

The Family Rebel

A Catholic Guide To Family Happiness

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A FEW days before his death, Jesus asked a group of Jewish religious leaders a thought-provoking question. He said: "But what think you? A certain man had two children; and coming to the first, he said: 'Child, go work today in my vineyard.' And this one answering, said: 'I will not.' But afterwards, being moved with repentance, he went. And coming to the other, he said in like manner. And this one answering, said: 'I go, Sir'; and he went not. Which of the two did the father's will? They say to him: 'The first'."

- Matthew 21:28-31.

Jesus was here highlighting the unfaithfulness of the Jewish leaders. They were like the second son, promising to do God's will and then not keeping their promise. But many parents will recognize that Jesus' illustration was based on a good understanding of family life. As he so well showed, it is often difficult to know what young people are thinking or to predict what they will do. A young person may cause many problems during his adolescence and then grow up to be a responsible, well-respected adult. This is something to keep in mind when we discuss the problem of teenage rebellion.

Review Questions. (a) What illustration did Jesus give to highlight the unfaithfulness of Jewish religious leaders?

(b) What point about adolescents can we learn from Jesus' illustration?

WHAT IS A REBEL?

IS THERE A REBEL IN THE HOUSE?

From time to time, you may hear of teenagers who out-rightly rebel against their parents. You may even personally know of a family in which a teenager seems impossible to control. However, it is not always easy to know whether a child is really a rebel. Moreover, it can be difficult to understand why some children rebel and others - even from the same household do not. If parents suspect that one of their children may be developing into an out-and-out rebel, what should they do? To answer this, we first have to talk about what a rebel is.

Review Question: Why should parents not hastily label their child a rebel?

Simply put, a rebel is a person who willfully and consistently disobeys or resists and defies a higher authority. Of course, Proverbs 22:15 reminds us: 'Folly is bound up in the heart of a child'.) So all children resist parental and other authority at one time or another. {This same verse offers part of a solution that Solomon and many of the ancients found useful in those days. Namely, 'and the rod of

correction shall drive it away'. Mind you, none of Solomon's children were 'perfect kids'.} Let me repeat, all children resist parental and other authority at one time or another.

This is particularly true during the time of physical and emotional development known as adolescence. A change in any person's life will create stress, and adolescence is all about change. Your teenage son or daughter is moving out of childhood and onto the road to adulthood. For this reason, during the adolescent years, some parents and children have a hard time getting along. Often parents instinctively try to put the brakes on the transition, whereas teenagers want to speed it up.

FAMILY HAPPINESS

A teenager who is a rebel turns his back on parental values. Remember, though, that a few acts of disobedience do not make a rebel. And when it comes to spiritual matters, some children may at first show little or no interest in their Catholic Faith and its Bible truth, but they may not be rebels. As a parent, do not be quick to pin a label on your child.

Are the adolescent years of all young people characterized by rebellion against parental authority? No, not at all. Indeed, the evidence would seem to indicate that only a minority of teenagers display serious adolescent rebellion. Still, what of a child who obstinately and consistently rebels? What might provoke such rebellion?

Review Questions:

(a) What is a rebel?

(b) What should parents bear in mind if their teenager is disobedient from time to time?

CAUSES OF REBELLION

A major cause of rebellion is the world's satanic environment. First John 5:19 reminds us that "we know that we are of God, and the whole world is seated in wickedness and is under the wicked one, {the Devil.}) The world in Satan's power has developed a harmful culture with which Catholics and, indeed, all Christians have to contend. (In John 17:15 Our Lord Jesus prayed: "I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from evil.") Much of that culture is coarser, more dangerous, and filled with more bad influences today than in the past. (In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, and 12-13 St Paul was already warning St Timothy: "Know also this, that, in the last days, shall come dangerous times. Men shall be lovers of themselves, covetous, haughty, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, wicked, without affection, without peace, slanderers, incontinent, unmerciful, without kindness, traitors, stubborn, puffed up, and lovers of pleasures more than of God: Having an appearance indeed of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Now these avoid!... All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall grow worse and worse: erring, and driving into error." Are not things even so in our days?)

If parents do not educate, warn, and protect their children, young ones can easily be overwhelmed by "the spirit that now works on the children of unbelief." (Ephesians 2:2 says: "In time past [before your conversion to Christ] you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of this air, of the spirit that now works on the children of unbelief.")

Related to this is peer pressure. The Bible says: "He that walks with the wise, shall be wise: a friend of fools shall become like to them." (Proverbs 13:20) Similarly, he that keeps company with those who are imbued with the spirit of this world is likely to be influenced by that spirit. Young ones

require constant help if they are to appreciate that obedience to godly principles is the foundation of the very best way of life.

- See Isaiah 48:17-18.

Review Question: How can the satanic environment influence a child to rebel?

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Another cause of rebellion might be the atmosphere in the home. For example, if one parent is an alcoholic, abuses drugs, or is violent toward the other parent, the teenager's view of life can be warped. Even in relatively tranquil homes, rebellion may break out when a child feels that his parents have no interest in him. However, teenage rebellion is not always caused by external influences. Some children turn their backs on parental values despite having parents who apply godly principles and who shelter them, to a great extent, from the world around them. Why? Perhaps because of another root of our problems - Original Sin and its consequences - human imperfection and concupiscence. Paul said: "By one man [Adam] sin entered into this world, and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned." (Romans 5:12) By his Original Sin, Adam showed that he was a selfish rebel, and he left all his offspring a bad legacy as a consequence of that sin. Some youths just choose to rebel, as their first forefather did.

Review Question: What factors might lead to rebellion on the part of a child?

SCRIPTURAL EXAMPLES

PERMISSIVE ELI AND RESTRICTIVE REHOBAM

Something else that has led to teenage rebellion is an unbalanced view of child rearing on the part of the parents. (See Colossians 3:21) Some conscientious parents severely restrict and discipline their children. Others are too permissive, not providing guidelines that would protect their inexperienced adolescent. It is not always easy to strike a balance between these two extremes. And different children have different needs. One may need more oversight than another. Still, two Bible examples will help to show the dangers of being extreme in either restrictiveness or permissiveness.

Review Question: What extremes in child rearing might provoke a child to rebel?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Ancient Israel's high priest Eli was a father. He served for 40 years, no doubt being well versed in the Law of God. Eli likely carried out his regular priestly duties quite faithfully and may even have thoroughly taught God's Law to his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. However, Eli was too indulgent with his sons. Hophni and Phinehas served as officiating priests, but they were "scoundrels - good-for-nothing men," interested only in satisfying their appetites and immoral desires. Yet, when they committed disgraceful acts on sacred ground, Eli did not have the courage to oust them from office. He merely gave them a feeble rebuke. By his permissiveness, Eli honored his sons more than God. As a result, his sons rebelled against the Lord God our Father's pure and clean worship and Eli's whole house suffered calamity.

– For the full story, read 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25, 29; 3:13-14; 4:11-22.

Review Question: Why was Eli, although likely a faithful high priest a poor parent?

IS THERE A REBEL IN THE HOUSE?

Eli's children were already adults when these events took place, but this history underscores the danger of withholding discipline. (Compare Proverbs 29:21 which talks of children and servants (little ones): "He that pampers his servant delicately from his childhood, afterwards shall find him stubborn".) Some parents may confuse love with permissiveness, failing to set and enforce clear, consistent, and reasonable rules. They neglect to apply loving discipline, even when godly principles are violated. Because of such permissiveness, their children may end up not paying attention to parental or any other type of authority. - Compare Ecclesiastes 8:11 which states: "This is Vanity - For because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the children of men commit evils without any fear." This IS vanity.

Review Question: What can parents learn from Eli's wrong example?

Rehoboam exemplifies the other extreme in handling authority. He was the last king of the united kingdom of Israel, but he was not a good king. Rehoboam had inherited a land whose people were discontented because of the burdens placed on them by his father, Solomon. Did Rehoboam show understanding? No. When a delegation asked him to remove some of the oppressive measures, he failed to heed mature advice from his older counselors and commanded that the people's yoke be made heavier. His arrogance provoked a rebellion by the ten northern tribes, and the kingdom was ripped in two.

- For this story read 1 Kings 12:1-21 and 2 Chronicles 10:19.

Review Question: What mistake did Rehoboam make in the exercise of authority?

Parents can learn some important lessons from the Bible account of Rehoboam. They need to "seek for the Lord," God our Father, in prayer and to examine their child-rearing methods in the light of Bible principles. (Psalm 105:4 [Psalm 104: 4 in the Vulgate] says: "All of you, seek the Lord, and be strengthened: seek his face evermore.") "Oppression troubles the wise and makes him mad, and shall destroy the strength of his heart," says Ecclesiastes 7:7 [7:8 in the Vulgate].

Well-thought-out boundaries give adolescents room to grow while protecting them from harm. But children should not live in an atmosphere that is so rigid and constricting that they are prevented from developing a reasonable measure of self-reliance and self-confidence. When parents strive for a balance between fair latitude and firm boundaries that are clearly marked, most teenagers will feel less inclined to rebel.

Review Question: How can parents avoid Rehoboam's mistake?

A SPECIAL NOTE.

TALK IT OUT

Adolescents will experience doubts and anxieties connected with increased independence. They may feel a little shaky about their ability to handle themselves in the world. It is as if they were trying to walk on a slippery road. You young ones, confide in your parents about your fears and the apprehensions you are experiencing.

(See Proverbs 23:22 which says: "Hearken to your father, that begot you: and despise not your mother when she is old".) Or if you feel that your parents are holding you too tightly, talk with them about your need to be granted more freedom.

Plan to talk with them at a time when you are relaxed and when they are not busy.

(See Proverbs 15:23 which says: "A man rejoices in the sentence of his mouth: and a word in due time is best.") Take the time really to listen to each other.

FILLING BASIC NEEDS CAN PREVENT REBELLION

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Although parents rejoice to see their youngster grow physically from babyhood to adulthood, they may feel disturbed when their adolescent child begins to move from dependence to appropriate self-reliance. During this transitional period, do not be surprised if your teenager is occasionally rather stubborn or uncooperative. Keep in mind that the goal of Christian parents should be to raise a mature, stable, and responsible Christian – a good Catholic.

- Compare 1 Corinthians 13:11: and Ephesians 4:13-14 which says: "We are all to meet into the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ; that henceforth we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men, by their cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive."

IS THERE A REBEL IN THE HOUSE?

As difficult as it may be, parents need to break the habit of responding negatively to any request from their adolescent for greater independence. In a wholesome way, a child needs to grow as an individual. Indeed, at a relatively young age, some teenagers begin to develop quite a grown-up outlook. For example, the Bible says of young King Josiah: " Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one and thirty years in Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father: he declined not, neither to the right hand, nor to the left. And in the eighth year of his reign, when he was yet a boy, [of about 15 years] he began to seek the God of his father David: and in the twelfth year after he began to reign, he cleansed Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the idols, and the graven things." This outstanding teenager was clearly a responsible individual. – See 2 Chronicles 34:1-3.

Review Question: How should parents view the development of their child?

HANDY HINT

It IS likely.

Children will grow up to be more stable if their parents help them to cope with their teenage problems.

However, freedom brings with it accountability. Therefore, allow your emerging adult to experience the consequences of some of his decisions and actions. The principle, "what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap," applies to teens as well as to adults. (Galatians 6:7-8 says: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that sows in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that sows in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting.") Children cannot be sheltered forever. What, though, if your child wants to do something that is completely unacceptable? As a responsible parent, you have to say, "No." And, while you may explain the reasons, nothing should change your 'no' to a 'yes'. (Compare Matthew 5:37. Jesus says: "But let your speech be yes, for yes: say no, when you mean no: and that which is over and above these, is of evil.")

Nevertheless, try to say "No" in a calm and reasonable manner, since "A mild answer breaks and turns wrath away: but a harsh word stirs up fury." - Proverbs 15:1.

Review Question: As children are given increased responsibility, what should they face up to?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

Young people need the security of consistent discipline even if they do not always readily agree with the restrictions and rules. It is frustrating if rules are frequently changed, depending on the way a parent feels at the time. Further, if teenagers receive encouragement and help, as needed, in coping with diffidence, shyness, or lack of self-confidence, they will likely grow up to be more stable. Teenagers also appreciate it when they receive the trust that they have earned. - Compare Isaiah 35:3-4; Luke 16: 10; Luke 19:17.

Review Question: What are some needs of a teenager that a parent should fill?

Parents can be comforted to know that when peace, stability, and love exist within the household, the children usually flourish.

(See Ephesians 4: 31-32; and James 3:17-18) Why, many youngsters have risen above even a bad home environment, coming from families marked by alcoholism, violence, or some other harmful influence, and have grown up to be fine adults. Hence, if you provide a home where your teenagers feel secure and know that they will receive love, affection, and attention - even if that support is accompanied by reasonable restrictions and discipline in harmony with Scriptural principles - they are very likely to grow up to be adults of which you will be proud. - Compare Proverbs 27:11.

Review Question: What are some encouraging truths about teenagers?

WHEN CHILDREN GET INTO DIFFICULTY

IS THERE A REBEL IN THE HOUSE?

Good parenting certainly makes a difference. The way we train our children can make a big difference in their lives. Proverbs 22:6 says: "It is a proverb: A young man according to his way, even when he is old he will not depart from it." Still, what of children who have serious problems in spite of having good parents? Is this possible? Yes. The words of the proverb must be understood in the light of other verses that emphasize the child's responsibility to "listen" to and obey the parents. (For example, Proverbs 1:8 says: "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother.") Both parent and child must cooperate in applying Scriptural principles if there is to be family harmony. If parents and children do not work together, there will be difficulties.

Review Question: While parents should train up a boy in the way he should go, what responsibility rests with the child?

How should parents react when a teenager errs and gets into trouble? Then, especially, the youngster needs help. If the parents remember that they are dealing with an inexperienced youth, they will more easily resist the tendency to overreact. Paul counseled mature ones in the congregation of the Church: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1) Parents can follow this same procedure when dealing with a young person who commits an error because of being thoughtless. While clearly explaining why his conduct was wrong and how he can avoid repeating the error, the parents should make it clear that it is the wrong

conduct, not the youth, that is bad. - Compare Jude 1:22-23. Here, Saint Jude gives his readers another instruction to practice charity in endeavouring to convert their neighbour, where they will meet with three sorts of persons: First, with persons obstinate in their errors and sins; these may be said to be already judged and condemned; they are to be sharply reprehended, reprov'd, and if possible convinced of their error. Second, as to others you must endeavour to save them, by pulling them, as it were, out of the fire, from the ruin of which they stand in great danger. Third, you must have mercy on others in fear, when you see them through ignorance of frailty, in danger of being drawn into the snares of those heretics; with these you must deal more gently and mildly, with a charitable compassion, hating always, and teaching others to hate the carnal garment which is spotted, their sensual and corrupt manners, that defile both the soul and body. Saint Jude's actual words are: "Some indeed reprove, being judged: But others save, pulling them out of the fire. And on others have mercy, in fear, hating also the spotted garment which is carnal."

Review Question: When children err because of being thoughtless, what would be a wise approach by the parents?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

What if the youngster's delinquency is very serious? In that case the child needs special help and skillful direction. When a member of the Church commits a serious sin, he is encouraged to repent and approach the priests and bishops of the Church for help. (James 5:14-16 teaches: "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the priests [the presbyteroi, or 'elders'] of the church [ekklesia, or 'assembly'], and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. [This is the standard 'proof text' for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, but it clearly has wider applications where a family member is in serious spiritual or social distress.] And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man: and the Lord shall raise him up: and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess therefore your sins one to another [in the context of having called for the 'elders' or priests, this is a clear reference to the Sacrament of Reconciliation – sometimes known as Penance or Confession – where the 'rebel' is called upon to confess his sins to the priest]: and pray one for another, that you may be saved. For the continual prayer of a just man avails much.")

The value of the Sacrament of Confession cannot be over-emphasized!

Once the 'rebel' repents, the priests, the 'elders' are to work with him to restore him spiritually. In the family the responsibility for helping the erring teenager rests with the parents, although they may need to discuss the matter with their priests, especially their pastors or parish priests, who, hopefully, have long been well-known to the family as a result of regular Mass attendance. (That IS how your parish priest organizes your parish, isn't it?) Parents certainly should not try to conceal from their pastors and priests, the 'body of elders,' any grave sins committed by one of their children. They should not be shy or embarrassed. In Australia, and other Western countries, I fear we grossly under-utilize, and therefore under-value and under-appreciate, the spiritual treasure-house that Christ's gift of the Priesthood offers us. These men have undergone years of spiritual and biblical preparation to administer the graces of Christ to us the flock of the Good Shepherd, and now many of them are being wasted as they sit in their presbyteries worrying about such trivialities as parish finance and cleaning rosters!

Review Question: Following the example of Saint James who said: "Confess therefore your sins one to another: and pray one for another, that you may be saved" and the example given by the Catholic Church down the ages, how should parents react if their children commit a serious sin'?

A serious problem involving one's own children is very trying. Being distraught emotionally, parents may feel like angrily threatening the wayward offspring; but this might only embitter him. Bear in mind that the future of this young person may depend on how he is treated during this critical time. Remember, too, that God our Father was ready to forgive when his people deviated from what was right-if they would only repent. Listen to his loving words: "The Lord says 'Then come, and let us talk this over', says the Lord: 'if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool'." (Isaiah 1:18) What a fine example for parents!

Review Question: In imitation of the Lord, God our Father, what attitude will parents try to maintain if their child commits a serious error?

Hence, try to encourage the wayward one to change his course. Seek sound advice from experienced parents and the priests of the Church the 'elders'. (Proverbs 11:14 says: "Where there is no governor, the people shall fall: but there is safety where there is much counsel.") Try not to act impulsively and say or do things that would make it difficult for your child to return to you. Avoid uncontrolled wrath and bitterness. (See Colossians 3:8) Do not be quick to give up. (1 Corinthians 13:4 & 7 remind us: "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envies not, deals not perversely; is not puffed up; Charity bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.") While hating badness, avoid becoming hard and embittered toward your child. Most important, parents should strive to set a fine example and to keep their faith in God strong.

Review Question: In the face of a serious sin by one of their children, how should parents act, and what should they avoid?

HANDLING A DETERMINED REBEL

IS THERE A REBEL IN THE HOUSE?

In some cases it becomes clear that a youth has made a definite decision to rebel and completely reject Christian values and the Truths of our Catholic Faith. Then the focus should change to that of maintaining or rebuilding the family life of those who remain. Be careful that you do not direct all your energy to the rebel, to the neglect of the other children. Instead of trying to hide the trouble from the rest of the family, discuss the matter with them to an appropriate extent and in a reassuring way. - Compare Proverbs 20:18, which says: "Designs are strengthened by counsels and consultations: and wars are to be managed by governments with sound guidance." Never neglect your obligation to pray for the poor soul who is turning his back on God's grace. Never be judgmental or 'holier-than-thou' in your attitude and always let the 'rebel' know that the open arms of love are always ready to receive him back into the fold. Take Jesus, the Good Shepherd as your model. Be like the Forgiving Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. (See Luke 15)

Review Question: What sad situation sometimes arises in a Christian family, and how should a parent respond?

FAMILY HAPPINESS

The origin of the Church's practice of excommunication can be seen from the following. The apostle Saint John said of one who becomes an irreclaimable rebel in the church: "If any man come to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into the house, or say to him, 'God speed you'." Now, we need to understand this Scripture in the fullness of the Church's teaching. The admonition "Nor say to him, God speed you," is in general, to forewarn the faithful of the dangers which may

arise from a familiarity with those who have prevaricated and gone from the true faith, and with such as teach false doctrine. But this is not forbidding a charity for all men, by which we ought to wish and pray for the eternal salvation of every one, even of our enemies. (2 John 1:10) Parents may feel it necessary to take a similar stand toward their own child if he is of legal age and becomes totally rebellious. As difficult and wrenching as such action may be, it is sometimes essential in order to protect the rest of the family. Your household needs your protection and continued oversight. Hence, keep on maintaining clearly defined, yet reasonable, boundaries of conduct. Communicate with the other children. Be interested in how they are doing in school and in the life of the Church. Also, let them know that even though you do not approve of the rebellious child's actions, you do not hate him that you continue to love and pray for him. Condemn the bad action rather than the child. When Jacob's two sons, Simeon and Levi, brought ostracism upon the family because of their cruel deed, Jacob cursed their violent anger, not the sons themselves.

- You find the story of their misdeeds in Genesis 34:1-31: Genesis 49 contains Jacob's prophetic blessing of his 12 sons. Verses 5-7 reveal his condemnation and cursing of the rage and fury these two had shown.

Review Questions:

(a) Following the pattern of the Church, and Saint John's advice, how may parents have to proceed if a child becomes a determined rebel?

(b) What should parents bear in mind if one of their children rebels?

You may feel responsible for what has happened in your family. But if you have prayerfully done all you could, following God our Father's counsel as well as you were able, there is no need to criticize yourself unreasonably. Take comfort in the fact that nobody can be a perfect parent, but you conscientiously tried to be a good one. (Compare Saint Paul's declaration in Acts 20:26.) To have an out-and-out rebel in the family is heartrending, but if it should happen to you, be assured that God understands and he will never abandon his devoted servants. Nor will He abandon His efforts as the Good Shepherd to seek out and recover the lost. (Psalm 27:10, [Psalm 26:10 in the Vulgate,] says: "For if my father and my mother have left me: but the Lord hath taken me up and not abandoned me.") So be determined to keep your home a safe, spiritual haven for any remaining children and a welcoming refuge for any returning prodigal son.

Review Question: From what can conscientious parents draw comfort if one of their children rebels?

IS THERE A REBEL IN THE HOUSE?

Moreover, you should never give up hope. Your earlier efforts in proper training may eventually affect the heart of the straying child and bring him back to his senses. (Ecclesiastes 11:6 says: "In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening let not your hand cease: for you know not which may rather spring up, this or that: and if both together, it shall be the better.") A significant number of Catholic and other Christian families have had the same experience as you, and some have seen their wayward children return. They had great joy, much as the father did in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. (You have, by now, already looked up Luke 15:11-32. If not, take time now to have a prayerful meditation on this consoling teaching.) The same thing may happen to you as happened to that father in Our Lord's story.

Review Question: Remembering the parable of the prodigal son, for what can parents of a rebellious child always hope?

HOW CAN THESE BIBLE PRINCIPLES HELP...

A PARENT TO PREVENT SERIOUS REBELLION IN THE HOUSEHOLD?

Without help, a child can be corrupted by the world's spirit.

- Proverbs 13:20: Ephesians 2:2.

Parents need to strike a balance between restrictiveness and permissiveness.

- Ecclesiastes 7:7 [verse 8 in the Vulgate];

Ecclesiastes 8:11.

Wrong conduct must be dealt with, but in a spirit of mildness and meekness.

- Galatians 6:1.

Those who commit serious sins can be "healed" if they repent and accept help.

The importance of the Sacrament of Confession.

- James 5:14-16.
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