

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When I am in the confessional, I am aware that some of those who come to make their confession are well prepared and others are not. The key to making a good confession is to first make a good examination of conscience, and a good examination of conscience is impossible without a clear understanding of what sin is.

Many Catholics don't think they have anything to confess because they are basically nice people who don't commit crimes or don't do anything they consider to be really bad like murder, adultery or stealing. This is a very shallow understanding of the Catholic faith.

Sin is not simply the bad things we do of which we are ashamed. In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul defines sin as "falling short of the glory of God." Each of us were made to grow up into the fullness of God's perfection. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul teaches us that we are all called to "grow up into the full humanity of Jesus Christ."

The spiritual life is a process of growing in grace, and to do this we need to not only choose good actions and thoughts, but we must also choose to repent of the times we have fallen short of God's glory. Only when we truly and honestly repent can we truly and honestly make progress. You can't improve if you don't know there is room for improvement, and you can't know there is room for improvement unless you understand the high standard to which you are aiming.

The Ten Commandments are God's high standard for the human race. He knows we can't keep them. He gives the ten commandments not because He thinks we will obey them, but because He knows we cannot. He sets the high standard so that we will realize our need for Him and learn to rely on His grace to "grow up into the full humanity of Jesus Christ."

These summer weeks I will be writing a series of pastor's letters on the Ten Commandments. I hope you will read them with interest, and that you will use them to examine your conscience. The reason to examine your conscience is to understand where you can improve and draw closer to God.

If we all continue on this pilgrimage towards Christ, think how much more powerful and joyful our Catholic witness will be at OLR! Join with me in renewing your spiritual life and commitment for the sake of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of our souls.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker