

Perfect Contrition & Spiritual Communion

With the restriction of public gatherings to slow the spread of COVID-19, the public celebration of the Mass has been suspended and many Lenten penance services have been canceled. Social distancing and quarantines also make it difficult to receive the sacraments normally. And so, the question arises:

“What do I do if I cannot go to confession or receive holy Communion because of the coronavirus?”

In these circumstances, there are devotions that enable you to receive forgiveness of your sins (under certain conditions) and the consolation of the grace of the Eucharist. These devotions have been encouraged by the church in times of great distress and have been practiced by the saints.

How to make an act of perfect contrition

The catechism describes contrition as “sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again.” Perfect contrition goes beyond this and “arises from a love by which God is loved above all else.” Perfect contrition “obtains the forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible” (CCC 1452–1452). While the ordinary way to receive absolution is through sacramental confession, through an act of perfect contrition you can receive the forgiveness of your sins — even mortal sins — outside of the sacrament, provided you are firmly resolved to reform your life and intend to go to confession as soon as possible.

Perfect contrition is a grace from God, so you must sincerely ask that this gift be granted to you. In your prayer, approach God asking, “My God, please grant me perfect contrition for my sins.” Then follow these steps:

1. In reality or in your mind, kneel at the foot of a crucifix and mentally repeat: “Jesus, my God and my Savior, in the midst of your passion on the cross, you suffered for me and gave your life to purify me from my sins.”
2. Keeping in mind the great love that the Lord Jesus demonstrated on the cross for you, call to mind your sins. Out of love for God, express your sorrow and regret to the Lord. Promise that, with his help, you firmly resolve no longer to sin.
3. Recite, slowly and sincerely, an act of contrition focusing on the goodness of God and your love for Jesus:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments, 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 sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

4. Make a firm resolution to go to sacramental confession as soon as possible.

How to make a spiritual communion

St. Teresa of Ávila wrote: “When you do not receive Communion and you do not attend Mass, you can make a spiritual communion, which is a most beneficial practice; by it the love of God will be greatly impressed on you” (The Way of Perfection, Ch. 35).

St. Thomas Aquinas defined spiritual communion as “an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the Holy Sacrament and a loving embrace as though we had already received Him.” To make an act of spiritual communion, follow these steps:

1. If you are aware that you have committed mortal sins, make an act of perfect contrition.
2. Imagine the sacred words and actions of the Mass, or watch them online or on TV.
3. Sincerely express in your heart to God your desire to receive Our Lord truly present in the Eucharist.
4. Recite this prayer of St. Alphonsus Liguori:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most holy Eucharist. I love you above all things, and I desire to receive you into my soul. Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you were already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

5. Express in your heart your gratitude to God for the gift the Lord gave us in his body and blood offered for our salvation.