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The Sacrament of Penance--III.
(Motives for Confidence)

Prisoner and Penitent. You have seen a prisoner, shackled to a deputy sheriff, led from county jail to court house. You experienced a sinking feeling at the shame to common humanity. For the moment you sympathized, because you knew that, if guilty, the fellow was in for more shackles and prison life in earnest. Change of heart, promise of doing better, wouldn't mean much to the judge.

Ever stop to think that when a fellow goes to the Tribunal of Penance, he goes, not shackled, but as a free man? His dispositions are everything--change of heart, promise of doing better, always bring exculpation from the crime.

Hard But Compensating. Not always easy to go to confession. Secretiveness is pretty natural. But a Catholic is ordinarily logical. He knows the obligation of confessing his sins. He knows that, if the forgiveness of sin is ordinarily possible without resorting to the Sacrament of Penance, the discretionary power of retaining sins, which Christ gave to His Apostles with the power of forgiving, has no purpose. And for Christ to give a power without a purpose does not make good sense.

Obedience, then, to the established law of Christ sends the Catholic sinner to confession. It may be hard sometimes, but the confessor is a fellow man, and the after-feeling is worth the cost. The confessor knows well why you come.

The Confessor, Your Friend. A man has many acquaintances. His friends are few. There is a particularism about any human being because he is small at best.

At the very heart of your circle of friends, there's your confidential friend. That kind of friend is your alter ego, for friendship and confidence cannot be separated.

Now God deals with men through men, and never more intimately than in the Sacrament of Penance. He does not deal through angels. They could not understand. St. Paul has a great passage to the point in Hebrews: "For every high priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God....who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself is compassed with infirmity."

Your confessor, by divine institution a judge, is your physician and friend. He could not be otherwise. He is working for the gentlest Man Who ever lived, of Whom it was foretold that a bruised reed He would not break. The old roaring-lion type is a lamb in the confessional. He can't be otherwise.

A Safety Valve and Counsellor. Muensterburg, the psychologist, thought it not unusual that there are few suicides among Catholics. They have a safety valve. They get rid of their worries. President Glenn Frank wants something like the Roman Catholic confessional in education. Why something like it, when there is the real thing?

An old proverb says, No one is a judge in his own case. Physicians do not cure themselves; they call in other physicians. A confessor settles your doubts, relieves your fears, instructs where there is ignorance, helps plan a definite campaign of resistance to temptation, works out a program of daily living, builds the character positively, suggests practices which bring the soul into closer union with Christ. Your confessor has the advantage of being on the inside looking out.

Have a regular confessor for continuity of direction. There are sixty priests at Notre Dame, men taken from among men for men, who return friendship in the most sacred of confidential relationships, who are safety valves and counsellors provided for you by Christ.