

Letter to be read in parishes, June 15–16 regarding Senate Bill 360

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Archbishop of Los Angeles
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On this Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, I am writing to you about an important matter.

The California legislature is considering a bill that would take away the full right to Confession from priests and from everyone who works with priests in parishes and Church agencies across the state.

Our lawmakers have good intentions. They want to prevent child abuse. But there is no evidence that this legislation will do that. Instead, it threatens a practice that is essential to our faith and religious identity.

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, what we call Confession, was the first gift that Jesus gave to the world after rising from the dead. On the first Easter night, he breathed his Holy Spirit into his apostles, his first priests, and he granted them the awesome power to forgive sins in his name.

Jesus gave us this gift so that we could always come to him, personally, to confess our sins and seek his forgiveness and the grace to continue on our Christian journey.

In practice, this sacrament takes place in a humble and honest conversation that we have with a priest, who is ordained to serve as the sign and the instrument of Christ's merciful love for us as sinners.

We confess our sins, not to a man, but to God. The priest stands in the place of Jesus, and the words he hears in the confessional are not spoken to him; they are words addressed to God. That is why the priest has the sacred duty to keep the seal of the confessional and never to disclose what he hears in sacramental Confession for any reason.

This ancient practice ensures that our confessions are always intimate communications with Jesus alone.

And as we all know, it is a great feeling to be able to speak to Jesus with total freedom and complete honesty in the confessional. We tell of our love for him; we express sorrow for our sins, and our sincere intent not to commit these sins again. We accept the penance that is given to us; we receive spiritual guidance and encouragement. And through the ministry of the priest, Jesus speaks to us personally, with words that set us free: "I absolve you of your sins."

Everything about this beautiful relationship depends on the divine assurance that what we say to Jesus in this sacrament will remain private and confidential.

This is why I am urging you today to write to your lawmakers.

We cannot allow the government to enter into our confessionals to dictate the terms of our personal relationship with Jesus. Unfortunately, that is what this legislation would do.

We need your help to protect this sacrament of the Church and to keep Confession sacred. And we need to continue our commitment to building a society where every child is loved, protected and safe.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my reflections with you, my brothers and sisters. Please know that you are in my prayers every day. And I ask you to please pray for me and my ministry.

I entrust you and your families to the loving care of Mary, our Blessed Mother.

Most Reverend José H. Gomez
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