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| ANNOUNCER KAI: | It's Saturday at 4:00 p.m. While their neighbors relax and enjoy the day, we can see Catholics gathering to cleanse themselves of sin in the sacrament of reconciliation, also known as confessional. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | What a great way to observe their natural behavior. Oh, it looks as if we have a particularly nervous penitent. |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | Not surprising. This is the sacrament that Catholics hate to perform but love after. |
| LIBBY: | Hi, I'm Libby. |
| KAI: | And I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central. |
| LIBBY: | In this episode we're going to talk about one of the most misunderstood practices in the Catholic Church, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. |
| KAI: | People also call it the Sacrament of Conversion, the Sacrament of Forgiveness, and the Sacrament of Penance, which you may know it by its more common name, Confession. |
| LIBBY: | OK, so you may get a little uncomfortable when you hear that word. |
| KAI: | Detailing all the ways in which you failed yourself and others might not exactly be your idea of a good time. |
| LIBBY: | But for Catholics, Confession can bring healing, peace and the kind of joy and inner freedom they can't experience any other way. |
| KAI: | So most people know that Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is something that Catholics do but it really points to a universal reality that all people have. |
| LIBBY: | There are times when every single person does things they regret, says things they wish they had not said, or holds onto an attitude that makes life miserable. |
| KAI: | There is a universal human longing to bring our darkness to the light, to be made whole, and to become our true selves. |
| LIBBY: | As universal as that might be though, the first question you might ask is, why do it this way? |
| KAI: | You might say, "Isn't it much easier to confess my sins directly to God?" You don't have to leave the house or even put on pants. |
| LIBBY: | That's a great question. Nothing stops anyone from communicating directly with God. The Church hopes you do. But there is value in speaking to another human being, one who will keep confidentiality and receive the confession with a sense of reverence. |
| KAI: | Saying something out loud can take away its power. Sin loves to stay a secret. It can grow and deceive that way. |
| LIBBY: | Another reason Catholics do what they do is because they recognize that sin doesn't just affect your relationship with God. |
| KAI: | As early as the third century, it became obvious to the Christian community that serious sins like apostasy, murder, and adultery affected everyone. |
| LIBBY: | So back then, penitents … |
| KAI: | People who had publicly sinned ... |
| LIBBY: | … could make a public confession and hang out their dirty laundry in front of everyone, then do acts of penance everybody could see. That didn't go over so well. |
| KAI: | Yeah, they stopped doing that. But there was still an awareness that others were affected by sin. Problem is, you can't go to every single person on earth and apologize. |
| LIBBY: | For us, the priest represents the entire community, the Body of Christ. Saying you're sorry to him is like saying you're sorry to the whole group. So now your next question might be, why does a priest get to do that? |
| KAI: | Catholics believe the authority comes from Jesus Himself, who gave it to the Apostles, who handed it down to the priests all the way here to today. John:20 explains. |
| LIBBY: | "And when he had said this he breathed it on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.'" So whenever Catholics confess to a priest, he represents Jesus Christ, who gave him the authority to absolve us. |
| KAI: | To absolve comes from the word to set free. |
| LIBBY: | Confession releases us from our sins and puts us back in right relationship with God, others, and ourselves. |
| KAI: | Even the famous psychologist Carl Jung believed in the curative power of confessing wrongs and receiving absolution from a person sanctioned to give it. He often asked new patients if they were Catholic, if they said yes, he sent them to Confession first. Some of the patients never came back, because Confession took care of whatever was bothering them. |
| LIBBY: | But it's important to know that Confession is not therapy. It's a sacrament that washes away sins. |
| KAI: | And it's not magic either. You have to do your part. |
| LIBBY: | There are three things required for a Catholic Confession to be valid. One, contrition. You have to be genuinely sorry for your sins. |
| KAI: | So, no doing whatever you want and using confession as a get-out-of-jail-free card. |
| LIBBY: | Two, you have to confess your sins out loud to a priest in person. And three, satisfaction. You have to perform whatever penance the priest prescribes. |
| KAI: | Remember, penance is not a way to earn forgiveness. |
| LIBBY: | Instead it's an opportunity to pause a moment to consider the seriousness of sin and to accept the mercy of God, who forgives and transforms. |
| KAI: | Which brings us to the question, what actually happens during a confession? |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | Let's return to our penitents in their natural habitat. In this case, a booth. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | But penitents are known to choose other places where they can talk to a priest privately. |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | Oh, our nervous penitent hasn't run away. He'll probably choose a door that has a screen for privacy. He chose the face-to-face option. Fascinating. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | He starts by saying when his last Confession was. |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | One year. We're in for a rare treat. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | Now comes the sins. |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | Our penitent is doing an excellent job of confessing his own sins and not blaming his family or mean neighbors. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | Now for a few words of advice or encouragement from the priest. |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | And here's the penance. It might be a prayer or some act of service, whatever the priest feels will be the most helpful for the penitent to grow closer to God. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | Next the Act of Contrition. Here the penitent expresses in prayer that he's truly sorry for his sins and intends to avoid them in the future. |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | I see the penitent has chosen the Act of Contrition printed on a card in the confessional. Classic. But now the most exciting part. The Prayer of Absolution, declaring the penitent's sins absolved in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. |
| ANNOUNCER LIBBY: | After that, the penitent goes in peace. |
| KAI: | So how often does the church say you should go to Confession? |
| LIBBY: | The Church recognizes the importance of individual conscience. You usually know when you've done something your way and not God's way, and it's time for Confession. Formally, Catholics should receive the Eucharist, the Body and Blood of Christ, at least once a year. And to do that, serious sins should be confessed beforehand. |
| KAI: | But when you need to go to confession, go. I personally intend to go every couple of weeks or sooner if I have something I've said or done weighing on me or need to get something off my chest. |
| LIBBY: | Like when you feel guilty for eating someone else's lunch? |
| KAI: | How did you know about that? |
| LIBBY: | You know that you told me this morning. |
| KAI: | Oh, yeah, phew. I was worried the priest had broken the seal of confessional. |
| LIBBY: | He can't. Every priest is sworn to uphold it. Even secular courts all over the world recognize this and by law they can't force a priest to reveal anything he's been told in Confession. |
| KAI: | So my secrets are safe with the priest even if I blab about them? |
| LIBBY: | Yep. Plus, the priest has likely heard at all so don't worry about shocking him. |
| KAI: | Speaking of shocking, you may have heard stories about confessions that were less than stellar. |
| LIBBY: | Unfortunately, it's true. Priests are people too and sometimes particular ones haven't been the most kind or helpful in the confessional. |
| KAI: | If you've had a bad experience or you're afraid to go, ask someone to recommend a priest who's known for his compassion and wisdom. |
| LIBBY: | It's like Pope Francis said, "The confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better." |
| ANNOUNCER KAI: | As he leaves the booth, that spring in his step and big smile are sure signs of joy. |
| LIBBY: | I'm Libby. |
| KAI: | And I'm Kai. See you next time on Catholic Central. |

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