

Priests Allowed to Forgive Abortion during Jubilee Year

Different news sources reveal that Pope Francis, on Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2015, issued a statement, saying: *“For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it.”*

You will please note that the Pope’s statement reflects what he said **“I have decided.”** Herein he concedes *“to all priests for the Jubilee Year,”* a year supposedly beginning Dec. 8, 2015 and continuing to Nov. 26, 2016. He decided to “concede” to all priests “for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion...” To his credit, he grants *“the discretion to absolve the sin of abortion”* to those who *“with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it.”*

The complete statement from the Pope reveals that he acknowledges the severity of the sin of abortion, while at the same time he is mindful of how widespread abortion is, as well as the great pain and agony a woman generally experiences after having had an abortion. Abortion, by Catholic officials, has been regarded as sin so severe that the power to forgive this sin has been reserved for bishops. In a sense, Pope Francis is now cutting out the middle man (the bishop) and is giving direct authority to priests to forgive sins. You will please observe that Pope Francis said this is something **“I have decided!”**

In commenting upon this decision by the Pope, it is difficult to know where to begin! But we will begin with his concept of “the Jubilee Year.” Yes, the Bible does mention *“the Year of Jubilee.”* From the Sabbath of the seventh year, the Israelites were to count *“seven sabbaths of years..., seven times seven years,”* or *“forty nine years,”* and then *“cause the trumpet of Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of Atonement,”* and thus *“consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants,”* Lev. 25:8-10. In that year prisoners and slaves would be freed, debts forgiven, and mercy would be shown, Lev. 25:11-15, 39-55. However, it must be noted that *“the Year of Jubilee,”* like the weekly Jewish Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of weeks, the Feast of trumpets, and the Day of Atonement, was a part of the law of Moses, the covenant God made with Israel at Horeb, or Mount Sinai, Deut. 5:1-2. That was the same Law which Jesus fulfilled, Matthew 5:17-18, and which, as a result of Jesus’ death, was blotted out, *“taken out of the way,”* and *“nailed to the cross,”* Col. 2:14. Jesus, through Whom God now speaks to us, Heb. 1:1-2, is the *“Mediator of the new covenant,”* Heb. 9:15-17, which is now *“in force”* as a result of His death. Catholics now have no more authority to observe *“the Year of Jubilee”* than they do to offer animal sacrifices, which were also mandated by the out dated law of Moses.

Secondly, with reference to priests being granted the right to absolve the sin of abortion, the Pope said this is something **“I have decided!”** But **who** gave him the right to make such a decision? Following His resurrection from the tomb, and prior to His departure back to the Father in heaven, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said **“All**

authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth,” Matt. 28:19. We ask, “how much authority is ‘**all** authority?’” If Jesus has “**all** authority,” how much authority does that leave for the Pope, or for anyone else? Moreover, Jesus is “*the head of the body the church,*” and in “*all things*” He has “*the preeminence,*” Col. 1:18. If Jesus is “**the head**” of the church, there can be but one “*head,*” and that is Jesus. Jesus is now “*seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,*” Heb. 8:1. If Jesus is “**the head of the body, the church,**” and if He is quartered in heaven, then the “headquarters” of the Lord’s church must be in heaven. Any church which has an earthly headquarters can not be the church Jesus built!

This brings us to a third item to be considered, namely this: **Can Man forgive sins?** It is a fact that, prior to ascending back to heaven, Jesus said to His apostles, “*If you forgive the sins of anyone they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained,*” John 20:23. The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus herein granted the apostles the right to forgive sins, and that the apostles passed this authority to forgive sins on to their successors, supposedly the Catholic priesthood. This issue merits closer scrutiny.

For the record, sin itself involves a transgression against the law of God, I John 3:4. Hence, ultimately all sin is against God, whose law “*all*” have violated, Rom. 3:23; 4:15. Hence, that being the case, then **God alone** can forgive sin in the ultimate sense. This is why some of the Scribes became upset with Jesus when He said to the paralytic, “*Son, your sins are forgiven you,*” Mark 2:5. They thus reasoned in their hearts, saying “*Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but **God alone,***” Mark 2:6-7. They were correct in concluding that “*God alone*” can forgive sin in the ultimate sense, but they were incorrect in assuming that Jesus was a mere man! Indeed, Jesus “*was God,*” John 1:1, Who “*became flesh and dwelt among us,*” John 1:14. Jesus “*was God,*” John 1:1, in that He was Deity and Divinity incarnate in the flesh. Thus, He, “*as God,*” could forgive sins.

But this brings us again to John 20:23, wherein Jesus said to His apostles, “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*” Let us keep in mind that scripture, “*rightly*” divided, 2 Tim. 2:15, does not contradict itself. Jesus herein was speaking to His apostles, to whom He had promised binding and loosing authority, Matt. 18:18, Who were to be His chosen Ambassadors, and to whom He promised to send the Holy Spirit Who would guide them “*into all truth,*” John 16:12-13. Scholars of the Greek language correctly point out that the apostles were authorized to announce the terms of forgiveness. And this certainly harmonizes with Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, as they then began to carry out the Great Commission. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter preached unto the people the gospel of Christ, concluding with the statement that “*God has made that same Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ,*” Acts 2:36. Upon hearing that, “*they were cut to the heart, said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do,*” Acts 2:37. Peter replied, saying, “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...*” Acts 2:38. Peter and the other apostles did not **personally** forgive these people of their sins; **they announced**

the terms upon which the people could be forgiven.

Abortion is a terrible sin; it is murder, and it involves the shedding of “*innocent blood*,” something which God “*hates*,” Prov. 6:16-17. However, God is “*rich in mercy*,” Eph. 2:4, and He is both willing and able to forgive those who comply with His **terms** of forgiveness — whether those “terms” be the conditions He has prescribed for “alien sinners,” or for His Own erring children. But this sin is not absolved by some priest in an apostate church; it, like all other sins, is absolved when sincere people comply with the terms of pardon prescribed in the New Testament. Consider ye well!

***** - Bobby Witherington