

## Ask Mason & Teo



### Can't I skip the priest and confess my sins to God?

Hi Mason & Teo, My good friend is a Protestant and he doesn't understand why we Catholics confess our sins to a priest when we can go directly to God. Can you help me explain? (Private Sinner)

Aloha, Private Sinner, Sin is never a private matter. Sin offends not only God, but others. The Body of Christ, the church, is wounded whenever we sin. Confession, or the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, is a wonderful gift from God that allows us to not only confess our sins, but to receive assurance of God's loving forgiveness and the spiritual guidance that we need to help us avoid sin, grow in God's grace and to lead holier lives. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1422)

God already knows about our sins. God wants us to experience the gift of divine forgiveness. He wanted to give us that gift so desperately that he gave us his son Jesus, the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity, who gave up the glory of heaven (Philippians 2:6-11) to bring us that gift of God's forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jesus continues to offer forgiveness through the life and work of his apostles to whom he gave the power to forgive sins. In John 20:21-23, Jesus says to the apostles, "As the Father has sent me so I send you ... receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained."

Jesus clearly expected the successors of the apostles, the bishops and priests through the centuries, to continue his work to preach, to pray and to forgive sins when we are truly sorry for them. Therefore, when confessing one's sins to a priest, one truly confesses one's sins to Christ himself and receives pardon from God.

Catholics do not confess sins to a priest instead of God; we confess our sins to a priest who is representing God. Because the priest acts in the person of Christ, he is the spiritual head or "father" of the community, thereby, reconciling us with Christ and his Body, the church, whom we have wounded by sin.

The prayer of absolution which the priest prays while administering the sacrament says, "I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is in God's name the priest forgives, not his own.

When Catholics receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we have the opportunity not only to be forgiven, but to receive kind and wise counsel from the priest on how to better live the Christian life and offer us ways to make up the offenses against others. Our relationships are

healed because we are forgiven by the church as well as by God.

It is embarrassing to confess shameful things that we have done. Often, when we share something confidentially to a friend we find out later that our friend broke confidentiality and told someone else. The priest knows that he, too, is a sinner and our priests are trained to reflect the compassion and understanding of Jesus to the sinner.

A priest has a sacred trust, the seal of confession. He can never tell anyone what someone has told him in the secrecy of the sacrament. The priest is obligated to keep secret what has been revealed to him in confession. He is bound by severe penalties to honor the seal, even if he has to risk his own life. There are no exceptions. Whatever is revealed in confession remains "sealed" by the sacrament. (CCC 1467)

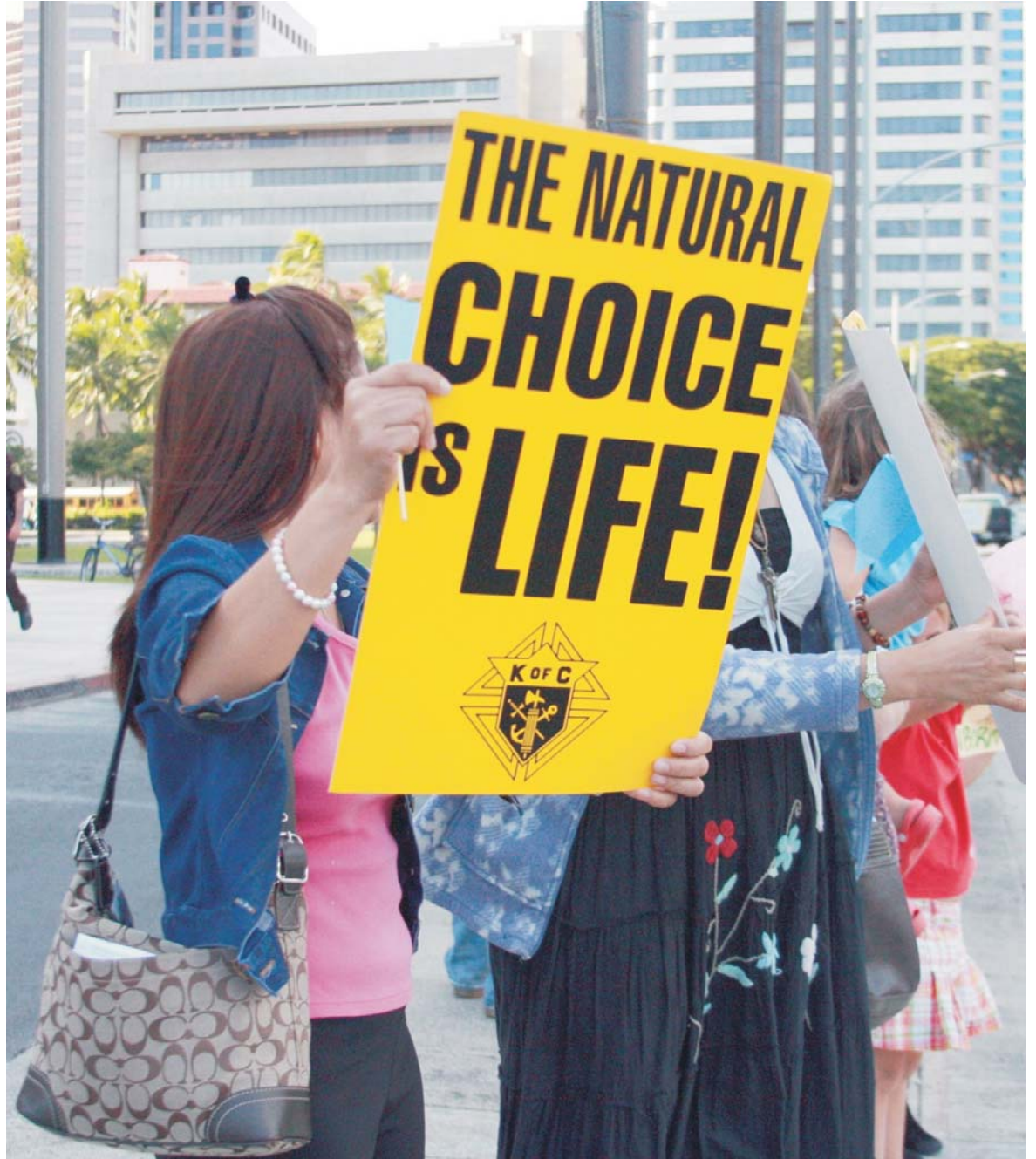
Confession is healthy, spiritually and psychologically. To be able to sit across another human being and admit that you have really messed up, that you have sinned, to ask for God's forgiveness, to hear the words that assure you of God's love and to know that another living human person shares this sacred moment of grace with you is incredible. It can only leave a positive impression.

When we open our hearts to another who is also flawed and sinful and has heard the worst of your secrets and has told you unequivocally that you are forgiven, accepted, reconciled and loved by God — it is good!

Yes, all of us can tell God we are sorry in our hearts. But as Catholics we are truly blessed to have the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Penance — which no other church has — which provide us with absolution of sin. For those who confess regularly, we have the lighthearted joy of hearing God through Jesus and his church say those comforting words, "Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace."

We come face-to-face with God in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. He wants to heal us and make us whole. Come to the Sacrament often and be free from the bondage of sin for the Lord waits for us with love despite our sins.

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Taking a public stand for life at the March for Life rally, Jan. 22, at the state capitol.

## Standing against THE INJUSTICE

### Young adults take up the pro-life banner at the Hawaii March for Life

By Anna Weaver  
Hawaii Catholic Herald

Millenials sometimes are labeled as an indifferent, self-centered generation. But the young adults who came out for the March for Life at the Hawaii State Capitol on Jan. 22 in support of life issues were anything but apathetic.

Branden Ibara left work early to attend his third rally because he said it was that important to him.

"I decided to come because the injustice in America is to such a point that we're killing the next generation of our citizens," said the 25-year-old as he stood on the capitol rotunda steps listening to speeches. "How can we have respect for ourselves if we don't respect life at its conception?"

"According to my faith, I'm to stand against the injustices that are going on."

Off to one side of the large crowd were Tony and Carrie Barcia, both 31, holding their two daughters, Lindsey, 2, and Riley, 6 months.

"They make you want to have more," Carrie said of her daughters. She recalled how, at her first prenatal appointments, she was asked whether her pregnancy was "a good pregnancy."

"We were very blessed because we were married and excited to be pregnant," Carrie said. "But I think if I wasn't [married] I'd still want to hear ... in a doctor's office about the choice of adoption."

"Just knowing people who are trying to have kids, that are trying to adopt, that [adoption] is not seen as an option or a choice

when you go in for prenatal visits" all the time is not right, she said.

Her husband Tony said he used to come to the rallies as a kid but this was the first time he'd been in a number of years as he'd been off-island. His sister was at the Washington D.C. March for Life, and he and his family came to the Hawaii rally, he said, "to be a voice for the unborn."

Twenty-nine-year-old Sarah Parker was at her first March after being abroad for several years. She found the size of the crowd to be "supermotivating."

"I think it's just important that we can get together in God's name and support pro-life and stop the killing of babies," she said.

As for other young adults, Parker said she thinks they know about life issues such as abortion but "they're sort of in denial and they don't want to have to be aware of it."

Movie reviews



CNS photo/Fox

**Taken (Fox):** Formulaic and contrived but effectively tense thriller about an ex-government operative (Liam Neeson) hunting for his missing teenage daughter (Maggie Grace) who's been kidnapped by Albanian sex traffickers in Paris. Director Pierre Morel keeps things moving with a flashy visual style, and Neeson plays with a genuine intensity that almost, but not quite, makes you overlook the improbable setup and ludicrous plot developments. Intense but nongraphic action violence including torture, multiple killings, vigilante justice, some crude language and expressions, and a single profanity. L (PG-13)

**I've Loved You So Long (Sony Classics):** Moving drama about a broken woman (Kristin Scott Thomas) who has been released from prison after many years for having inexplicably murdered her 6-year-old child. She is taken in by her younger sister (Elsa Zylberstein) and wary brother-in-law (Serge Hazanavicius), where gradually, embraced by the loving atmosphere of the household, including two adopted Vietnamese nieces and a stroke-victim grandfather, she has a rebirth, coming to terms with her past and slowly learning to reconnect with the outside world. Novelist-turned-director Philippe Claudel's compassionate story demonstrates profound respect for human dignity, anchored by Thomas' extraordinary performance, beautifully matched by that of Zylberstein, as the pair re-establish a sisterly bond

thought lost. In French. Subtitles. An implied nonmarital encounter, suicide, a couple of crude expressions. A-III (NR)

**New in Town (Lionsgate/Gold Circle):** Quirky, low-key but ultimately endearing romantic comedy about an ambitious Miami-based executive (Renee Zellweger) sent to downsize a food manufacturing plant in New Ulm, Minn., who learns to adjust her values from the eccentric locals and a good-looking union rep (Harry Connick Jr.). Danish director Jonas Elmer helms an engaging cast, which also includes J.K. Simmons, Siobhan Fallon Hogan and Frances Conroy, in this refreshing departure from the usual Hollywood gloss; though more amiable than outright funny, the script nicely stresses the fundamental decency of this overtly Christian community. A few crude and crass

words and a single profanity. A-II (PG)

**The Uninvited (DreamWorks):** Restrained psychological thriller in which a mentally unstable teen girl (Emily Browning) and her sister (Arielle Kebbel) suspect their late mother's nurse (Elizabeth Banks) of murdering Mom to marry their father (David Strathairn). Directors Charles and Thomas Guard's mostly gore-free adaptation of a 2003 Korean film inspires a few chills the old-fashioned way, but its twisting plot is somewhat predictable. Brief nongraphic sexual activity, adultery, cohabitation, moderate violence, underage drinking, sexual and contraceptive references, occasional crass language and a few uses of profanity. A-III (PG-13)

**The Wrestler (Fox Searchlight):** Seamy but powerful character por-

trait of an aging professional wrestler (a superb Mickey Rourke) whose marginal career is threatened by a heart attack, as he initiates a tentative romance with a stripper (Marisa Tomei) and makes fumbling efforts to reconnect with his estranged daughter (Evan Rachel Wood). Director Darren Aronofsky's study of loneliness, set in a landscape of trailer parks and strip malls, is unsparing in its portrayal of the titular sport, the sadistic impulses of its fans, and the demeaning sexuality of the strip club where the protagonist unwinds, but the drama's artistic intent and achievement are clear, as are the fundamentally decent aspirations of the troubled man at its core. Strong sexual content, including graphic nonmarital sexual activity, some nudity, brutal wrestling scenes, drug abuse, pervasive rough and much crude language, and some uses of profanity. L (R)

Twenty-something



Christina Capecchi | Say 'cheese': looking good to the supreme photographer

There are two types of people: those who don't take pictures and those who do. Whichever category you occupy, you probably feel some uneasiness about your position, guilty of either neglect or obsession.

The first group muses, "I ought to take more pictures" - an obligation that's akin to eating more cruciferous vegetables and writing prompt thank-you notes.

The second group fears it goes overboard on picture-taking. This group consists disproportionately of young adults. Our ubiquitous cameras can turn the most mundane activity into a Kodak moment. Our lives are thoroughly documented on Facebook and Flickr, uploaded in the blink of an eye and the click of a button.

We perform for the camera, whipping out our trademark moves, the stances and expressions that charm a crowd and cinch a frame. We are constantly posing, turning life into one ongoing photo-op.

But the heavy-duty image-sculpting happens after the flash, during the editing and presentation. We have unprece-

dent power to alter our images, to delete the unsavory shots and Photoshop the keepers. We crop strategically and sharpen the contrast, making the whites whiter and the tans tanner.

Self-perception has never been more pliable. It is easy to create a flattering portrait: life as a series of smiles cast under soft lighting. How we see ourselves depends upon the sophistication of our software. It has little to do with reality.

We must be aware of these illusions, remembering God's direction to Samuel as he searched Bethlehem for an anointed leader: "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearances but the Lord looks into the heart."

The question is not the beauty of the body, as captured by the camera, but the beauty of the heart.

St. Paul calls us to shift our focus to the unphotographed inner self. "We look not to what is seen

but to what is unseen," he instructs. "For what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal."

The unseen is the way we treat our neighbors when no one is watching. It's the moral code we uphold when it isn't convenient or conventional. It's the daily effort to scrape bitterness from sticky corners in our hearts.

Let's rise above the camera's flash this February, saturated by the glitz of Valentine's Day and the Academy Awards. Red roses and red carpet are far from reality.

Our aim on Earth is not to produce Hollywood glamour for the camera. We've been given a far

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nobler purpose, we read in Genesis this month: We were created in the image and likeness of God.

The pictures we collect may seem to hold some weight, but they are fleeting, deleted as quickly as they are snapped.

What really matters is how God sees us. How do we look through the lens of the Lord - without the benefit of the delete button and the aid of Photoshop?

That's where we should apply our revisionary efforts, altering and adjusting each day.

Pope Benedict XVI recently reflected on the beauty of Christian living. Quoting Ephesians, he said, "Christ thus desires that we grow more beautiful each day through irreproachable moral conduct, 'without wrinkle or defect.'"

So turn off the distractions: Set down the camera and log off Facebook. Stop chasing Kodak moments. Instead, chase grace, seek sacraments and pursue virtues. That kind of beauty is bigger than the camera. It can't be contained in eight megapixels. It is only picked up by the lens of the Lord.

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Vatican YouTube news channel

Vatican now on YouTube

By Carol Glatz  
Catholic News Service

**VATICAN CITY**  
The Vatican launched a video channel on YouTube that will feature news coverage of Pope Benedict XVI and major Vatican events.

It marked the start of the Vatican's strategic vision of working "to be present wherever people are," said Archbishop Claudio Celli, head of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

The Vatican officially unveiled the new channel Jan. 23 during a press conference that presented Pope Benedict's message for World Communications Day, which was dedicated to new media technology.

Addressing pilgrims in St. Peter's Square Jan. 25, the pope said he hope the YouTube channel "will enrich a wide range of people - including those who have yet to find a response to their spiritual yearning - through the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ."

The new Vatican initiative will make information and news about the Vatican more readily accessible on the Internet, the pope said at the end of his midday Angelus address.

The wise use of online networking technology can help people form new communities "in ways that promote the search for truth, the good and the beautiful, transcending geographical boundaries and ethnic divisions," he said.

The Vatican channel is the result of a new partnership the Vatican Television Center and Vatican Radio forged with the Internet giant Google and its video-sharing Web site, YouTube.

The Vatican's television and radio operations had been collaborating for the past year and a half to produce short news videos that are aired on the Vatican Radio Web site.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, head of the Vatican's television and radio offices, said during the Jan. 23 press conference it only seemed natural to start offering the news clips "not only to a prevalently Catholic audience, but to a much larger, practically global audience."

He said it was important to offer these services to people who are looking for the pronouncements and position of "a high-level moral authority like the pope and, in general, the Catholic Church" concerning the major burning issues and problems in the world today.

"Therefore, choosing YouTube as an appropriate platform for establishing a presence on the Web" made sense, he said, especially given that so much information on the pope and the Vatican was already appearing in fragmented, out-of-context forms and scattered over multiple venues.