

Traveling Companion: Bonnie from Clyde

Fr. Michael Tracey

"Dear Father:

Good afternoon! I found your email address on your webpage and I hope that you do not mind my writing to you. It's just that I would be very grateful for the opinion and advice of someone like yourself and I'm not sure who to ask.

I have recently moved away from home to go to college and since coming to college, I have found myself attending Sunday Mass regularly since I have not been to Mass regularly for many, many years. This was a big step for me but so far I'm glad that I made the effort because I have really been 'enjoying' (if that is the right word,) and getting a lot from the Mass as well having a great feeling of peace and serenity each time I go. This is all good but I really want to progress in my faith now that I have found it again and it seems to me that the next logical step is to go to confession and there lies the problem. I know what my numerous faults and failings are and I am so very sorry for them and I really want to make my peace with God. However, I just cannot get together the confidence to go to confession. I have prayed for it but still I can't manage it and it's really hurting me. I think maybe that the fact of the unknown is keeping me back as I don't know what to expect (as the only time I've been to confession is with school when everything is organized, etc.) I don't know any of the priests and I'm not 100% sure of the procedure. I would be very grateful if you could give me any advice, etc. and I apologize to you for bothering you with this. It's just that I've not spoken to a priest about anything like this and I'm grateful for the chance to ask you. Thanks a million. Bonnie"

I checked the email address. Bonnie is a student at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland. The email arrived on Tuesday morning.

As I read Bonnie's email, I remembered an irony. On the previous Sunday afternoon, I walked into our Confirmation class in the middle of the class. Immediately, I was brought into the discussion. The topic being discussed was "confession." Some indicated they didn't believe in confession; others indicated they didn't see a need for confession when they could go directly to God and ask for forgiveness for anything they had done wrong. Some asked why one should go to a priest to confession; others wondered if the priest would remember all the things a person told them in confession. Another asked if someone came into confession and told the priest they had committed murder, could the priest go and tell the authorities? I tried to answer the students barrage of questions and enjoyed the banter.

I sat down and penned an email response to Bonnie. I complimented her on attending Mass again and assured her that the fears and questions she had about confession were normal and natural. I then proceeded to give her some pointers as to how she might approach the sacrament so that it might be more meaningful to her.

I received a return email from Bonnie the next morning. She had given much thought to what I had emailed her. Being a shy, nervous person, she was afraid of 'falling apart' when she would go to Confession. She indicated that, one week ago, she got herself "prepared and ready to go to Confession" but as soon as she entered the church, she couldn't go through with it, "nerves kicked in and seeing other people there," she "kept thinking they are going to know that she was new at this" and she felt so "ashamed."

She ended here email saying, "I am very grateful and it is really reassuring to know that there is someone there who I can ask." I hope to continue to hear from Bonnie from Clyde.