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Coming or going, may the Lord give you peace

Sister Maria Veronica Splonskowski

Thanks be to God for all the places where Divinity reaches out to heal broken humanity! It has been said that the confessional is easier to leave than to enter. True as this may be in general, at one point I encountered the opposite difficulty.

Fear is a real factor for me in life. This factor is heightened greatly when preparing for any life-changing event. The sacrament of confession is no exception. Imagine then, my agony when, after three-quarters of an hour of nerve-wracking suspense, and five eternal minutes in the confessional, I couldn't escape! The door was stuck, and Father, from his seat behind the curtain simply kept repeating, "Turn the knob and push. Turn and push."

Following several such encounters with the door, my sense of humor kicked in. After all, God must have more to say if he won't let me go so easily; or maybe he is so glad someone finally came in, that he wants to lengthen the visit! In an effort to beat the fear, I committed myself interiorly to receive reconciliation more frequently. This, of course, demanded more frequent examination of conscience - something with which I have always struggled.

Time went on, and the door consistently stuck when I tried to leave the confessional. In desperation, I begged help from Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners, and St. Michael, who helped my Guardian Angel to gradually awaken in me an abiding, childlike trust in our Father's love for me.

As we were leaving for Hankinson in the spring, I teased Father after reconciliation, "While we're gone, why don't you fix that door?" To which he enthusiastically objected, "There is NOTHING the matter with the door! All you have to do is turn the handle and push!" Laughing, I took leave, succeeding as usual, only after a few failed attempts which reduced me to giggles. The transformation in myself was miraculous. I had new freedom, new life, new hope!

All summer I did my best to continue faithfully receiving the sacrament of penance frequently. Each mysterious encounter with Jesus filled me with an ever greater appreciation and love for this gift, especially when priests who knew little or nothing about me would reveal with astonishing accuracy hidden struggles or present me with seemingly impossible challenges. Our Father continued to reach out and heal me wherever I was - physically, mentally and spiritually.

Autumn came once more and, returning to the accustomed, and now beloved, "refuge of sinners" - the parish confessional - I received with joy those beautifully familiar words, "May the Lord grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. . . ." Whether something was fixed on the door or in me, I do not know, but I was surprised when it gave way easily on my first attempt.

To this day, our Father's grace continues to fill me more and more with confidence in his mercy and love, despite the fears which, by the help of his grace, I continue to face. I have learned in the process that God can truly free us from sin any place, any time, anywhere,

and the confessional door has never stuck on me – coming in or going out - since then. I pray that all who share these same fears may also come to better know our Father and receive his love for them in the sacrament of reconciliation today.

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