

your bedroom; you can make a misstep on a stairway or fall in the midst of your work. They carry you away, dying. They run to look for a priest, but the priest is late in coming, and the time is short. What do you do? Immediately make an act of perfect contrition. Repent mightily out of love and gratitude to God and Jesus Christ crucified. Perfect contrition will have afforded you the key to heaven.

It is not the case that it is lawful for everyone to wait until the last hour in the hope of being free from every sin by means of a simple act of perfect contrition. It is very doubtful, in fact, that perfect contrition can avail those who have misused it in order to sin. The benefits detailed are chiefly for those who have good will.

“But,” you will ask me, “will I have the time to make an act of perfect contrition?” Yes, with God’s grace. Perfect contrition does not require much time, especially if, during your life, you have practiced it often. It takes only an instant to make it from the depths of your soul. Besides, God’s grace is more efficacious at the moment of danger, and our mind is much more active. At death’s door, the seconds seem like hours. I speak from personal experience.

On July 20, 1886, I came very close to death. It was a matter of eight to ten seconds of pain, the time it takes to pray half an Our Father. In this very brief moment, thousands of thoughts crossed my mind. My whole life passed before me with an unimaginable speed; at the same time I thought of what was in store for me after death. All that, I repeat, happened during the short period of half a Pater. Fortunately, my life was spared. God thus willed it so that I could write *The Key to Heaven*. Well! The first thing I had to do in such a danger was to make what they taught us in catechism — an act of contrition — and to have recourse to God in seeking His protection. Truly, it was then that I learned to love and treasure, as is proper, perfect contrition. Afterward, I made it known and prized everywhere when I had the opportunity. What a loss that people do not better understand its importance in this last moment! Everyone rushes about; they do not understand the tears and cries; they lose their heads; they go to find the doctor or the priest; they bring fresh water and all the remedies that they secretly possess. And while the sick person is in agony, no one, perhaps, has pity on his immortal soul; no one suggests to him to make an act of perfect contrition. If you find yourself in a similar situation, hasten to the side of the dying person and, calmly and serenely presenting to him, if possible, the image of Jesus crucified, with a sure and firm voice, tell him to think and to repeat from the depths of his soul what you are about to say. Then slowly and clearly recite the act of contrition even though it would appear that the sick person understands and comprehends nothing. You will have done a supremely good work that will earn you his eternal gratitude.

Even if you are dealing with a heretic, help him in his last moments in the same way. It is not necessary to speak to him about confession. Urge him to make an act of love of God and of Jesus crucified in slowly reciting to him the act of contrition.