

Confessio

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [August 22, 2012](#) issue



A confessional in Montepulciano, Tuscany, Italy. [AttributionNoncommercial Some rights reserved](#) by [augschburger](#).

I, Brian, a sinner, a most simple suburbanite, a generally decent sort but subject to fits of unrelieved selfishness, do here wish to confess and be shriven, in such a manner that speaking of that which I have not done well will provoke me to do better; this slight daily improvement being exactly the work we are asked to do by the Shining One. So then:

I missed my cousin's funeral because I had weekend plans with a girlfriend that I was not man enough to break; and this beloved cousin was a nun, and to this day, nearly 30 years after I casually blew off her funeral, I am haunted by the story of my sister, also now a nun, leaving a small bowl of white flowers on the altar after the mass, because she and our cousin loved small white flowers, which they felt were overlooked in the world, but which often arrived first and smelled best.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas, I beg to be forgiven.

Also I was for many years sneering and dismissive and vulgar and rude to my mother and father, never once even seeing the pain I inflicted, never once thinking of them as human beings, never once thinking how they would feel to have raised and coddled a child with such a serpent's tongue; and not until I was 19 did I feel the lash of remorse, and pick up the telephone, and apologize profusely, and ask their forgiveness for years of surly lip.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I did for years actually take my lovely bride for granted, more than a little; I did think that being married meant that she would never leave me and I could drift into a gentle selfishness that she would have to endure because she had sworn in public in a church before many witnesses *to be true in good times and bad, in sickness and health, to love and honor you all the days of my life*; I carry those words in my wallet, but I did not look at them enough and contemplate them and mull them over and take them deep into my salty heart and consider what they asked me to do and be, and there came dark years, and I was in no small part responsible for their bleakness and pain.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I have roared at my children, and snarled at them, and insulted them, and made cutting remarks, and teased and razzed them past the point of gentle humor, and I have belittled their ideas and accomplishments, and failed to listen to what they were saying beneath the words they were using, and failed to contemplate their dreams, especially when their dreams were far from the dreams I had for them, and I set lofty expectations and standards and behavioral bars, all this having more to do with what I wanted than with what they wanted and who they wished to be, and a thousand thousand times I have spoken to them sternly of what they have not done rather than sweetly of what they have done, and left unsaid that which I feel most certainly in my heart, this being a love so oceanic and electric that I cannot find words for it, though I would happily die for them anytime anyhow anywhere, and if that is so, as I know it to be so, why can I not be more gentle to them, instead of snarling about the failed test?

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I have gossiped and committed calumny and made snide remarks about friends and acquaintances, and made snap judgments based on appearance, and held people to higher standards than I could meet myself, and jumped to conclusions based on no evidence at all, not even ephemeral and circumstantial; and offered scurrilous insults freely; and while hiding behind humor actually flicked words like whips and chains upon those who deserved nothing of the sort; and I have amused myself with dark remarks; and I have often amused myself at the expense of others, under the guise of laughter; and I have done this so very much, I realize, because it

is so very uncomfortable to say this aloud here on the naked page.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

Also I have taken seats on the bus reserved for the elderly and weary when I was neither; and I have sat mute on the bus while old women stood awkwardly, their heavy bags battering their thin shoulders; and I have stolen shampoo and notepads and pens from hotels and motels; and I have even stolen a Gideon Bible from a motel; and I have stolen vast ranks of teas from conferences and seminars; and I have stolen towels from pools and gyms; and I have stolen much else under the aegis of borrowing, knowing full well that I would never return nor attempt to return the contraband; and I have even in this way stolen obscure paperback books from the shelves of friends; another confession that makes me so uncomfortable that it must be true.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas.

There are many more things under heaven that I could here confess, but I am going to use the lovely excuse that time grows short and the end of the page draws near, so I beseech the reader to ascribe many more sins large and small to me, and leave them nameless except to him who knows every feather of every sparrow, and assume my guilt and shame and apologia, and join me as we say, in a small voice but with a wild heart.

Obsecro ut mihi ignoscas, and then amen.