

## Landry: Like practising a golf swing, Confession helps keep us in good spiritual form



I know a lot of people who love the game, but golf just isn't for me. The last time I played golf, I shot 90 on the first nine holes, gave up, and went home without even trying the back nine. I'm a lousy golfer because I've never put any effort into learning how to play – I've been to the driving range a handful of times, and I've done a little bit of mini-golf – so no one is going to look at my golfing techniques and think that I have it figured out.

That being said, I have a lot of respect for the time and effort that goes into mastering golf. If you look at the basic motion of golf, the golf swing, it seems pretty simple: you need to push the club back and pull it through in order to propel the ball forward.

At the same time there are numerous finer details that a golfer needs to work on in order to ensure that the ball goes where you want it to. A good golfing instructor might correct hand placement on the club, leaning too far in one direction or the other, pulling your head up, and a bad follow through. Each of these is a simple, learned, habitual thing that can make a big difference in playing (and enjoying) the game of golf.

What is true of learning how to properly swing a golf club is also true of our spiritual lives.

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) speaks to us of a major motion, a turning towards Christ which we call 'conversion.' The *first and fundamental conversion* takes place at Baptism (CCC 1427), turning from evil, by the forgiveness of our sins, we embrace the gift of new life in Christ. For many of us, that first decision was made for us when our parents brought us to Church and had us baptized. But conversion doesn't stop there.

The Catechism also speaks of the need for an ongoing turning towards Christ: ***"This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal"*** (CCC 1428). This is the place where we work on the simple, learned, habitual elements of our spiritual life. And so, it makes great sense that this path of penance and renewal begins with prayer.

The trouble that many have with prayer is that we have a basic grasp of what prayer is – often as petition and the learned prayers of our childhood ... but we've never grown beyond that. And so, in much the same way as my golf game leaves a lot to be desired, our prayer can become limited to a wish list we present to God alongside an Our Father.

While this is a good start, it is only scratching the surface of what prayer is meant to be. The Catechism tells us that ***"The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced"*** (CCC 1432). *It goes on to say that "the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him"* (CCC 2565).

We grow in prayer by making a commitment to daily seek out silence – and while our prayer time can certainly involve rote prayers and petitions, it should also grow to include a period of listening to hear what God wants to say to us. Good moments of silence for this sort of prayer can be found at the beginning and end of the day, or after we've received Communion at Mass. We can also seek out that silence by attending eucharistic adoration in our parishes, or in making a brief visit to the Church between Sundays.

Many find that when they dedicate themselves to prayer, they begin to feel a tangible sense of discomfort. We are uncomfortable because we feel like we don't know what we're doing, because we are so easily distracted, and because prayer makes us keenly aware of specific weaknesses that exist in our lives (much like a golf swing that sends the ball in the wrong direction).

Some of this is dealt with simply by practice – learning how to talk and to listen in prayer, and how to handle distractions when they come up. But some of it requires something more – much like a golfer who needs instruction and correction – it is an invitation to seek out Confession and spiritual direction.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is *the* place where we go to make a conscious turn towards Jesus by confessing and expressing sorrow for our sins. Spiritual

direction is a place we can discuss our experience of prayer and the state of our souls with an expert, who can give advice not on how to move forward in this process of 'second conversion.'

For the good of our souls, the Church asks us to go to Confession at least once a year, but we are encouraged to go more often ... monthly, if possible. And while it can be easy to get frustrated that we seem to be bringing the same sins back to confession over and over again, we need to remember that many of these things have become learned and habitual. Becoming aware of them is a wonderful first step, confessing them and receiving God's forgiveness is critical, but it may take some time to "unlearn" our bad habits.

Unlike my golf swing, prayer, penance, and renewal are not the sort of things we ought to abandon simply because they are hard. If you've been away from Confession for a while, all parishes in the Archdiocese of Edmonton are offering a [Day of Confessions on Tuesday, March 3, 2020](#) – and this represents a wonderful opportunity to walk this beautiful path and straighten out our swing.

***"To return to communion with God after having lost it through sin is a process born of the grace of God who is rich in mercy and solicitous for the salvation of men. One must ask for this precious gift for oneself and for others."*** -CCC 1489

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