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Some Timely Questions

What of Confession by Telephone ? Recent news articles might give the impression that certain priests in Germany are hearing confessions and conferring sacramental absolution over the telephone. Actually, one who reads the articles carefully will perceive that these priests are merely giving advice and answers to questions. The Church has never given a definite answer to this question. However, theologians generally teach that more probably a person cannot validly confess his sins and receive absolution by telephone, because priest and penitent must be present to each other for the valid administration of Penance. Nevertheless, Father Connell, the Redemptorist, believes that since there is a slight probability that such presence is sufficiently achieved in a telephone conversation, a priest could use the telephone to hear a confession and impart absolution in case of great necessity -- for example, if a person is dying and can contact a priest only by telephone, or a miner is imprisoned under the ground by a cave-in. In such an event the priest would confer absolution conditionally -- that is, with the intention of absolving only if this can be done validly.

The problem of confession by telephone involves the divine law, since Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance and laid down the conditions for its valid administration. But on matters subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction the Pope can make a decision; and in some instances such decisions have been made with reference to the use of modern means of communications. Thus, in 1939 Pius XII decreed that those who hear by radio the solemn blessing which the Holy Father sometimes imparts urbi et orbi (to Rome and to the entire world) -- as on Easter Sunday -- can gain the plenary indulgence attached to that blessing.

What of the Rosary by Radio ? In 1952 the same Sovereign Pontiff declared that those who participate in a Rosary broadcast can gain the indulgence if they recite the Rosary in conjunction with the person broadcasting, that is, if he says the first part and they the second. This holds only when there is a "live" broadcast, not when it is only a recording. In this latter case, a group reciting the Rosary concomitantly with the broadcast would have to recite the prayers in their entirety in order to gain the indulgence, or at least one member would have to say the first part while the others would recite the second.

What of Assisting at Mass by Radio or T-V ? No. You cannot argue from the above concessions that you can satisfy your obligations of hearing Mass on Sundays and Holy Days by listening to the Holy Sacrifice on the radio, or viewing it on T-V.

The Church requires that we be present physically at Mass, because the Mass is an act of corporate or social worship. Hence Catholics are bound to participate in the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice as a group.

However, those who are unable to attend Mass in the church -- particularly those who are confined to their homes -- will surely gain many graces if they follow the ceremonies of this sublime act of worship with the aid of a radio or television.

PRAYERS REQUESTED - Deceased: William J. Henry; grandmother of Tony Yarchak of Walsh sister of Father Theodore Hesburgh, CSC; mother of Rev. Robert McKee, CSC; sister of Father Jerome Lawyer, CSC; father of Rev. Thomas Baker, CSC; grandmother and aunt of Bob Desmond of Alumni; Richard W. Giroux, '31; Edward B. Carroll, '29. Ill: brother of Dan Bergen of Fisher; Mr. Otto Pfaff; Rev. Matthew Coyle, CSC; Rev. Oscar Hentges, CSC; Tom White, '38; sister of Wm. Fitzgerald, '41; child of Prof. McInerney; grandfather of Xavier Aragona (O-C). Five special intentions.