

The Sacrament of Penance

Divine Perspective on the Sacrament of Penance:

- We are “earthen vessels” who, by Baptism and Eucharist, hold the “treasure” of all treasures. Through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the Father gives us the possibility of restoring the new life given us in Baptism after we have weakened it or lost it by sin.

Place in God’s Plan:

- Trinity: God, the Father of Mercies, reconciled the world to Himself through the Death and Resurrection of His Son and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. The sinner’s reconciliation is a work of the Trinity.
- The Paschal Mystery: Christ’s Paschal Mystery won for us the forgiveness of sins and the possibility of new life which He bestows on us through this Sacrament.
- The Church: The forgiveness of sins was entrusted to the Church, the body of Christ. For this reason, we confess to a priest and receive God’s forgiveness through him.
- Dignity of the Human Person: Sin is a possibility of human freedom, but, moved by grace, we are also capable of repentance. The payments the priest gives allows us to use our freedom for good – to restore what was damaged by our sins.

Theological Virtues (Aims of Instruction):

- Seeing with Faith: It strengthens faith by helping us to know that we are understood by God.
- Abiding with Hope: Knowing this and having these graces available makes us more confident in God and His plan for us.
- Burning with Charity: Seeing His loving provision for us and using it causes us to respond with even more love for Him and for others.

Scripture and Essentials:

- 1) The Sacrament of Penance Restores the Grace of Baptism (Eph 1:4; 2 Cor 4:7; Lk 15:3-7, 11-32; Lk 19:1-10) (CCC 1422, 979-980, 983, Lumen Gentium 11.2, Council of Trent 1551).
 - a. It is necessary for the forgiveness of serious sins committed after Baptism, which wound our relationship with God and with the Church.
 - i. The Church Fathers called it “a laborious kind of baptism” or “a baptism of tears.”
 - ii. It is necessary for the salvation of those who commit grave sin after Baptism.

The Sacrament of Penance

- b. By this Sacrament, God pardons offences against Him and restores us to fellowship with Him, to the dignity of sonship.
 - c. Through Penance, God also reconciles us with the Church.
 - i. Every failure in charity we commit harms the Church, of which we are a member.
 - ii. The Church, by her charity, prayer, and example, labors for the conversion of sinners.
 - d. This Sacrament has a variety of names, which describe different aspects of the same reality:
 - i. "Reconciliation" highlights the effect of the Sacrament, which reunites us to God and the Church.
 - ii. "Penance" describes the sorrow for sin and the action that seeks to make things right again.
 - iii. "Confession" is not an official name for the Sacrament, but it is the action that is required, and therefore it tends to be used as its name.
- 2) Christ Entrusted this Ministry of Reconciliation to the Apostles and to their Successors (2 Cor 5:18; Jn 20:23; Lk 24:44-47) (CCC 981-982, 1461-1470, 1548).
- a. God alone forgives, but He changes the very being of priests through the Sacrament of Holy Orders so that they are able to act in the Person of Christ.
 - b. The priest acts in the Person of Christ, so that, when he says the words of absolution, the Father forgives through him.
 - c. The priest's power in this Sacrament is called "binding and loosing."
 - i. This power extends to all truly repentant sinners until their last breath.
 - ii. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven through this Sacrament.
 - iii. The "sin against the Holy Spirit" is sin for which the sinner does not repent and, hence, cannot be forgiven. Repentance is necessary to the forgiveness of sins (Mt 12:31).
- 3) The Penitent's Acts are Essential to this Sacrament: His Contrition and His Confession of His Sins to a Priest, with the Intention to Never Sin Again and to Make Satisfaction (Eph 4:22-24; 1 Jn 2:1-2) (CCC 618, 1451-1460, 1470-1473, 1783).
- a. Genuine sorrow for sin involves hatred for the sin and the intention to never do it again. This is called contrition (Gal 6:14; Mt 5:28).
 - i. Perfect contrition is a gift of the Holy Spirit and comes from love of God.

The Sacrament of Penance

- ii. Imperfect contrition (attrition) is also a gift of the Holy Spirit, but it is born out of consideration of sin's ugliness or fear of hell or punishment.
 - b. A regular examination of conscience results in true contrition (1 Jn 2:1-2).
 - i. The sins we confess in this Sacrament are concrete acts.
 - 1. Mortal sins must be confessed with what it was and how many times we did it.
 - 2. Venial sins, also, are committed in thought, word, deed or omission. They are not vague acts.
 - ii. Recognizing our concrete failures leads us to true sorrow and to the desire for amendment.
 - c. By confessing our sins, we stand with God, acknowledging our failure to live in His likeness, so that God can restore us.
 - i. Mortal sins must be confessed to be forgiven.
 - ii. While sacramentally confessing venial sins is not necessary for their forgiveness, this Sacrament gives grace to overcome the tendency to commit the same sin again.
 - d. Performing the penance given by the priest helps the penitent make satisfaction (or restitution) for the sins. We engage in some of work of prayer, mercy, or suffering, remembering that Christ suffered for our sins (Lk 6:36; Phil 4:13).
- 4) In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, We Meet Christ and Experience His Mercy (Mt 18:21-22; 2 Cor 5:18; Mk 2:5, 17; Lk 15:18) (CCC 980-982, 1449, 1480, 1484).
 - a. Christ personally addresses every sinner in this Sacrament.
 - b. Christ speaks in the words of absolution, so that we hear, "Go and sin no more."
 - i. The required "matter" of the Sacrament is the contrition of the penitent and their confession of their sins.
 - ii. The "form" of the Sacrament is the words of absolution—Christ speaks our forgiveness, and it happens. The priest's words convey Christ's mercy.
- 5) The Sacrament of Reconciliation Restores Our Relationship with God, Reconciles Us with the Church and Anticipates our Particular Judgment (Rev 22:14; Lk 15:32; Jn 5:24) (CCC 983, 1039, 1468-1470, 2305).
 - a. Reconciliation with God leads to healing of our relationships with others (Eph 2:16; 1 Cor 12:26).

The Sacrament of Penance

- i. Sin distances us from God and makes us less capable of communion with Him.
- ii. Sin also turns us inward on ourselves, so that we live in opposition to our neighbor.
- b. This forgiveness comes through the Church and strengthens our communion with her (Rev 22:14).
 - i. Mortal sin cuts us off from receiving the Eucharist, the heart of the Church's communion.
 - ii. We must confess all mortal sins before we receive the Eucharist.
- c. In conversion, through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and does not come to judgment (Sir 5:6-7; Lk 15:32; Jn 5:24; Ps 103:12-13).
 - i. When God forgives us, the sin we committed no longer exists for Him. He no longer sees it in us or us in its light.
 - ii. The Sacrament restores us to the life of grace—we pass from spiritual death of mortal sin (or sickness in the case of venial sin) to life by confessing and receiving absolution.
 - iii. We begin a new way of life by embracing God's will, including making right what was wronged in our sin.

Related Doctrines:

- 1) This Sacrament is a major part in the Father's "ocean of mercy."
- 2) The Mercy extended in this Sacrament flows from the Paschal Mystery (the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus).
- 3) Person sin is the cause for the Sacrament.
- 4) Reconciliation is ordered to the Eucharist, efficacious because of sanctifying grace.
- 5) It allows us the opportunity to restore baptismal life.
- 6) It anticipates heavenly glory and restores our fellowship with the Church.