



Psst. I have a secret, and you have to promise not to tell anyone... I see that confession got your attention, for secrets are like magnets, drawing our interest closer to the one admitting a secret exists. We've all had secrets from time to time. What to do with them is a big question.

In the case of a secret that harms someone else, something the church calls *sin*, the Bible encourages confession:

- Leviticus 5:5: "When you realize your guilt in any of these, you shall confess the sin that you have committed."
- James 5:16: "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

Even an early church document called the Didache from around A.D. 70 says: "Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life... On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure" (*Didache* 4:14, 14:1).

It's hard to carry around secrets. We may confess them to our closest friends, hoping that talking about them will relieve the burden of carrying the secrets alone. Some traditions encourage formal confession to a religious leader, and one priest tells the story of trying to help children understand this practice:

Because the younger children at our parochial school often forgot their sins when they entered my confessional, I suggested that teachers have the students make lists.

The next week when one child came to confession, I could hear him unfolding paper. The youngster began, "I lied to my parents. I disobeyed my mom. I fought with my brothers and..."

There was a long pause. Then a small angry voice said, "Hey, this isn't my list!"¹

Sometimes we may feel as though we have nowhere to turn for our confessions, but since 2004, the website PostSecret.com has offered a place to fess up. This website is a combination of art and confession, inviting people to make a homemade postcard revealing their secrets and to

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anonymously mail them, which are then displayed on the website.

It not only provides a place to confess, but it also offers everyone else the opportunity to identify with those confessions, such as this recent one from Halloween:

- My favorite reason for trick-or-treating was to look inside people's homes for the brief second and wonder what it was like to live their lives.

Have you ever wonder about other people's lives but were afraid to confess sadness about your own?

Children who find themselves bouncing back and forth between their parents' homes may feel like this confession:

- Everytime I switch from mom's to my dad's, I die a little more inside.

I imagine many of us have felt like the following confession this past year:

- This pandemic has me thinking I should blow everything off and go do what I want.

Those caring for aging parents may relate to this confession:

- It took 8 years for my mom to lose all memory of me, it took my heart and broke it into a million pieces! Alzheimer's sucks!

I imagine every one of us has something we would like to fess up to but are afraid to say. One person once confessed to me that he was having struggles with relationships and someone said to him, "Maybe you need to see a therapist and find out why you're stuck." He confessed to me, "I already know why I'm stuck, for I've been to counselors. Now what I need is a place for confession and forgiveness."

We humans have a deep need for forgiveness, and sometimes we don't fully embrace what God has been offering us. We cling to the acts of sin, accusing one another and holding onto our anger, finding it easier to hide behind these walls we have built. What we need is a place to fess up, to let go of the acts or thoughts that haunt us.

The church has often been a place for fessing up and reaching out to God, for as the Book of



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Hebrews reminds us, we can enter into the place of worship “with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water. Let’s hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable.”²

The writer compares Jesus to the high priest of the temple, who would offer sacrifices as a way of receiving God’s forgiveness. The author suggested that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, the final offering, the One who reminds us of what God has been doing all along—offering a new start each day when we mess up our lives. Even though we read throughout the Bible that God has been offering healing and forgiveness, we sometimes have a hard time accepting that for ourselves, as one postcard confession displays:

- I tried to talk to God here in the pews. Didn’t hear anything back.



¹ *Homiletics*, April 23, 2006.

Sometimes in the silence, we mistakenly believe that God has not responded. It’s in the stillness, in the silence, that God is mysterious working within us, helping us claim what God has already offered us each day: forgiveness. The chance to begin again. New life. Resurrection.

Thanksgiving will soon be upon us, a time of giving thanks for what God has done in our lives. The season of Advent will not be far behind, and many of us will quickly focus on decorating and gifts, ways of expressing our joy at what God has done for us. But I hope that in these busy seasons that we will also spend time in silence, reflecting on the forgiveness that God offers us each day. If you have something rumbling around inside of you, may you fess up and claim the gift that God has already given you: a chance to begin each day with forgiveness, a present of presence that lovingly embraces you, even in the silence.

² Hebrews 10:22-23, CEB.

