



WEDNESDAY ~ MARCH 15 ~ 6:30—8:00 p.m.
Sacrament of Reconciliation available at all parishes

How to Make a Good Confession

*The penitent and the priest begin with the sign of the Cross, saying: **In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.***

*The priest urges the penitent to have confidence in God with these or similar words: **May the Lord be in your heart and help you to confess your sins with true sorrow.***

*The priest may read or say a passage from Sacred Scripture after which the penitent then states: **Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (however many days, weeks, months or years) since my last confession.***

The penitent then states their sins. For confession to be valid, the penitent must confess all sins they are aware of having committed since their last confession, be sorry for them, and have a firm purpose of amendment of trying not to commit the same sins in the future.

*After this, the priest generally offers some advice to the penitent and gives a penance. The penitent is then asked to pray an act of contrition doing so in their own words, or by one of many acts of contrition like the following: **O My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with the help of your grace, to do penance, to sin no more and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered and died for us. In His Name, O Lord, have mercy.***

*The priest then absolves the penitent in the following words: **God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.** The penitent makes the sign of the Cross and answers: **Amen.***

The priest concludes with some brief words of encouragement and dismissal.

The penitent should then immediately make every effort to fulfill the penance given.

FAQ About Sacrament of Reconciliation

Many people have concerns about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is hoped that those who have questions may find this useful in helping to overcome whatever hesitations they may have in coming to receive the sacrament.

1. Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest?

That is the way Jesus established it on Easter Sunday evening. He told his apostles that, just as God the Father had sent him to save us from our sins, so he was sending them. He breathed on them the power of the Holy Spirit, giving them God's power to forgive sins, since no one can forgive sins but God alone. He then told them that whatever sins they forgive are forgiven and whatever sins they retain are retained (Jn 20:21-23; Mk 2:7). Since the apostles were unable to read minds, the only way that they would know which to forgive and which to retain is if people told them their sins. Jesus thus established the essential structure of the sacrament of confession.

2. Why do people vary in calling it the Sacrament of Penance, Confession or Reconciliation?

The names emphasize different aspects of the sacrament. Penance refers to our repentance, sorrow and resolution to amend our life with God's help. Confession refers to the act by which we tell our sins to a priest. Reconciliation refers to the goal of the celebration by which the sinner is reconciled to God and the Church. The ritual for the sacrament is called the Rite of Penance, but is fitting to refer to it with any of these titles. In fact, the Catechism refers to it also as "the Sacrament of Conversion" and the "Sacrament of Forgiveness."

3. What do I need to do to make a good confession?

The sacrament consists of three actions on the part of the penitent: contrition, which is sorrow for one's sins; confession, that is examining one's conscience and telling one's sins to a priest; and penance, namely a desire to make up for one's sins and amend one's life. Together the three are called the "acts of the penitent."

4. How do I examine my conscience well?

One does so by asking for God's help and prayerfully examining one's actions in the light of Christ's teaching and example. Some may examine their behavior according to the Ten Commandments; or by Christ's command to love God and love others; or by the beatitudes; or by comparing their behavior to the most important Christian virtues of life. →

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5. How does our sorrow translate into penance?

When we are truly sorry for our sins, we regret having ever done them. That leads naturally to our trying to remedy the damage caused by sin and to having a firm purpose of amendment to avoid that and other types of sins in the future. The priest normally assigns us a penance (for example: prayer, fasting or other types of self-denial, sacrifices, almsgiving, spiritual or corporal works of mercy, or service of neighbor) as a way to begin to repair the damage caused by sin.

6. What are the qualities of a good confession?

A good confession is humble, sincere and complete. It is humble when we accuse ourselves of our sins with a deep sorrow for having offended the Lord while imploring his loving mercy. It is sincere when we tell all of our sins honestly and truthfully, without exaggerating or excusing them. It is complete when we confess all of our sins, including the number of times we have committed each one.

7. What is sin and what sins need to be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance?

Sin is an offense against God that ruptures our communion with Him and with His Church. It is far more than “breaking the rules,” rather it is a failure to love God and to love others, which in turn causes real damage in all our relationships. There are sins totally incompatible with love for God and others (mortal sins, in which genuine love is “dead”), and sins in which love is less grievously wounded (venial or “easily forgiven”). The Church says that all grave or mortal sins must be confessed as soon as possible.

8. What did Jesus say and do about sin?

Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). His first public words were “Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mt 4:17). He healed the sins of the paralyzed man and of the woman caught in adultery (Mk 2:5; Jn 8:11). He preached on God’s desire to reconcile us with the beautiful images of the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son (Lk 15). He taught us how to be brutal toward sin, instructing us in the Sermon on the Mount that it would be better to rip out our eyes or cut off our hands if they were leading us to sin than to do nothing and lose our bodies and souls forever in hell (Mt 5:29-30). He taught us to pray to the Father to forgive us our sins and to bring us to forgive the relatively smaller debts of those who sin against us (Mt 6:12; 18:21-35). And on the Cross, as he prepared to die, Jesus’ salvific words were, first for sinners in general, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” and then for one sinner, the Good Thief, in particular (Lk 23:34,43). After his resurrection, not only did Jesus give the apostles the ability to forgive sins in his name but commanded them to preach “repentance and forgiveness of sins” to all nations (Jn 20:21-23; Lk 24:47). That is what the Church continues through preaching the need for repentance and making Jesus’ mercy available through the Sacrament of Penance.

9. How often do I need to confess?

The Church recommends that Catholics receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently. Strictly speaking, after reaching the age of reason, Catholics are obliged to confess their serious sins at least once a year. However, the minimum should not be made a maximum! Catholics should come to confession as soon as possible after they have committed a mortal sin. If we are seeking to grow in holiness, the regular practice of confession should be desired and is recommended.

10. What are the effects of the sacrament?

The Sacrament of Penance is a spiritual resurrection bringing us to life again after we were dead through sin (Lk 15:24). It reconciles us with God in loving friendship and restores us to his grace. It is normally followed by peace, joy, serenity and spiritual consolation. The sacrament also reconciles us with the Church, repairing or restoring the damage our sins have done to our communion with others.

11. Can a priest reveal what he has heard to others?

No. A priest can never reveal the sins a person has confessed. This is known as the “seal of confession,” which admits of no exceptions. If a priest were to violate the seal of confession he would be automatically excommunicated. Over the centuries several priests have died and many have been imprisoned because they refused, even under threat of torture and execution, to break the inviolable seal of confession. This is one of the most beautiful aspects of the sacrament and of the priesthood: the priest who hears our confession, in order to protect the secrets we have expressed to God through him, will allow himself to be imprisoned, tortured or even killed. That is how seriously he and the Church take the seal and the sacrament.

12. What is the priest’s role in the sacrament of penance?

When he celebrates the sacrament of penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God’s merciful love for the sinner. The priest is called, practically, to lead the penitent with patience toward healing and full maturity.

13. What if I feel nervous about going to the sacrament?

Remember, first, that in the sacrament you are fundamentally talking to God through the priest. God loves you, wishes to forgive you, and desires to embrace you with the joy with which the prodigal son was embraced in Jesus’ parable (Lk 15:11-32). Moreover, know that you will not say anything that the priest has not heard before. Do not be afraid and if you are nervous, please just tell the priest. He is there help you.