



Ask, Father James:

Where in the Bible can one find God's desire to forgive sins through His chosen Ministers?

The practice of confession and absolution in one form or another is basic to Christianity. Jesus began his ministry with the command to "repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). And he ended his earthly ministry with the admonition that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). The first letter of John says, "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There is evidence from as early as 100 A.D. , in chapter IV, 14, of the *The Didache*, where believers are admonished to confess their transgressions in church and Chapter XIV, 1, directs people to confess their transgressions. In our regular Sunday worship, we the Roman Catholics, invoke the confession of sins at the beginning of the Sunday worship by praying the "I confess..."

God intended the "Father" to forgive sins. In the parable of the prodigal son, the son after coming to his senses said; "I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Luke 15:18). And that was exactly what he did. He went to the Father and confessed his sins. Also, in Matthew and Luke's Gospels, Jesus cleanses a leper, then tells the former leper not to tell anyone what Jesus did but to go show himself to the priest who would offer the sacrifices Moses prescribed (Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 17:12-19). The social condition of the leper was that they were ostracized from the community. The exclusion of the leprous from first-century Jewish society also meant they can't be admitted to worship in the Temple and there were taboos against contact with them or touching lepers . Leprosy in this sense is the sin and consequently, taboo against interacting with bearers of impurity (unclean) people. In John 20:21-23 – Jesus said; "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "receive the Holy Spirit, whosoever sin you forgive they are forgiven them; and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained." By this power, Jesus gives the Apostles and their successors (Bishops, and the priests) authority to forgive sins (sec. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 and James 5:14-15).

In the above passage, i.e., James" 5: 14-15; it says; Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Thus, the anointing rite and hearing confessions have always been by the elders which in the Greek original is translated as (i.e., presbyter = Greek $\pi\rho\epsilon\sigma\beta\upsilon\tau\epsilon\rho\varsigma$ which means priest, the senior, leader of the Christian congregation). He is asked to hear the confession of the sick person and anoint them through these sacraments. This power to "forgive and retain" sins in the name of Jesus is described in other scriptural passages as the authority to "bind and loose" (Cf. Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18).

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