

## Why is Fr. John Mary not hearing confessions right now?

Many people have been asking that Fr. John Mary resume hearing confessions, and he very much desires to offer this ministry again. He and the Community have been devoting much thought and prayer to this decision.

The canonical issue for offering confession is more complex than for celebrating Mass. What follows is an attempt to explain the issue.

The answer to this question turns significantly on what makes a particular sacrament valid—together with our continual discernment of what God is asking of us at this time.

To say that a sacrament is *valid* means the sacrament truly takes place. In a valid Mass the bread and wine truly turn into the Body and Blood of Jesus. In an invalid Mass the bread and wine remain bread and wine. Even if a priest does not have permission (faculty) from his bishop to celebrate Mass publicly, his Mass is valid—transubstantiation takes place—even if his Mass is not *licit*, that is, authorized by the proper authority.

The requirements for confession are different. For a priest to validly hear confession, it is required that he have the permission (the faculty) to do so from his bishop. If a priest has not received this faculty, his confessions would be invalid, meaning that the sins of the penitents would not truly be absolved.

As Can. 966 §1. states: *The valid absolution of sins requires that the minister have, in addition to the power of orders [i.e. be an ordained priest], the faculty of exercising it for the faithful to whom he imparts absolution.*<sup>1</sup>

Such is the normal course and understanding of the Church.

In this difficult situation, we are trying to be prudent. Since Fr. John Mary does not have faculty from his bishop, he is not hearing confessions.

However, it should be said that the Church teaches that there are exceptional circumstances of necessity or confusion in which a priest, though lacking faculties from his bishop, can validly hear confession. In these cases, *Ecclesia Supplet* applies, that is, the Church, the Mystical Body of Jesus, supplies the faculty directly to the priest—what is known in canon law as *supplied jurisdiction*.

---

<sup>1</sup> See most sacramental manuals (such as Handbook of Moral Theology by Dominic Prümmer O.P.) for more information on the reasons for this distinction between the validity of the Eucharist and Confession. See also the Catholic Encyclopedia, which says: For valid administration, a twofold power is necessary: the power of order and the power of jurisdiction. The former is conferred by ordination, the latter by ecclesiastical authority (see JURISDICTION). At his ordination a priest receives the power to consecrate the Holy Eucharist, and for valid consecration he needs no jurisdiction. As regards penance, the case is different: "because the nature and character of a judgment requires that sentence be pronounced only on those who are subjects (of the judge) the Church of God has always held, and this Council affirms it to be most true, that the absolution which a priest pronounces upon one over whom he has not either ordinary or delegated jurisdiction, is of no effect" (Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, c. 7). <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>

Whether this would apply to us is difficult to evaluate. For there is understandably no legal precedent for this unprecedented reality in which we believe authority at the very top has been usurped by an enemy of Jesus. Some argue it is more than reasonable to hear confessions in such circumstances, that in such a case the general principles of canon law would qualify us for supplied jurisdiction. Others disagree, even those very sympathetic to our situation and who concur with the judgement of our Messages regarding Jorge Bergoglio's status as a usurper.<sup>2</sup>

We have engaged this question now for many months by prayer, study, and counsel. We continue to pray for the Lord's guidance, and we ask for your prayers, so that we may continue to discern His Will for this grave matter.

---

<sup>2</sup> To see a similar question addressed from different perspectives, see the resources below. *While we believe these resources can provide additional and helpful perspective on this subject, it should be understood that MDM does not necessarily agree with all the views contained in them.*

1. [Bishop Tissier de Mallerais on Supplied Jurisdiction and Traditional Priests](#)
2. [Fr. Michael Rodriguez on Supplied Jurisdiction](#)
3. [Canon Law Made Easy: Are the SSPX Sacraments Valid?](#)