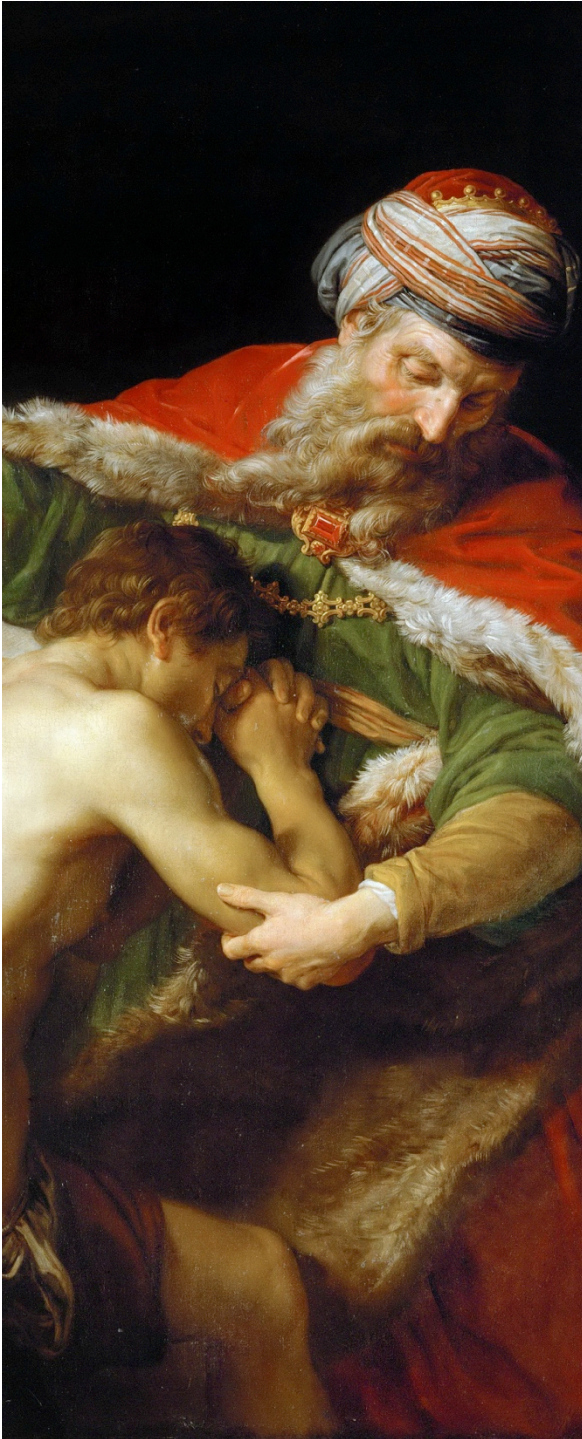


Making Better Confessions



Fr. Roger J. Landry
Catholic Information Conference
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The Gift of the Sacrament

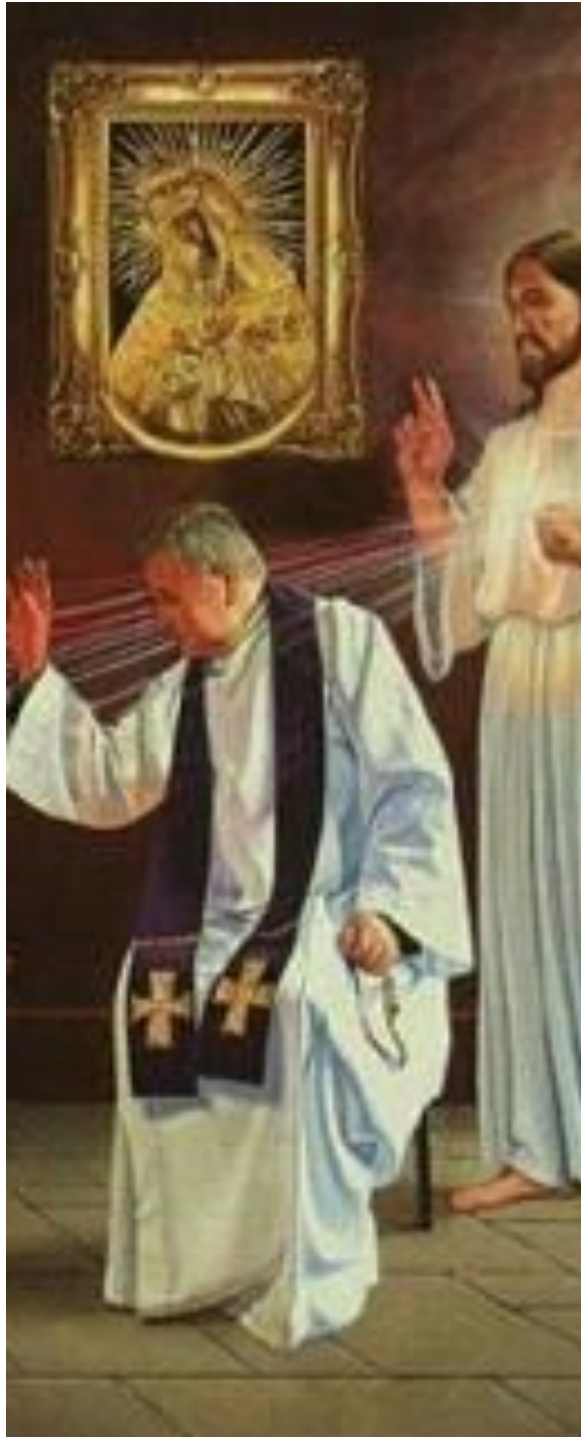


- The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (aka Confession) is a great gift.
- Founded by Jesus on Easter Sunday evening (Jn 20:19-23)
 - “Just as the Father sent me so I send you”
 - “Receive the Holy Spirit”
 - “Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”
- Why Easter? Because as Jesus indicated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:1-32), which is about God’s mercy, sin and divine forgiveness is the experience of resurrection: “My son was dead and has come back to life again!”
- The Sacrament is a privilege for us to have our souls returned to their baptismal beauty by the power of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. It’s a great spiritual reset. God’s “lost and found” department.
- St. John Paul II once told young people that the fastest way to mature is to become better penitents: through the experience of Confession we are not only freed of the weight of sin but learn those areas in our life where we need God’s help.



Challenges to the Sacrament

- Many Catholics have received any more formation about the Sacrament since they made their first Confession, often when they were eight.
- Others look at it not as a sacred encounter with God but as a forensic accounting of the soul or an exercise in psychological introspection.
- Others go too infrequently. Only 38 percent of practicing Catholics go at least once a year.
- Sometimes it's not offered enough and some people infer that it therefore can't be that important.
- Sometimes there's a bad theology of the Sacrament, that we don't need it, because can confess our sins to God directly.
- Many are intimidated because they don't know what to say or do. Others are ashamed of what they've done and don't want to say it. Others worry that if the priest recognizes them, he'll think poorly of them.
- The evil one is obviously at work trying to keep people from converting, coming to their senses and returning to God.



Preparation for Confession

- We will talk soon about the “acts of the penitent”: examination of conscience, sorrow, firm purpose of amendment; how to go to confession; and what to do after.
- But it’s good to begin with the “theological virtues,” the three habits given to us by God to help us to relate correctly to him: faith, hope and love.
- With regard to the Confession, we need:
 - **Faith** in God’s working through the Sacrament as well as faith that God can give us his mercy through the same instruments (priests) through whom he gives us his Body and Blood;
 - **Hope** that helps us to trust in God’s promise to grant us his mercy and a fresh start if we turn to him;
 - **Love** for God that makes us regret how we have injured our relationship with him as well as love for others that brings us to ask for God’s help to repair the damage that we have inflicted by our thoughts, words, deeds and omissions.



Examination of Conscience

- This is when we look at our behavior in the light of God and see how our thoughts, words, deeds and failures to act have strengthened or weakened our relationship with God and others.
- We calibrate our conscience – the inner organ of sensitivity to God – by his Word, the teaching of the Church, the wisdom of the saints.
- Many are trained to do so looking at their life through the prism of the Ten Commandments, which help us to focus on love of God (first three) and love of neighbor (other seven). There are many helpful examination sheets like the ones available at missionariesofmercyusa.org.
- Frequent penitents may shift to scrutinizing their behavior by means of the seven deadly sins (pride, anger, envy, greed, lust, sloth, gluttony), the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, the beatitudes or various Biblical lists of virtues (like 1 Cor 13:4-8).
- Doing a brief examination each night before bed can sensitise our conscience to the areas of harmony and disharmony with God and make the examination of conscience before Confession more fruitful.



Sorrow

- Most penitents spend most of their time preparing for Confession examining their consciences, but the most important part of preparation is sorrow.
- St. John Vianney called contrition the “balm of the soul” and said, “It is necessary to spend more time asking for contrition than making the examination of conscience.”
- St. John Paul II called contrition “the essential act of Penance on the part of the penitent” and the “beginning and the heart of conversion.”
- There are two types of contrition:
 - “perfect” (sorrow flowing from love for God)
 - “imperfect” (sorrow flowing from fear of the consequences of sin in this world and the next).
- Many today, John Paul II said, no longer experience complete sorrow because they are “no longer sufficiently motivated by the love of God.” They look at sin as transgressing a law rather than wounding a loved one.
- To grow in sorrow:
 - Examine your conscience holding a Crucifix and recognizing that Jesus died on the Cross to take away each sin we’ve committed.
 - Really pray and mean the Act of Contrition.



The Act of Contrition

- Many Catholics have questions about the Act of Contrition, which is an expression of sorrow for sins.
- Two of the most common ones teach both about perfect and imperfect contrition, but also about the firm purpose of amendment and reliance on God.
 - O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.
 - My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.
- It is always possible to say something shorter, like, “O Jesus, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner,” or express your sorrow briefly in your own words, “I’m so sorry, Lord, for having sinned against you. Please help me!”



Firm Purpose of Amendment

- As we see in the Act of Contrition, true contrition always leads to a firm purpose of amendment, a resolution not to wound the Lord, others, our ourselves again.
- Few people spend sufficient time forming the resolve never to commit such a sin again, and when they do, often it remains just at the level of a good and holy “desire.” What’s needed is a game plan, a strategy, to avoid recurrent behavior and develop the virtues we need to remain faithful under temptation.
- How to we form such a plan?
 - Trust in God more than our willpower and ask for his help.
 - Analyze the near occasions of sin, when we’re particularly vulnerable.
 - Get spiritually cutthroat, like Jesus suggests when he declares we need to be willing to pluck out eyes or chop off hands and feet if they lead us to sin (Mk 9:43-47). It’s to say, “What would I do to avoid this sin if I knew I would physically die if I committed it again?”
 - Get specific. If you’re trying to avoid the sin of harboring anger, say, “When I notice I’m starting to get angry, I will immediately pray, ‘Lord, please forgive this person for his behavior and have mercy on me, too,’ etc.”

Going to Confession

- Remember how happy you are making God by coming to Confession. Jesus said, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who have need no repentance” (Lk 15:7).
- We should seek to be candid, clear and concise, stating how long it’s been since our last Confession and getting off of our consciences first what we think are the most serious sins.
- There are many “how to” sheets on going to Confession (like at missionariesofmercyusa.org). It’s fine to bring them into the confessional or reconciliation room with you if you’re at all nervous.
- Likewise, if it’s helpful for you to prepare a short sheet to help you remember what to confess, please do. Remember: the Sacrament is not a memorization test or an oral exam but an encounter with God through his ambassador. (You can destroy the sheet after Confession.)
- If you need help, please don’t hesitate to say, “Father, I’m nervous and I don’t know what to do.” “Father, it’s been too long. Would you please walk me through the Sacrament?”
- Remember to pray for the priest who hears your Confession, that he might really be an instrument of God, giving you good advice and helping you to experience a little of the joy of heaven at your absolution.



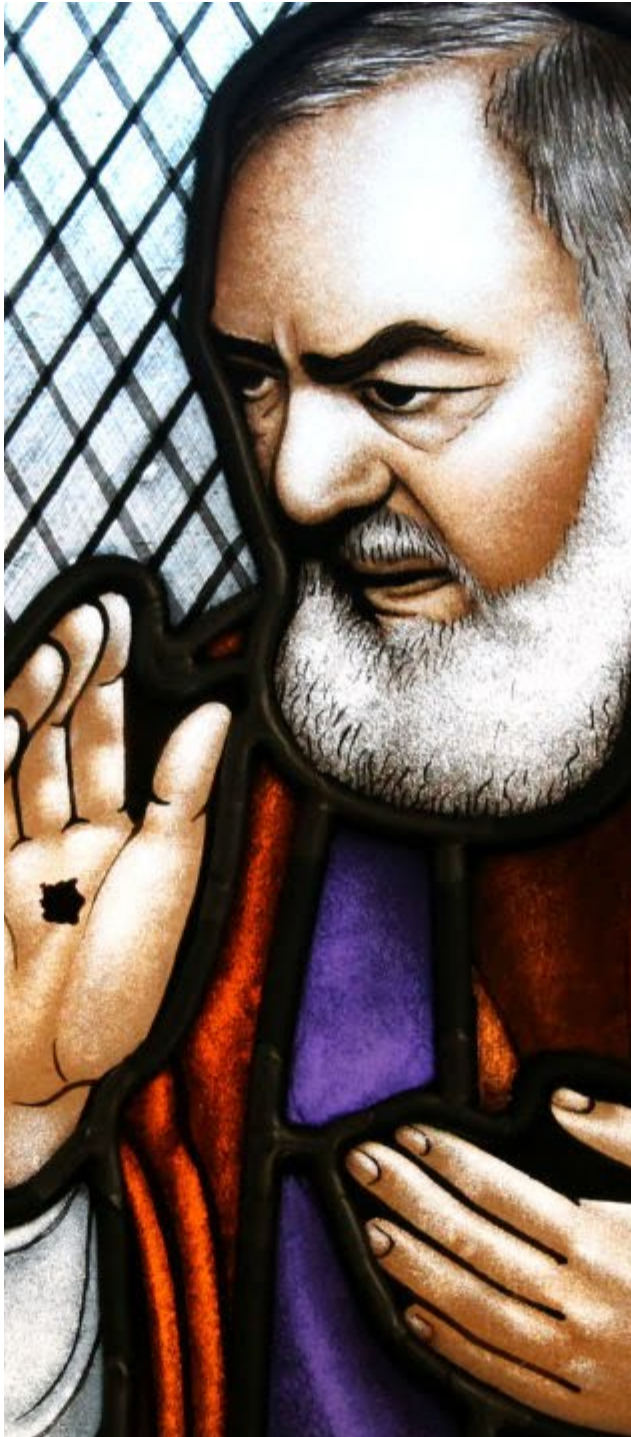
After Confession



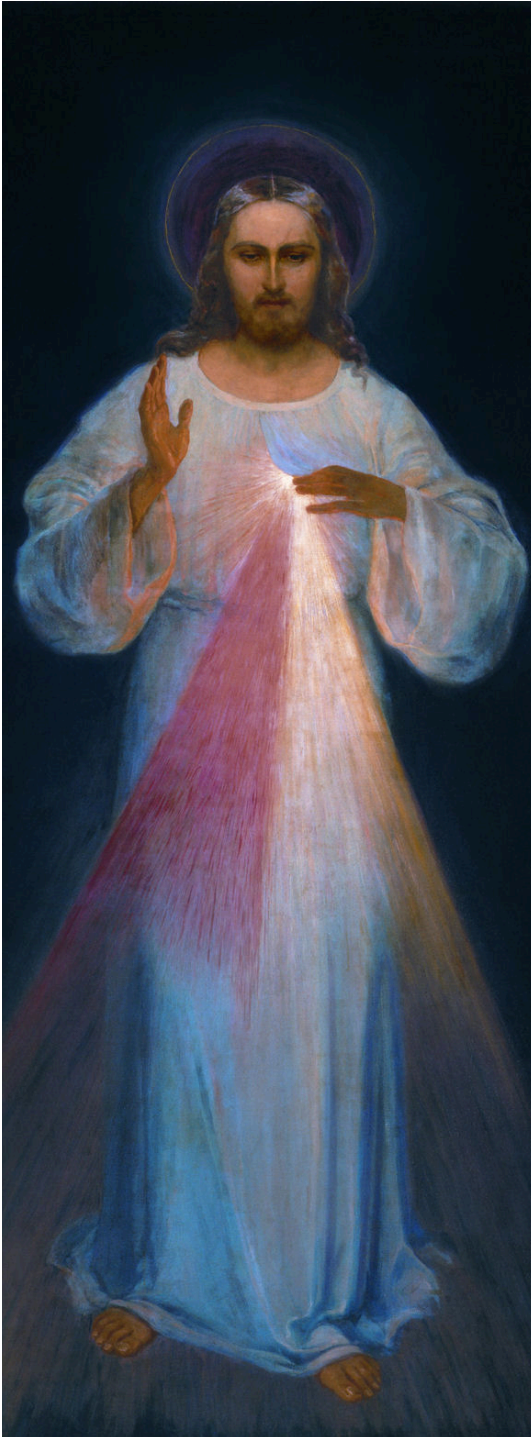
- Doing penance
 - The priest will give you a penance, to start the process of repairing the damage due to sin. You should try, as quickly as you can, to complete the penance imposed by the confessor.
 - The penance should lead us to grow in the virtue of penance, by which we regularly try to do reparation for our sins as well as the sins of others.
 - We should and to put into practice with seriousness our firm purpose of amendment.
- Sharing Mercy
 - When Jesus taught us the Our Father and gave us the Parable of the Two Debtors (Mt 18:21-35), he indicated that our sins will be forgiven only to the extent that we are forgiving others.
 - It's not that God would refuse to forgive us, but we can't receive his mercy unless we have a heart open to mercy. The Parable teaches us that what others have done to us is small compared to what our sins have done to God, and if he has forgiven our much bigger debts, we should do the same for others toward us.
- Bringing others
 - Transformed, we should become ambassadors of divine mercy trying to draw others to receive the same gift.
 - We should become like the friends of the paralyzed man who brought their pal to Jesus, who forgave his sins even before he healed his paralysis (Mt 9:1-8)

Frequent Confession

- Catholics are supposed to go to Confession at least once a year, but the minimum should not become our maximum.
- The last seven popes have strongly advocated for it:
 - St. John Paul II said, “It would be an illusion to seek after holiness ... without partaking frequently of this Sacrament of Conversion and Reconciliation. Those who go to Confession frequently, and do so with the desire to make progress, will notice the strides that they make in their spiritual lives.”
 - St. Paul VI: “Frequent and reverent recourse to this Sacrament, even when only venial sin is in question, is of great value. Frequent Confession is not mere ritual repetition, [but]... rather a constant effort to bring to perfection the grace of our Baptism... [so that] the life Jesus Christ lives may be more and more manifested in us.
 - Pius XII: “To ensure more rapid progress day by day in the path of virtue, the pious practice of frequent confession, which was introduced into the Church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, should be earnestly advocated,”
 - Pope Francis; “The Pope, too, is a sinner. ... So that you know I practice what I preach, ... I see my confessor every week.”
- What are the fruits of frequent confession?
 - “The regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father’s mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful” (CCC 1458).
 - Pope Pius XII in 1943: “Genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and grace is increased in virtue of the Sacrament itself.”



The Power of God's Mercy



- The Sacrament of Confession makes heaven rejoice the most (Lk 15:1-32). The Sacrament has the power to make great sinners great saints, as we have seen throughout Church history. God wants us to grow in love for him in this Sacrament, which is what the Divine Mercy Devotion is all about and helps us to do.
- In one of the Prefaces of the Ambrosian Liturgy, the priest sings to God: “You bent down over our wounds and healed us, giving us a medicine stronger than our afflictions, a mercy greater than our fault. In this way, even sin, by virtue of your invincible love, served to elevate us to the divine life.” I call it the “cow manure principle,” that God takes our refuse and makes it fertilizer for new growth.
- And priests by ordination are committed to bring this gift at the cost of everything, including their life. The Sacramental Seal of Confession means that a priest has made the commitment never to reveal what you or anyone else says to him in the Sacrament of Penance, even to save his own life, even when someone is calumniously attacking his good name, even to avert a public disaster, even to stop the brutal torture of his mother before his eyes. Several priests have died protecting the seal — St. John Nepomuk, St. Mateo Correa, Bl. Felipe Ciscar, Bl. Fernando Olmedo— and many others have been imprisoned and suffered for it. *This points to how important the Sacrament of Confession is if it requires that level of commitment and potential sacrifice from those who administer it.*
- We finish with St. Paul’s words we hear every Ash Wednesday: “All this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation... So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”
- The Sacrament helps us to experience reconciliation with God so that we might become the holiness of God in Christ!

For the Slides of this Talk

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and listen to the audio recording

by going to
www.catholicpreaching.com
and then clicking on the appropriate link
under “Most Recent Talks”

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The screenshot shows the homepage of the website catholicpreaching.com. The header features a gold cross logo and the text "Catholic Preaching" with "Fr. Roger J. Landry, Diocese of Fall River" underneath. A small photo of Fr. Landry is in the top right. A navigation menu includes Home, Homilies, Articles, Plan of Life Book, Retreats, Teaching, and Biography. A search bar is present. The main content area has a "Welcome!" section with a warm greeting and a quote from Cardinal Edmund Szoka: "Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Practice what you teach." Below this is a paragraph about the author's ordination and mission, followed by a list of "Most Recent Homilies", "Most Recent Articles", and "Most Recent Talks".

Home Homilies Articles Plan of Life Book Retreats Teaching Biography

Search this website ... Search

Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

*"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are.
Believe what you read.
Teach what you believe.
Practice what you teach."*

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,
Fr. Roger J. Landry

Most Recent Homilies	Most Recent Articles	Most Recent Talks
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bearing Fruit Attached to the Vine, 12th Wednesday (II), June 27, 2018▪ Following the Lead of the Precursor, Solemnity of St. John the Baptist, June 24, 2018▪ Placing Our Heart and Treasure in God, 11th Friday (II), June 22, 2018▪ Longing to See God's Face in Prayer and in Others, 10th Friday (II), June 15, 2018▪ The Surpassing Righteousness of Christ-like Merciful Love, 10th Thursday (II), June 14, 2018▪ Greatest in the Kingdom, 10th Wednesday (II), June 13, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Secular Push to Get Priests to Break the Seal, The Anchor, June 29, 2018▪ Approaching the Suicide Surge with Honesty and Resolve, The Anchor, June 15, 2018▪ The Abortion Exception to the Practice of Discrimination, The Anchor, June 1, 2018▪ The Contemporary Attack on Motherhood, The Anchor, May 18, 2018▪ The Euthanasia of Alfie Evans, The Anchor, May 4, 2018▪ "Do Not Be Afraid of Holiness," The Anchor, April 20, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Church and International Diplomacy, Acton University, June 20, 2018▪ The Entrepreneurial Vocation, Acton University, June 20, 2018▪ The Social Teaching of Pope St. John Paul II, Acton University, June 20, 2018▪ The Necessity and Art of Trinitarian Prayer, Catholic Medical Association Boot Camp, June 18, 2018▪ Christ, the Redeemer of Marriage: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel of the Sacramentality of Marriage at a Time When Sex, Love,

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*Thank you for your interest in this presentation
and for your hunger to grow in your Catholic formation!*