



## **Pope Francis speaking with Young People** *Tuesday, 14 September 2021*

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If I were to ask all of you what you think about when you go to Confession – don't answer out loud – I am quite sure your answer will be “our sins”. But let me ask you, and please answer me, are sins really the centre of Confession? Does God want you to approach him thinking just about yourself and your sins; or about him? What does God want? That you approach him thinking about him or about your sins? What does he want? What is central, our sins or the Father who forgives everything? It is the Father. We do not go to confession to be punished and humiliated, but as children who run towards the Father's loving arms. And the Father lifts us up in every situation, he forgives all our sins. Listen well to this: God always forgives! Understood? God always forgives!

I will give you a little piece of advice: after each Confession, sit still for a few moments in order to remember the forgiveness you received. Hold on to that peace in your heart, that inner freedom you are feeling; not your sins, which no longer exist, but the forgiveness that God has granted you, the caress of God the Father. Just hold on to that; don't let it fade. The next time you go to confession, think: I am going to receive again the embrace that did me so much good. I am not going to stand before a judge, but before Jesus, who loves us and heals us. Now I would like to give some advice to priests: priests should feel that they take the place of God the Father who always forgives, embraces and welcomes. In Confession, let us give God first place. Once he is in charge, everything becomes beautiful and Confession becomes the *sacrament of joy*. Yes, joy; not fear and judgement but joy. It is also important for priests to be merciful. Never curious or inquisitorial, but acting as brothers who convey the Father's forgiveness, brothers who accompany others in this embrace of the Father.

Someone might say, “But I am ashamed, I can't get over the embarrassment of going to confession”. This is not a problem; in fact, feeling ashamed is a good thing. In life, feeling ashamed sometimes does you good, because it means you are not happy about what you did. Feeling ashamed is a good sign, but like any other sign, it points to the road we need to follow. Don't let shame imprison you, because God is never ashamed of you. He loves you in the very place where you feel ashamed. And he loves you always. I will tell you something not in my original text: in my country, we call those brazen individuals who do all the wrong things “shameless”.

One last thing. You may say: “But Father, I can't forgive myself, so how can God forgive me if I am always falling into the same sins?” Listen, is God ever offended? Is he offended if you go to him and ask for forgiveness? No! Never. God suffers when we think that he can't forgive us, because that is like us telling him: “Your love is not strong enough!” Saying to God, “Your love is not strong enough” is not good! Instead, God rejoices in forgiving us, time and time again. Whenever he picks us up, he believes in us as if it were the first time. He never grows discouraged. We are the ones who get discouraged, not he. He does not label us as sinners: he sees us as children to be loved. He does not see us as lost causes, but as beloved and hurting children; and then he feels all the more compassion and tenderness. So never forget, whenever we go to confession, there is a party in heaven. May it also be so on earth!