

Shake it Off!

by Fr. Jim Schmitmeyer

Some years ago I attended a Little League baseball game. My friend was the coach. His team was gang of second grade boys. Halfway through the game, one boy gets up to bat. He strikes out. Then, in a fit of frustration, he throws the bat and stomps off to the dugout. He drops his head low and, all the way to the dugout, you could hear him saying, over and over, "I'm stupid! I'm so stupid!"

The next boy steps to the plate. He winds up to hit the ball and...he misses. He misses again. And again. And, like the batter before him, stomps off to the dugout, saying, "I'm stupid. I'm so stupid."

But before he gets to the dugout, His mother yells to him from the bleachers: "Shake it off, Jake! You hear me? Shake it off!"

Now, you tell me, of those two boys, which one is more likely to become the better player? Obviously, the boy who "shook it off" and moved on.

Each year, the Church gives us penitential seasons called Advent and Lent. And each week, we are instructed to either abstain from meat or perform some work of mercy in commemoration of the death of the Lord. Why? Because, like a good coach, or, rather, like the mother of that second boy, the Church, tells us, strong and clear, that we are to do all in our power to move past our sins and "shake them off."

Unfortunately, that's not how some Catholics experience the Sacrament of Penance. Instead, we step into the confessional line like that first boy at bat and we concentrate so intensely on how many times we strike out that God's forgiveness and the words of absolution do not sink in.

Sometimes, the hardest part of confession is forgiving yourself. If you are a serious person, committed to doing the right thing, you might tend to be hard on yourself. If so, chances are that you leave the confessional the same way you went in, saying to yourself: "I'm stupid! I'm so stupid! I will never get good at playing this game!"

Yet, when the priest says, "May God, the Father of mercies, grant you pardon and peace." He means what he says. And when he adds, "Go in peace" what he is really saying is *Go. And shake it off!*