

Traveling Companion: Forgiveness: Just a Mouse-click Away

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The article in the newspaper got my attention. It had to happen. Cyber confession is now a reality.

The first ever confessional Internet website has just been launched by Premier Christian Radio in England. It is called, "The Confessor." In its first week of launching, the site, which is supposed to be absolutely confidential, had one million visitors. Thousands log on daily to its site.

"The Confessor" doesn't have a priest to respond to your written or oral confession, nor does it hand out penances. Instead, it invites people to log on, consider the sins they may have committed; then allows them to type in their sins. The owners of the site claim that no one else can access your sins.

The progression through the web pages is interesting. Every time one logs on, one is invited to reflect on any one of over 21,000 scripture reflections. Once one has savored the scripture quotation, one moves to an expose of sin, where sin is seen as an attitude of rebellion against God because we refuse to receive His love or accept His authority. It reminds us that sin destroys relationships and spoils communities, leaving us in a perpetual state of unease because it upsets the balance between love of God and love of neighbor. One is then invited to repent and restore the relationship with God and neighbor. Next, one encounters the "sin screen" where one can begin to share one's sins. One can start with "Dear God..." This is followed by a series of scriptures to reflect on and our need to surrender to God's forgiveness. Then there is a final prayer thanking God for his forgiveness.

The idea of having a Cyber Confessional got me thinking. First of all, it shows the need that people have for some form or mechanism through which they can unburden themselves and experience some peace and forgiveness. One is not judging its effectiveness but reflecting on its need. If there is a need then people will seek out ways to meet such a need, no matter how different or even bizarre are the methods they use.

Secondly, it shows how much we are willing to invest or not invest in getting the peace of mind we seek. A Cyber Confessional experience may be free, but is it healing. A Cyber Confessional allows one to be anonymous, have the least amount of interaction with the least amount of hassle, without having to trust another human being. It is simple, easy, somewhat reflective and assuring and minimally challenging. In an age of instant communications and expectations to be met, it is easy to expect simple solutions to complex problems, easy answers where radical changes are needed, no hassles where life-enhancing decisions are needed.

In an age filled with time saving devices, we end up having less quality time. In an age of remote controls, another bombarding, boring TV program is just a click away. In an age of cruise control cars, we can travel worry-free down the highways of life and be lulled into a false sense of security. In an age of mouse-clicks, we are led to a no hassle, no guilt, no absolution, and no string attached cyber confessional.

Maybe, as Catholics, it is time that we recognize that we possess one of the best-kept secrets of life, which is a lot closer than a mouse-click away.