WHAT DO YOU SAY WHEN a friend asks why you have to confess your sins to a priest?

In 2017, Theology 101 is focusing on the topic of evangelization. Specifically, the task is to offer some ways of approaching various questions Catholics may encounter from co-workers, family and friends regarding the practice of the faith. Of course, we must remember that nothing can replace the power of witnessing to the Good News through our own actions and words, combined with our willingness to accompany others on their faith journey.

THE QUESTION:

WHAT DO I SAY WHEN SOMEONE ASKS ME WHY WE HAVE TO CONFESSION OUR SINS TO A PRIEST? THEY WANT TO KNOW WHY WE CAN’T GO DIRECTLY TO GOD.

AND SO WHY A PRIEST?

If you can get the questioner reflecting on this experience, you can then begin addressing their question. You can point out that, as in the case of healing a physical ailment, only God can forgive sins. However, in the same way that God offers healing to the body through the physician, God forgives us (heals us and restores us to communion) precisely through the vocation of the priesthood – because this is what we need as human beings – a soul and a body. Jesus Christ, by virtue of his divine authority, has given this power to some to exercise in his name because of his desire that the Church be “sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood.” (CCC 1442) To this end, Jesus entrusted the power of the absolution of sins to his apostles. This power passed principally to the bishops, who are the successors of the apostles and the visible head of a particular Church. Priests, who are a
bishop's collaborators, are able to exercise this power in Jesus' name "to the extent that they have received the commission either from their bishop (or religious superior) or the pope, according to the law of the Church." (CCC 1462)

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Consider prayerfully reading the following passage from the Gospel of John (20:19-23):

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What does this passage have to teach us about the connection between peace (wholeness, healing, communion) and the role of the priest in hearing confessions?

2. How might this passage help you explain why we have to confess our sins to a priest?

EVANGELIZATION QUIZ

Which saint said the following? Go to your confessor; open your heart to him; display to him all the recesses of your soul; take the advice that he will give you with the utmost humility and simplicity. For God, who has an infinite love for obedience, frequently renders profitable the counsels we take from others, but especially from those who are the guides of our souls.

A. St. Augustine
B. St. Faustina
C. St. Francis de Sales
D. St. Thomas Aquinas