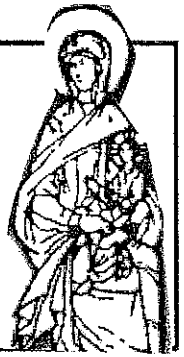


# **SOPHIA!**

*A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BOARD OF THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN*

*JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2009*

*DIANNE O'REGAN, EDITOR*



*DID YOU KNOW . . . that confession is often referred to in Church Tradition as the renewal of baptism, or as the reestablishment of that condition of life with God which was given to us in the basic sacraments of our introduction into the Christian way of life?*

## **TOPIC OF THE MONTH . . . CONFESSION**

### **Prayer Before Confession (from St. Symeon the New Theologian):**

O God and Lord of all! Who hath the power over every breath and soul, the only One able to heal me, hearken unto the prayer of me, the wretched one, and, having put him to death, destroy the serpent nestling within me by the descent of the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit. And vouchsafe me, poor and naked of all virtue, to fall with tears at the feet of my spiritual father, and to call on God to have mercy on me. And grant, O Lord, unto my heart humility and good thoughts, becoming a sinner, who hath consented to repent unto Thee, and do not abandon unto the end the one soul, which hath united itself unto Thee and hath confessed Thee, and instead of all the world hath chosen Thee and hath preferred Thee. For Thou knowest, O Lord, that I want to save myself, and that my evil habits are obstacles. But all things are possible unto Thee, O Master, which are impossible for man. Amen.

### **Discussion Topics:**

1. It is recommended that you first read and contemplate the prayers contained in the Red Pocket Prayer Book (pages 95 through 99). Also, recite the Prayer of Preparation (p. 98) beginning with "I believe, O Lord, and I confess . . ."
2. Think about how your understanding of the Sacrament of Confession now differs with having read and recited the above passages. Now think about your next Confession.
3. Do you properly prepare for the Sacrament of Confession? In addition to reading the prayers above, it is recommended that you ask yourself the following questions: "Have I counseled, commanded, consented, or provoked another to sin, either by praise or flattery, silence, or defending something that is wrong?"
4. Remember that you are confessing to GOD – not to a man (the priest). The priest is neither a prosecutor, nor a silent witness. He is the image of Christ, who took upon Himself the sins of the world.
5. God already knows your sins, but He wishes for you to acknowledge them yourself. Many priests recommend that you bring a list, so as to not forget why you are there. It is entirely possible you may forget to confess a sin while you are there before God and your priest. Forgetfulness should NOT be an excuse – therefore, you should either (a) write down your sins, or (b) confess on a more regular basis.
6. A sinner is someone who is "spiritually" ill. Think of your spiritual father as your doctor. Just as you tell your doctor your "symptoms," you should tell all your sins to your spiritual father in order to receive healing.

7. Each sin should be confessed separately. Again, remember that we are ALL sinners, so don't involve other people in your confession – judging another person is yet one more sin.
8. Don't try to “justify” your sins during your confession (giving “excuses” such as illness, force of habit, etc.). If a person tries to justify their actions, he will be justified that much less by God.
9. Your confession should be made with sorrow and heartfelt contrition. You should not relate your sins without any feeling or remorse, as if you were just carrying on a casual conversation.
10. Think about the three formal elements to the Sacrament of Penance – (1) the feeling of sincere sorrow for your sins and for breaking your communion with God; (2) an open and heartfelt confession of your sins; and (3) the formal prayer of absolution through which the forgiveness of God through Christ is sacramentally bestowed on you via the priest.
11. Remember that the secrecy of the Sacrament of Confession is considered an unquestionable rule in Orthodoxy. One cannot expect a sincere and complete confession if the penitent has doubts about the confidentiality of what they are saying. The Church Fathers have repeatedly written that the secrecy of confession is a principle without exception. The reason for maintaining this secrecy comes from the fact that the priest is only a witness before God. (From the OCA's *Guidelines for the Clergy*)
12. The fulfillment of the Sacrament of Confession consists in receiving Holy Communion and the reconciliation of the sinner with God and all the faithful according to the commandments of God.

#### Biblical References:

In times of temptation, read Psalms 15, 19, and 139; Matthew 4; and James 4. If asking for forgiveness, read Psalm 130:4; Ephesians 1:7; and Acts 13:38 and 26:18.

#### Recommended Readings:

The Orthodox Study Bible & the Red Pocket Prayer Book, published by the Antiochian Archdiocese  
These Are the Sacraments, by Fr. Anthony Coniaris  
Repentance and Confession, by Fr. John Chryssavgis

#### Points to Ponder:

“The remission of sins is given in the Sacrament of Penance which is called a ‘second baptism,’ a ‘baptism of tears.’” – Archbishop Antony Bashir

“It is impossible that sins should be forgiven through your own personal penance. Christ granted this power to the Apostles and from the Apostles, it has been transmitted to the office of the priests.” – St. Ambrose in *On Penance*.

“Priests who are filled with the spirit of God forgive sins in two ways: either by admitting to baptism those who are worthy or by pardoning the penitent faithful of the Church.” – St. Cyril of Alexandria.

“The revelation of sins is subject to the same laws as the revelation of physical infirmities.” – St. Basil the Great.

St. John Chrysostom stated that the priest's power of forgiving sins “penetrates the soul and reaches up to heaven.”