

NOVENA for EXAMS and
FOR FATHERS begins
Friday

University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
June 5, 1945

A plenary indulgence for
visiting Log Chapel Wed.
and praying for Holy Father.

Correcting An Error.

The June issue of a popular magazine with nation-wide distribution contains an article about the Catholic Church. Two paragraphs in the article misrepresent the Sacrament of Confession. As the explanation stands it is incorrect. The first questionable paragraph reads: "In preparation for his reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Holy Communion, the child must first go to confession. He must receive the Sacrament of Penance that he may be free of sin."

This statement gives one the impression that confession must always be a preliminary for the reception of Holy Communion. Pope Pius X clearly stated the Catholic doctrine about confession in reference to Holy Communion in his famous Decree on Frequent Communion. He states that the only requirements for frequent and even daily Communion are (1) freedom from mortal sin and (2) a good intention (that is, the desire to receive spiritual profit from Communion.) Frequent confession is recommended by Catholic theologians, but there is no obligation to confess before Communion unless a mortal sin has been committed.

Now and then a student unfamiliar with the practice of frequent Communion will labor under the idea that where there is no Communion possible on the following day or two, he should not go to confession, even though he is in mortal sin. The Catholic doctrine is that confession can be separated from the reception of Holy Communion. In the case of certain penitents struggling with violent temptations and old weaknesses, a confessor occasionally recommends confession twice a day. The fact that one always went to confession Saturday night before Sunday Communion does not prove that one must continue the practice. On the campus, confessions that are not of necessity because of mortal sin are best made during the week and not at Sunday Mass. The less rush there is with confession, the more fruitful will it be.

The second misleading paragraph, in the magazine reads: "The priest counsels him, then raises his hand with the words, 'May our Lord Jesus Christ absolve thee.'" The impression one takes from these words is that the confessor does nothing more than pray that Christ will absolve the penitent. The words quoted are part of the preliminary prayers said by the priest before he gives the essential words of absolution. The essential words are: "I absolve you from your sins,"; in Latin, "Ego te absolve a peccatis tuis." These words alone bring about the effect of confession, namely the forgiveness of sin and a variety of graces from Christ, enabling one to be more resolute and more strong against sin in the future.

The power of the priest in the confessional is not that of simply praying for the penitent's forgiveness. The priest through sacramental absolution really forgives the guilt of sin. At the moment of absolution Christ and the priest, both, and together, forgive sin through confession. That the priest has the power to forgive sin is clear from the words of Christ to His Apostles (and to their successors in the priesthood): "Who sins YOU shall forgive, they are forgiven...Who sins YOU shall retain, they are retained," (that is not forgiven, as sometimes happens when a penitent refuses to give up an occasion of sin, besides other cases.)

The judge-State relationship helps one see the priest-Christ relationship. The judge does not claim power in his own name and right to handle civil cases, but only through the State. When he pronounces a verdict, the State does too. If the judge should acquit one accused of a civil offense, no one doubts his right to give a sentence, and no one questions the fact that the State at the same time dismisses the party involved. As a matter of devotion, penitents should try to confess in the same spirit as they would confess to Christ bodily present in the confessional.