

## Catholic 101

### Seal of the Confessional

As we move into Advent next week, the start of a new Liturgical Year, a season of joyful anticipation, it is a perfect time to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In fact we will have an Advent Communal Reconciliation service here at the church on December 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm. In this Catholic 101 installment we would like to focus on just one aspect of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, namely, the Seal of Confession. According to Catholic Canon Law: *The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitents words or in any manner and for any reason.* (983.1) which means that priests can never reveal what they have heard during a confession to anyone, even under the threat of imprisonment, even under the threat of their own death. A priest, who would break the seal, would be automatically excommunicated. The reason for this law is to free the penitent to confess any and every sin that may weigh heavy on their hearts with no fear of judgment or scandal. To use a popular advertisement campaign, what happens in confession stays in confession. So much so that after confession a priest could never walk up to someone later and ask “how ya’ doin’ with that problem you mentioned?” Even when laws have been broken a priest may (and generally does) encourage the penitent (within the context of the confession) to surrender to the authorities, the priest can not go to the authorities or tip them off in anyway whatsoever, either directly or indirectly. While this may be frustrating to some or perhaps even seem irresponsible to others, such compromises would diminish the sanctity of the sacrament and erode the sacred trust which is essential to the integrity of the sacrament. Every Catholic should always feel free and safe to confess every sin no matter how grave or embarrassing trusting that what is spoken from a repentant heart will never be betrayed.