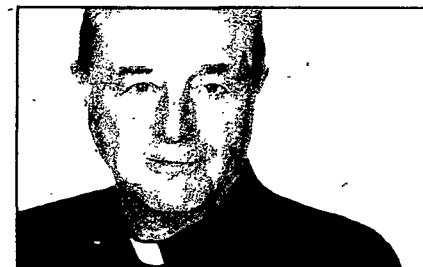


# Communion services not the same as Mass



Father John Dietzen

Question Corner

**Q.** I understand that more than 3,000 of the nearly 29,300 parishes in the United States are now without a resident priest-pastor. In many of them, instead of Sunday Mass there is a Communion service. Does our obligation to attend Sunday Mass apply also to these Communion services? (Maryland)

**A.** What you say about priestless parishes is correct, and it seems that unless something major happens the replacement of Mass with Communion services will become more frequent as time goes by. Church law on the subject is explicit; the faithful must participate in the Mass on Sundays (Canon 1247). When that is not possible, the obligation does not transfer to a Communion service or any other liturgy.

Of course, worshipping God in some way with our community of faith ought to be an integral part of keeping the Lord's Day holy. Participation in a Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion together, when the opportunity is provided, is an appropriate way to meet that responsibility.

**Q.** My friends and I found the communal penance services in our parish greatly beneficial, much more meaningful than private confessions ever were. When and under what circumstances was the sacrament of penance introduced in the church? Our understanding is that private confession was not always available or required. (New York)

**A.** The history of the sacrament (or sacraments) of forgiveness in the church is much too long and complicated for a column like this. But some highlights may be helpful.

As you say, private one-on-one confessions were not the first form. In early centuries the process of forgiveness of sins was generally more public, sometimes lasted for years and took place under the direction of the bishop.

The move toward private confession and forgiveness of sins extended over several centuries. Beginning around the time of St. Patrick (died 461), Irish monks, most of them priests, traveled the Irish countryside preaching, baptizing and conducting a simple personal rite of forgiveness patterned on what the monks were accustomed to in their own monastic spiritual lives.

Penitential books began to appear with appropriate penances for different kinds of sins. As the monks

spread over Europe, they took these "penitentials" and rituals with them, and began to use them in regions where they established new monasteries and communities.

The practice took hold very slowly, however. In fact, several bishops and church councils condemned what one regional council (Toledo, Spain, seventh century) called the "abominable presumption" of "asking a priest to forgive them as often as they wish to sin."

They insisted on a return to the ancient and accepted penitential disciplines. Even as late as the ninth century the practice of private confession apparently was unknown in Rome.

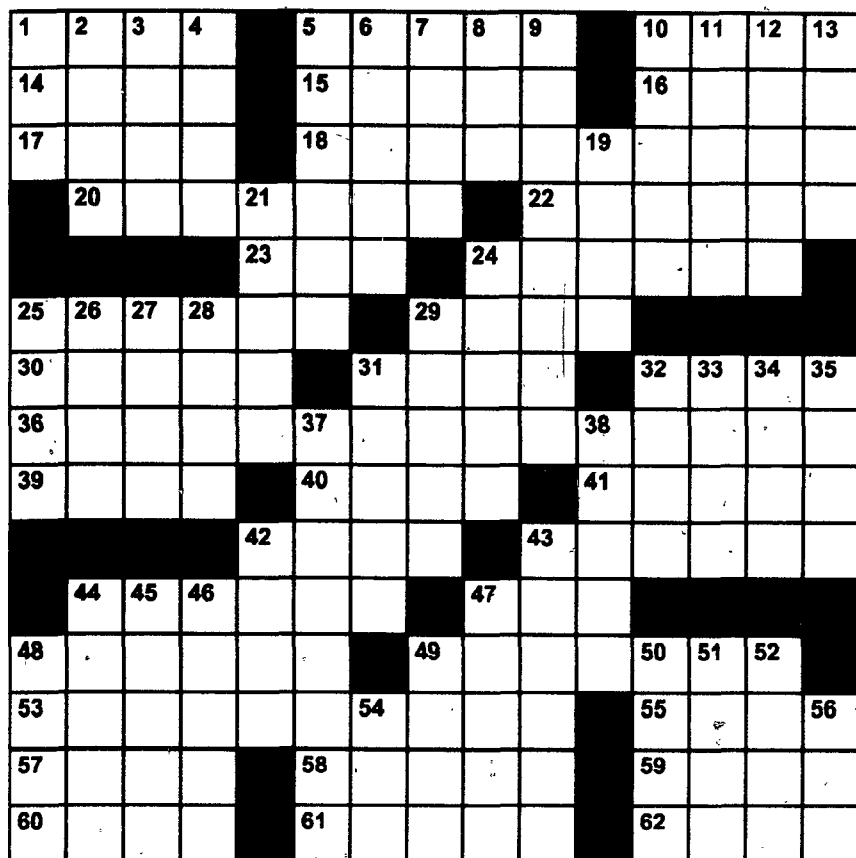
Gradually the idea took hold, however, and bishops moved from condemning the practice to trying to regulate it. By the Fourth Lateran Ecumenical Council (1215), private confession had become pretty much "the" sacrament of forgiveness in the church.

There is no question that in its understanding of the sacrament of penance, or reconciliation, the church is turning from a rather legalistic, juridical approach to one more scriptural and liturgical, more centered on conversion of heart.

In other words, the present Catholic rituals for this sacrament focus more on the penitential theology of the first centuries, but with additional insights offered by the experiences of faith in our own age.

I must add that these changes and developments in the church's liturgical celebration of forgiveness of sin should not surprise us. It happened with the other sacraments as the people of God lived through the centuries, and would be expected in this case as well.

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## Catholic Crossword

### ACROSS

- 1 First man
- 5 Fable teller
- 10 Burgundy blue
- 14 Biblical movie (with "The")
- 15 Some are sweet and some are green
- 16 Decays
- 17 "\_\_\_ or not to be"
- 18 Outward signs instituted by Christ
- 20 Set right
- 22 Astronaut Chuck
- 23 Suffix
- 24 Time periods
- 25 Intersecting line
- 29 Children's book author
- 30 Lock
- 31 Star
- 32 Port or pad starter
- 36 Three of the four marks of the Church
- 39 \_\_\_ majesty
- 40 Letters on an envelope
- 41 Chicago's airport
- 42 Gov't agency
- 43 Jesus \_\_\_ for our sins
- 44 Adjusts
- 47 Anglo-imperial honor (abbr.)
- 48 Not dish A?
- 49 Close

- 53 Office of bishop
- 55 Paving stone
- 57 Storage area (abbr)
- 58 Baptism and Marriage
- 59 What Antony wanted on loan?
- 60 \_\_\_ prayer for me
- 61 \_\_\_ birds of the sky have \_\_\_, but the Son of Man has nowhere ... (Lk 9:58)
- 62 Tedious

- country (abbr)
- 19 The Mass is both a \_\_\_ and a sacrifice
- 21 \_\_\_ Blue
- 24 Plastic wrap
- 25 Plane acronym
- 26 Eagle
- 27 Average grade's?
- 28 Tennis great
- 29 Phone opener
- 31 Profound religious stories of our beginnings
- 32 Santa's line
- 33 Dash
- 34 Naples money
- 35 Finished the cake
- 37 Benjamin, to Jacob
- 38 The Ritz or The Plaza
- 42 Middle Eastern cartel acronym
- 43 Dental dilemma
- 44 "I am the \_\_\_ and the Omega." (Rev 1:8)
- 45 Driving Miss \_\_\_
- 46 Lost
- 47 \_\_\_ Group of eight
- 48 Church seats
- 49 Horse fodder
- 50 Employed
- 51 Letter opener
- 52 To be, to Michelle
- 54 Kind of man Simon met going to the fair
- 56 Literary initials

### DOWN

- 1 Sacred \_\_\_ (e.g., icons, statues, stained glass)
- 2 Jubilee
- 3 Head of French monastery
- 4 Reward
- 5 Not here
- 6 Rub out
- 7 Attacks
- 8 Poetic word
- 9 "My brothers and sisters, \_\_\_ our sacrifice"
- 10 Primary symbol of the Sacrament of the Eucharist
- 11 Vowel sound
- 12 Major ending
- 13 Former communist

Answers on page 11 (No. 34)