

## RECEIVING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission, man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of; takes responsibility for them; and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible. (CCC, no. 1455)

- ◆ **Welcoming the Penitent:** The Priest should welcome the penitent with fraternal charity and addresses him with friendly words. The penitent then makes the sign of the cross. The priest urges the penitent to have confidence in God.
- ◆ **Reading the Word of God:** Then the priest, or the penitent himself, may read a text of holy Scripture, or this may be done as part of the preparation for the sacrament. Through the word of God the Christian receives light to recognize his sins and is called to conversion and to confidence in God's mercy.
- ◆ **Confession of Sins and the Act of Penance:** The penitent then confesses his sins, if necessary, the priest should help the penitent to make a complete confession; he should also encourage him to have sincere sorrow for his sins against God.
- ◆ **The imposition and acceptance of penance:** Then the priest imposes an act of penance or satisfaction on the penitent; this should serve not only to make up for the past but also to help him to begin a new life and provide him with an antidote to weakness. This act of penance may suitably take the form of prayer, self-denial, and especially service of one's neighbor and works of mercy.

- ◆ **The Prayer of the Penitent and the Absolution by the Priest:** The penitent makes his prayer of contrition and resolution to begin a new life by means of prayer for God's pardon. Following this prayer, the priest extends his hands, over the head of the penitent and pronounces the formula of absolution. As he says the final words the priest makes the sign of the cross over the penitent.
- ◆ **Proclamation of Praise and dismissal of the Penitent:** After receiving pardon for his sins the penitent praises the mercy of God and gives him thanks, "His mercy endures forever." Then the priest tells him to go in peace. The penitent continues his conversion and expresses it by a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God, for "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4: 8).

(*The Rite of Penance*, The Roman Ritual, pp. 19-21)

### Acts of Contrition

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 your help, 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, my God, have mercy.

or

Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

or

Father, I have sinned against you and am not worthy to be called your son. Be merciful to me, a sinner.

Holy Name  
Catholic Church

## Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation



*"Though your sins are like scarlet,  
they shall be as white as snow..."*

Isaiah 1: 18

## WHY DO I NEED THIS SACRAMENT?

“Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their Baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the Sacrament of Penance offers a new possibilities to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this as ‘the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.’” (CCC, no. 1446)

### WHAT IS SIN?

“Sin is an offense against God as well as against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as ‘an utterance,’ a deed, or a desire contrary to eternal law.’” (CCC, no. 1849)

### MORTAL OR GRAVE SIN VS. VENIAL SIN

“Mortal Sin is when we consciously and freely choose to do something grave against the divine law (Ten Commandments) and contrary to our final destiny. There are three conditions for a sin to be a mortal sin: grave matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent (freedom). Mortal sin destroys the loving relationship with God that we need for eternal happiness. If not repented, it results in a loss of love and God’s grace and merits eternal punishment in hell, that is, exclusion from the Kingdom of God and thus eternal death. Venial sin is an offense against God in a less serious matter. Though venial sin does not completely destroy the love we need for eternal happiness, it weakens that love and impedes our progress in the practice of virtue and the moral good. Over time, repeated venial sins can have serious consequences.”

(U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults, pg. 313)

## HOW DO I PREPARE FOR THE SACRAMENT?

The basic requirements for a good reconciliation are to have the intention of returning to God like the “prodigal son” and acknowledging our sins with true sorrow before the priest.

### True Contrition

“Among the penitent’s acts, contrition occupies the first place. Contrition is ‘sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again.’” (CCC, no. 1451)

The essential act of penance on the part of the penitent is contrition. This is a clear and decisive rejection of sins committed together with a resolution to avoid committing these sins in the future out of the love for God and love for neighbor. The resolution is a sure sign that your sorrow is genuine and authentic. This does not mean that a promise never to fall again into sin is necessary. A resolution to try to avoid the near occasions of sin suffices for true repentance. God’s grace, in cooperation with the intention to rectify your life, will give you the strength to resist and overcome temptation in the future.

### Examining your conscience

Ask the help of the Holy Spirit and review our life with God. The Ten Commandments are a helpful guide here.

**I. I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.** Do I seek to love God with my whole heart and soul? Does He truly hold the first place in my life? Have I been involved with the occult or superstitious practices?

**II. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.** Have I insulted God’s Holy Name or used it lightly or carelessly? Have I wished evil on anyone?

**III. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.** Have I missed Mass deliberately on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, or Holy Days of obligation? Do I try to keep Sunday as a day of rest? Have I neglected prayer?

### IV. Honor your father and your mother.

Do I honor and obey my parents? Do I care for them in their old age? Have I neglected my family responsibilities to my spouse and children? Is my family life centered around Christ and his teachings.

**V. You shall not kill.** Have I murdered or physically harmed anyone? Have I encouraged abortion? Have I abused drugs or alcohol? Have I mutilated myself through sterilization? Have I harbored hatred, anger, or resentment in my heart toward anyone? Have I given scandal to anyone by my sins, thereby leading them to sin?

**VI. You shall not commit adultery.** Have I been chaste in thought and word? Have I used the gift of sex only within marriage? Have I been open to the gift of children? Have I given myself sexual gratification? Did I deliberately look at impure TV, pictures, reading, or internet pornography?

**VII. You shall not steal.** Have I taken what is not mine? Am I honest with my employer/employee? Do I gamble excessively, thereby robbing my family of their needs. Do I seek to share what I have with the poor and needy?

**VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.** Have I lied, gossiped or spoken behind anyone’s back? Have I ruined anyone’s good name? Do I reveal information that should be confidential? Am I sincere in my dealings with others or am I “two-faced”?

**IX. You shall not desire your neighbor’s wife.** Am I envious of another’s spouse? Have I consented to impure thoughts? Do I try to control my imagination? Am I reckless and irresponsible in the books I read and the movies I watch?

**X. You shall not desire your neighbor’s goods.** Am I envious of the possessions of others? Am I resentful and bitter over my position in life?