

Forty Weeks ~ Sacred Story



Week Eighteen Encouragements & Wisdom

E & W reflections are additional helps for your Sacred Story prayer journey. Reflect on them ahead of your prayer exercises for the week or outside of your fifteen-minute prayer windows during the week.

Beginning a Monthly Habit of Reconciliation for your *Sacred Story*

We continue exploring the graces from *Sacred Story* pilgrims' reflections on the experience of making a whole-life confession. God is faithful when we confront our fears. In this we learn that the one Ignatius calls the enemy of our human nature actively works to keep us from God's peace and healing—sometimes for years and decades. Please make a monthly commitment to “walk into your fears” and engage this most profound healing Sacrament. Nothing else in the world that is this powerful and healing comes with such a low, low price! Nothing.

✦ I have been really busy of late and so even though I had labored over my letter, I hadn't been especially anxious about attending confession. Instead, when the day arrived, I was more concerned because I had arrived late at the service and wasn't sure of the procedure, I felt unsure why I was there and felt maybe I was wasting an opportunity. However, once I was before the priest and started reading through my letter, the floodgates opened. So many of the real anxieties and struggles I've lived with were there before me on the page. The priest was wonderfully patient and let me say what I needed to. His kindness and his attentive listening were remarkable. I cried hugely, wished I'd brought more tissues, but had a sense of relief and release. I felt I had come before my God and been heard, my soul laid bare. The days after my confession were very interesting. I felt a lightness about my being. I paid closer attention to the good things in my life and tried to leave some of the fears and anxieties behind. I'm not sure how long this newfound sense of freedom might continue, but the

confessional experience was a tremendous surprise, quite unexpected. I came to the church, rushed, distracted and not ready for the gift of peace and reconciliation bestowed upon me. Our God is good, forgiving and generous in His love.

+ Making your whole life confession is so freeing! It makes you more reflective about your life, but not just the past. It helps you see the "why" of your choices. With this knowledge and awareness you are better able to make choices. I found a lot of my guilt about my past dissipated. I find I look at events in my life in a different way, not as a bad happening, but an opportunity to grow. The whole life confession helped me become a more mature Christian.

+ Do write your letter to Jesus. Be frank and open about how you feel about Him and your relationship. Once you write it down, tell Him how you feel about your shortcomings (sins), reread it and rewrite it...pray about it...you'll become confident through the Holy Spirit that **YOU CAN DO THIS...with much prayer. YOU WILL DO IT!** You'll be greatly refreshed...my reaction was **IT WAS SO EASY AND I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED!** Oh, just so you know, I was anxious beforehand...but, Our Lord was too in Gethsemane. He triumphed to become the **SAVIOR OF THE WHOLE WORLD...that includes YOU and me.** I will pray for you. Thank you to our Bishop, our priests and fellow participants who prayed for me. **DEO GRATIAS! ALLELUIA!'**

+ I knew Our Lord was waiting just for me. I felt a surge of joy knowing that He was loving and accepting me in all my smallness and simplicity. My letter in many ways was like a small child presenting a crayon drawing to their Father to put on the fridge. Jesus was thanking me for trusting Him and coming to Him. I went home filled with hope, peace and joy in the future. I felt loved and forgiven, encouraged and worthwhile.

+ I was absolutely terrified. As Thursday of last week approached, the more anxious I became. I read all of my notes again and again. Reading the Encouragements helped calm me, but I was still frightened. I prayed a lot, thought about how St. Ignatius fought "the dark side" and went to church, praying for help. Father put me at ease and made the experience very cathartic. It still wasn't easy, but I am so grateful to God and everyone who is on this journey with me. An hour after the confession, my heart felt lighter. The anxiety is gone, I felt better. Thank you Father from the bottom of my heart. Praise be to God!

+ The act of writing the whole life confession was far more daunting and challenging than the act of making the confession. Although I was not sure that I could make the confession face to face with my confessor, although drawn to tears several times, I made it through face to face, and I believe that made it even more of a true blessing for me. This was a very guilt liberating, spiritual exercise, and I feel God's grace in helping me with honesty and courage to see out through. Father Bill's continual words of encouragement over these past weeks

have helped me to keep going.

✦ The whole-life confession was an opportunity to really lay it all out there on the line- the root causes of why I sin, those sins for which I have the deepest sorrow, and a submission to the Lord to help me break the pattern. When I go to regular Reconciliation, I find myself searching for very specific, daily sins. This was a rare opportunity to explore sinfulness on a much deeper, broad level. As scary as that might sound, it was more a turning point AWAY from my repetitive sins than a dwelling on them. I am so glad I did it.

✦ I prayed for a most understanding priest to whom I could do my first life confession. My prayers were answered. He talked to me with an unconditional love and without judgment. He showed me the presence of God in my life. I went away with an impression that I am Jesus' "beloved". It was the most wonderful experience. I am very grateful for Sacred Story.

✦ The whole-life confession is one of the best things I have ever done in my entire life. Because I go to confession regularly I did not expect the whole-life confession to be so profound. I wrote my letter before the Blessed Sacrament and tried to penetrate the depths of the state of my soul. I followed the guidance that the program offered. I thanked God for so much. I honestly disclosed my sin the best I could in my letter. It wasn't pretty - and yes, it was all-embarrassing to admit. During the week prior to my confession I prayed to the Holy Spirit. The amazing thing is, that at the whole-life confession, - Just the act of being there - of surrendering myself to the Lord - brought me to tears. It was as though I was forgiven and cleansed before I began my confession. Father was so kind and loving. Perhaps my honest attempt at penetrating the depths of my sin, and the realization of my human insufficiency and limitations - the cry for mercy, drew the cleansing relief of tears. I know I have work to do still, but this type of confession is so beneficial and definitely worth any amount of effort you put into it!

✦ I didn't know about the whole life confession until after I had made the commitment to take the Sacred Story journey. I know it was mentioned in the literature, but I didn't get it. Then when I heard that the whole life confession was a part of the process, I was very nervous. As someone new to the Catholic faith the thought of doing a whole life confession was overwhelming. However, each part of the process leading up to the whole life confession helped me identify patterns and see connections between my experiences and my behaviors and see where I fell short of living a Christ-like life. The writing exercises helped me focus on just having a conversation with Jesus. That imagery was very helpful. Going to the Reconciliation service I was very agitated and emotional. I was afraid I wouldn't do it "right". I am so grateful that I went through the process. It's like going through an evaluation and being surprised at being affirmed rather than criticized. This is more like a self evaluation where you come out feeling healed and forgiven, reaffirmed about the depth of God's love for

you. Thanks so much to all the priests who made this possible.

✦ This was a profound experience. It was unlike any confession I have ever experienced. By writing my letter to Jesus, I was able to complete my thoughts which made my confession more authentic and truthful. My priest was so loving and I left with great joy, relief and a heart full of gratitude and love for my Lord.

✦ I found that following the prayerful walking with Jesus exercise caused me to awaken to sins I have confessed before but had avoided total honesty in the process of relating them because of the deep shame and self-justification I harbored of them. The last week, continuing the spiritual exercises, after my life confession, revealed another which I plan to confess again but without self-justification. I feel there will be many more sins in this category which will be revealed to me as we continue.

✦ I thank God for this grace and healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Was phenomenal, to be able to go through this exercises that helps me to find the source of my weakness, failures, vices and sins. As we learned that the sins have many avenues (tentacles), I can associate frequency, graveness, intensity, people... in all, been able to go deep enough to find the root of the problem, get a hold of it and yank it for good. With God's grace I can become a better person, find the peace and joy in every situation and hopefully help someone along the way. There is no substitute for Reconciliation. If we are not soul-healthy, we cannot do God's will. We need to pray for our Priests. Without them we can't have the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

✦ The opportunity to pray about and write for 2 weeks leading up to the confession help dissipate the anxiousness I felt. I still cried but not the sobbing that I had done reading my story to myself. There is such a peace reading your own whole-life confession. I do think I will come back to it in my journey periodically.

✦ For me it was a wonderful experience, a great blessing. Being elderly there were years of experiences to look at of course. There was certainly anxiety at first as I tried to look into issues with Jesus. This very process became a great blessing and drew me closer to the Lord I believe. For the time we were directed I continued to go through the process of looking at my issues in the presence of the Lord. By the day of the evening for confession I was blessed to ask God to help me flow with the day. Almost all of the anxiety was gone; I looked forward to the blessing. And what a great and wonderful blessing it was. It has brought me more confidence and a closer relationship with the Lord. I would not want anyone to miss this great opportunity.

✦ This was a truly incredible experience. It was through the process of examining my life

that I came to such a deep understanding of how the events from my earliest days have impacted me in the present and how important it is to open my heart completely to the Lord. He knows all so there is nothing I can hide, but by allowing myself to truly examine my life and present it to him brought me an awakening experience I'd never realized was possible. To open your heart completely to the Lord to allow his servant to help guide me through the journey has brought me tremendous peace and lifted a burden from my heart that I have never fully realized the extreme weight of. The peace this process has brought me is beyond anything I had hoped for.



† I was extremely afraid and anxious going into the experience that I was extremely tempted to back out because I did not feel that I was thorough enough or had prepared well enough. I felt extremely scattered and judgmental of myself. I had notes flying everywhere, editing the letter and re-editing the letter up until the very last minute that I entered the confessional. However, I just drove myself to the Church. What really resonated with me and motivated me was the constant reminder not to let fear direct my life. I was consoling myself along the way by repeating that God would be pleased with any attempt and any effort and that this very situation was another example of the fact that I can't save myself, God is in control and that I need Him in my life. I wanted to have this action of not giving into the fear, allowing it to paralyze me, to be the first step toward the path toward my new life story with God as its author. DO IT!! Don't allow the fear to paralyze you!! You will be amazed by the results.

✦ I was afraid. So afraid! I started crying in the pew even before I gave my whole-life confession. I almost ran out the door of the church I was so afraid and overcome with emotion. But instead I prayed hard for courage and peace. And before I could think about it anymore, I chose a priest to hear my whole-life confession. To do it before I lost all courage. And WOW. I am so glad I didn't run. What a wonderful experience!! I told my priest how scared I was and how I almost fled. He held my hands and heard my confession. It was truly powerful to fully experience what turning away from fear and embracing God can really do. It brought home so much of the previous weeks lessons from Sacred Story. Truly it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life.

✦ In February, my grown children, grandchildren and friends had a 70th birthday party for me that I will never forget. After the whole-life confession, I remember thinking that as a result of these two events, I could die happy. Then, I began to think, no what I can do now is LIVE happy! I did not really find it to be intimidating, but rather freeing. I feel that I found as much relief in the writing of the confession as I did in the confession itself. I feel the way it was presented removed fears and doubts. Thank you for providing this opportunity.

