

Confession: Second Baptism

Contributed by H.G. Bishop Youssef
 Tuesday, 28 August 2007
 Last Updated Thursday, 30 August 2007

God, the lover of mankind, introduced to us the practice of confession to help us get rid of these three consequences of sin. In confession we admit our sins, take responsibility of them, and we obtain forgiveness. Admitting one's sin removes the fear; taking responsibility of one's sin carries away the guilt; and being forgiven takes away the shame.

When David the prophet did not confess his sins he suffered, so he resolved to confess his sins in order to have peace and to obtain the joy of salvation "when I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to Thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;' then Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin" (Ps 32:3-5).

Similarly, Joseph's brothers when they did not admit their sin nor took responsibility of it, they did not have peace of heart and their conscience rebuked them for so many years. They went to Egypt to buy wheat and met Joseph their brother without recognizing him and when he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them, they said to one another "in truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us and we would not listen; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, 'did I not tell you not to sin against the lad? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood'" (Gen 42:21,22).

When we confess our sins we will prosper "he who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Prov 28:13); be purified "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9); and be healed "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (Jam 5:16).

The practice of confession is from old, it can be traced to the time of Moses the prophet "when a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed" (Lev 5:5) and it was done before the priests "and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mt 3:6) meanwhile it was understood that it is done to God "now Joshua said to Achan, 'my son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me'" (Joshua 7:19).

The practice of confession continued in the New Testament "many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices" (Acts 19:18). This was based on the authority that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to His disciples and their successors "and when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (Jn 20:22,23).

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, St. Clement says, "Let us therefore implore forgiveness for all those transgressions which through any suggestion of the adversary we have committed. And these who have been the leaders of sedition and disagreement ought to have respect to the common hope. For such as live in fear and love would rather that they themselves than their neighbors should be involved in suffering. And they prefer to bear blame themselves, rather than that the concord which has been well and piously handed down to us should suffer. For it is better that a man should acknowledge his transgressions than that he should harden his heart, as the hearts of those were hardened who stirred up sedition against Moses the servant of God, and whose condemnation was made manifest unto all; for they went down alive into Hades, and death swallowed them up. Pharaoh with his army and all the princes of Egypt, and the chariots with their riders, were sunk in the depths of the Red Sea, and perished, for no other reason than that their foolish hearts were hardened, after so many signs and wonders had been wrought in the land of Egypt by Moses the servant of God. The Lord, brethren, stands in need of nothing; and He desires nothing of any one except that confession be made to Him. For, says the elect David, "I will confess unto the Lord; and that will please Him more than young bullock that hath horns and hoofs. Let the poor see it, and be glad." And again he saith, "Offer unto God the sacrifice of praise, and pay thy vows unto the Most High. And call upon me in the day of thy trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" for 'the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit.'"

Before giving the disciples His holy Body and His precious Blood on Covenant Thursday, the Lord Jesus Christ first washed their feet. When St. Peter refused at the beginning the Lord told him "if I do not wash you, you have no part in Me" (Jn 13:8). To this St. Peter replied "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head" (Jn 13:9) but the Lord told him "he who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over" (Jn 13:10).

While walking in our spiritual journey, our spiritual feet get dirty. Therefore washing the feet here represents repentance

and confession by which we wash away the dirtiness of our spiritual life. This is a necessary step before partaking of the Holy Mysteries; therefore the Lord said to St. Peter "if I do not wash you (through the mystery of repentance and confession) you have no part in Me (through the mystery of communion)."

In the mystery of Baptism, we receive the forgiveness of our sins (Acts 22:16). When we sin after being baptized, we don't need to be rebaptized since the Lord died once on the cross and the baptism is fellowship in His death and His resurrection (Rom 6:3, 4). Therefore after baptism we wash away our sins through the mystery of repentance and confession. That is why the Lord said to St. Peter "he who has bathed (mystery of baptism) does not need to wash (be baptized again) except for his feet (mystery of repentance and confession) but he is clean all over." Thus truly the mystery of repentance and confession is called the second baptism.

St. Paul also emphasized the importance of repentance and confession before taking communion "let a man examine himself (through the mystery of repentance and confession) and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly (through the mystery of repentance and confession), we should not be judged" (1 Cor 11:28-31).

Self examination covers three areas; my relationship with God, my relationship with others, and my relationship with myself. True repentance does not know justification to one's self, excuses, or shifting blame. True repentance involves admitting one's sin (e.g. the prodigal son - Lk 15:18,19), remorse (e.g. David the prophet - Ps 6:6), taking responsibility of one's behavior (e.g. Zacchaeus - Lk 19:8), purposing to follow the Lord and not to return back to the former life (e.g. St. Paul - Acts 9:6), having great confidence in the acceptance and forgiveness of the Lord (e.g. St. Peter - Jn 21:15), and confessing all of that to God before His stewards the priests (e.g. the believers in Acts 19:18).

Let us repent and confess our sins to the Lord praying and saying "I have sinned, I have sinned, O my Lord Jesus forgive me; for there is no servant without sin nor a master without forgiveness."

H.G. Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States