donate his own tomb, or Jesus' body would have been placed in a pauper's tomb," Mary said.

"Who will roll the stone back for us?" Joanna asked, her mind on the more practical matters at hand.

"Perhaps the Roman soldiers that Pilate has sent to guard the tomb," Mary answered.

"Roman guards?" Joanna asked.

"The Jewish leaders were not to be satisfied even by Jesus' death," Mary explained. "They went to Pilate and insisted that he place a guard at the tomb for three days. Someone once heard Jesus claim that he would be raised to life three days after his death."

While the three women were still dis-

cussing all of these things, they were stopped by two Roman soldiers.

"Who's there?" one of them asked gruffly.

"Friends and family of the dead man, Jesus Christ," Mary said, her face firmly set as she stepped forward, braced for a confrontation.

"We have our orders and no one is allowed through," he said.

"We come in peace to anoint the body with oils and spices as is our custom," Mary replied, indicating the jars they each carried. "When they placed him in the tomb, the shops had already closed in observance of the Sabbath. Surely you will not be so cruel ..."

"I don't see any harm in that," the other soldier said to his companion.

"You are absolutely correct," said Mary, smiling as she sensed her chance. "Three women together are not even strong enough to roll back the stone at the entrance to the tomb. Will one of you oblige us?"

"Go on, but be quick about it," said the first soldier, motioning to the other guard. "If Pilate or those temple priests hear about this, we could lose our jobs."

No sooner had the four of them trudged the short distance up the hill than the soldier who remained behind heard shouts and cries coming from them.

"He is gone; the body is gone!" his friend shouted as he came back down the hill. "Just the linen wrappings are still in the tomb. Someone has stolen the body."

"Impossible!" said the first soldier. "We've been here the entire time. No one,

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until these women, has even passed."

"The seal was broken and the stone already rolled back," his companion explained. "I guess there's nothing to be done now but go and report to the captain."

"Wait, you fool! Don't be so hasty. Besides us, who has the most to lose in all of this?" the other asked.

"The Jewish leaders," the soldier replied, smiling in understanding. "It will be just as they feared. The followers of Jesus will go round claiming that Jesus rose from the dead."

"Then it is to the Jewish leaders that we will go," the first soldier said.

The Jewish priests and the Roman soldiers were pleased with the arrangement made that day at the temple. The soldiers were paid a handsome sum of hush money to perpetuate this story: "We fell asleep during the watch of the second night. During that time, the followers of Jesus came and stole his body."

Even though some of Jesus' followers were interrogated and the body was never found, the contrived story of the Roman guards is still believed by some to this very day. The real story has never stopped being told by all those calling themselves the followers of Jesus Christ.

Scripture reference: Matthew 27:57-28:15.

Meditation: "I am the Resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

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