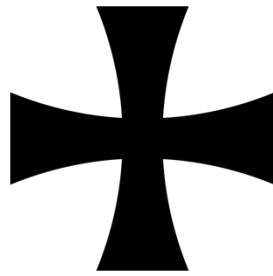


The Sacrament of Reconciliation



Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

- Definition of a sacrament: A sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ that gives us Sanctifying Grace.
- The Sacrament of Confession was instituted by Christ in which forgiveness for sins committed after baptism is granted through the priest's absolution (through his ordination) to those who with true sorrow confess their sins and promise to do penance (reparation).
- Reconciliation delivers the one confessing from the guilt of sin and, in the case of mortal sin, from its eternal punishment.
- The matter and form for the sacrament of Reconciliation is the penitent and the words of absolution, "I absolve you of your sins . . . "

MORTAL AND VENIAL SIN

There are 2 types of sin to confess:

1. **Mortal Sin:** Sin in which the sinner has "cut off" from God's grace, because of a grave offense against God. It is a spiritually "dead" soul.
 - a. **CCC 1033** To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."¹
 - b. **Gal 5:19-21** Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit,²¹ envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
 - c. **1 Cor 6:9-10** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.
 - d. **CCC 1395** The Eucharist is not ordered to the forgiveness of mortal sins—that is **proper to the sacrament of Reconciliation.**

The culpability of the person committing such a sin depends on the following 3 conditions:

1. The sin must be grave or serious
 2. Must be done with full knowledge
 3. Must be done willingly
2. **Venial Sin:** That sin which offends God, but the sinner does not lose being in the state of grace.
 - a. **1 Jn 5:16–17** If any one sees his brother committing what is not a deadly sin, he will ask, and God will give him life for those whose sin is not deadly. There is sin which is deadly; I do not say that one is to pray for that.¹⁷ All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not deadly.

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., p. 269). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

- b. **CCC 1394** As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; and this living charity *wipes away venial sins*.

GOD’S DESIGN FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Old Testament Typology (Typology is a sign or symbol that represents a reality)

Lev. 5:5-8 “Whoever is guilty in any of these cases *shall confess the sin he has incurred*, and as his *sin offering* . . . he shall bring to the LORD a female animal from the flock. . . The *priest shall then make atonement for his sin*. He shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer the one for the sin offering first.

- Notice that God’s design in the OT is that we **confess** our sin, offer **penance** and the **priest** has an integral part in the process of forgiveness.

New Testament

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.

- Note that *1 Jn 1:9* does not say that we are to confess ONLY to God.

James 5:14-16 Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the *presbyters* of the church, and they should pray over him and . . . and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another that you may be healed.

- Note that we are to confess our sins to “one another.” The context is that the priest (Greek: *presbuteros*) is present to hear your confession. The English word, “priest,” comes from the Greek word “presbyter.”

CAN MEN FORGIVE SINS?

- God alone has the power to forgive sins and reconcile man to God.

Mark 2:5-7, 10 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?” . . . But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.”

Col 1:19–20 For in him [Jesus] all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

2 Cor 5:18–20 God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- Jesus came with authority to forgive sins and with authority over all heaven and earth.

Mt 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mt 9:6-8 “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to *men*.

Note that “authority was given to men” (plural) not just “a” (singular) man.

- Now he sends his apostles to do the same in his name.

John 20:21-23 [Jesus] said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

- The confession is, therefore, not made only in the secrecy of the penitent's heart.
 - Confession, by God’s design, is to a priest with the power to forgive sins, which Christ granted to His Church.

How to Make a Good Confession

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession, brings about a change of heart through God’s mercy and forgiveness. Experience the Lord’s compassion through the Sacrament of Penance, which is made up of the following parts:

Before Confession

How to Make a Good Confession

Confession is not difficult, but it does require preparation. We should begin with prayer, placing ourselves in the presence of God, our loving Father. We seek healing and forgiveness through repentance and a resolve to sin no more. Then we review our lives since our last confession, searching our thoughts, words and actions for that which did not conform to God’s command to love Him and one another through His laws and the laws of His Church. This is called an examination of conscience.

To make an examination of conscience:

- Begin with a prayer asking for God’s help.
- Review your life with the help of some questions, which are based on the 10 Commandments (see below).
- Tell God how truly sorry you are for your sins.
- Make a firm resolution not to sin again.

Examination of Conscience

Ask God to help you make a good confession. In quiet reflection ask yourself: Since my last confession...

- Did I pray to God, daily and from my heart?
- Did I live and witness to my Catholic faith, joyfully & courageously? Did I take God's name in vain? Did I curse anyone or make false oaths? Did I engage in superstitious or occult practices?
- Did I attend and participate actively at Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation? Did I fast & abstain on prescribed days?
- Did I respect people in authority? My employer? Did I honor my parents?
- Was I violent or unnecessarily aggressive (e.g., physically, verbally, psychologically, etc.) with anyone?
- Was I prideful, stubborn, or rude with anyone? Did I hold a grudge?
- Did I abuse alcohol, prescription medications, or illegal drugs? Did I overindulge in food?
- Did I consent to, recommend, advise, or actively take part in an abortion? Did I use abortifacient drugs?
- Did I view pornography, entertain lustful thoughts, conversations or actions?
- Was I unloving to my spouse? Did I engage in adulterous activity (e.g., sexual, emotional, virtual, etc.)? Did I use contraceptives?
- Was I neglectful of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, or physical needs of my spouse, children, or family?
- Did I steal or damage another's property? Was I honest and just in my business relations? Did I waste time at work?
- Did I contribute to the needs of the spiritually and materially poor with my time and resources?
- Did I engage in gossip? Did I lie? Did I speak poorly of others? Did I judge anyone unfairly?
- Did I envy anyone? Was I jealous of others or covet another's belongings?

During Confession

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) involves four steps:

- **Contrition:** A sincere sorrow for having offended God, and the most important act of the person confessing. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.
 - **Confession:** Naming our sins—aloud—to the priest, who represents Christ and the Church.
 - **Penance:** The prayers—or sometimes, the good deeds—the priest gives, for our healing and the healing of those we have hurt by our sins.
 - **Absolution:** The words the priest speaks by which “God, the Father of mercies” reconciles us to himself through his death and resurrection, called the Prayer of

Absolution: *“God the father of mercies through the death and resurrection of his Son as reconciled the world to himself and the 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. Amen.”*

Going to Confession

Reconciliation may be face-to-face or anonymous, with a screen between you and the priest. Choose the option that is the most comfortable for you.

1. The priest gives a blessing or greeting.
2. Make the Sign of the Cross and say, “Bless me father, for I have sinned. My last confession was...” (give weeks, months, or years).
3. Confess all your sins to the priest. (If you are unsure or uneasy, tell him and ask for help.)
4. Say, “I am sorry for these and all my sins.”
5. The priest gives a penance and offers advice to help you become a better Catholic Christian.
6. Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins.
7. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

Act of Contrition

God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to confess my sins, do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

After Confession

Rejoice! You have received the forgiveness of Christ! What should you do when you leave? Remember the words you recited in the Act of Contrition: *“I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.”*

Before you leave the confessional, the priest will give you your penance, which may consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy or sacrifices. You must complete the penance given to you. These works help to join us with Christ, who alone died for us. The goal of our life’s journey is to grow closer to God. We can do this through prayer, spiritual reading, fasting and the reception of the Sacraments.

Taken from the Archdiocese of Washington.