

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Soaked

I confess: I'm terrible with umbrellas. I've probably gotten dozens of small, cheap umbrellas, bought at newsstands or drugstores, to cover me as I dashed to the subway or braved a downpour on the way to work.

And I've lost, broken or left behind every single one.

They end up littering the floors of movie theaters or the corners of coffee shops, or the seats of subway cars. They've been abandoned, forgotten, misplaced. And so I keep shelling out bucks to buy another one.

All of which, believe it or not, brings me to the subject of confession.

Many Catholics see a confessional and run the other way. Behind the mystery of that velvet curtain sits an anonymous head, with a low voice and a limitless supply of penance. We kneel before that shadowy form, share our sins, then await both forgiveness and punishment. We whisper an act of contrition and go on our way—grateful to step outside the confessional into the dim light of the church, where we breathe the air scented by burning candles and wilting flowers.

But if that's how we feel, we're not really doing it right.

Confession has been properly renamed the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We do not confess; we reconcile. We reunite with One from whom we've been separated. It's not a burden we unload, but a sacrament that we celebrate. And, increasingly, it is not done into the ear of an unfamiliar stranger, but face-to-face—priest to penitent, sinner to sinner.

The purpose is not just to apologize and beg forgiveness—though, certainly, that can be part of it. God deserves at least that much. Rather, the act of reconciliation can and should be a quiet, hope-filled event that enables us to receive a measure of grace.

And what a gift that can be. When caught in the downpour of life, we approach the confessional and are given grace. That is our umbrella: a blessed tool that can shelter us—or, at least, make us less vulnerable to the soakings of sin. The grace of God's forgiveness, the mantle of His mercy, helps us to once again step out into the rain and get on with life.

But, of course, we're not perfect. We are human, and prone to losing grace—to leaving it behind on the subway—and then we find ourselves inevitably back on the street, getting drenched. Our hearts become hard, our fuses short. Temptations are many. The rain just makes it worse. Where's an umbrella when you need one?

This Sunday is Divine Mercy Sunday—a day when, we are told, we receive abundant graces in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There, God is waiting, with His boundless mercy, if only we are willing to go to Him, in humility and in hope, to ask for it.

The skies may be clear now, but we never know when the clouds will come.

It always helps to have an umbrella.

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All Catholics are required to receive Communion at least once every year, between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday (this year on May 31). Please take the opportunity to go to confession up to 20 days after the Feast of Divine Mercy. Confessions are heard Monday through Friday at 11:30 a.m. and Saturdays at 12:45 p.m.