

The Gift of forgiveness: A Guide to the Sacrament

When was the last time you went to confession? Has it been a while? The Sacrament of Penance, also known as reconciliation or confession, may seem intimidating for many, but with some simple preparation found in this brief guide, it can be a peaceful healing encounter with Christ. We invite you to take this guide with you to confession as a way of reflection and rediscover the Sacrament of Penance. Reconciliation (also known as confession or Penance) is a Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ in his love and mercy to offer sinners forgiveness for offenses committed against God. At the same time, sinners reconcile with the Church, because it is also wounded by our sins. Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people, and God. In Reconciliation, we acknowledge our sins before God and his Church. We express our sorrow in a meaningful way, receive the forgiveness of Christ and his Church, make reparation for what we have done, and resolve to do better in the future.

The Four Parts of Confession

- **Contrition:** a sincere sorrow for having offended God, and the most important act of the penitent. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.
- **Confession:** confronting our sins in a profound way to God by speaking about them — aloud — to the priest.
- **Penance:** an important part of our healing is the “penance” the priest imposes in reparation for our sins.
- **Absolution:** the priest says the words by which “God, the Father of Mercies” reconciles a sinner to Himself through the merits of the Cross.

A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Adapted from Examination of Conscience based on the Ten Commandments

Take a moment to reflect on how sin has damaged your relationships.

- Have I treated people, events, or things as more important than God?
- Have my words, actively or passively, put down God, the Church, or people?
- Do I 'keep Holy the Sabbath'? Do I go to Mass every Sunday (or Saturday Vigil) and on Holy Days of Obligation, as is possible? Do I avoid, when possible, work that impedes worship to God, joy for the Lord's Day, and proper relaxation of mind and body? Do I look for ways to spend time with family or in service on Sunday?
- Do I show my parents due respect? Do I seek to maintain good communication with my parents where possible? Do I criticize them for lacking skills I think they should have?
- Have I harmed another through physical, verbal, or emotional means, including gossip or manipulation of any kind?
- Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of others and of myself?
- Have I taken or wasted time or resources that belonged to another?
- How do I protect and care for God's creation, including my family, the environment and those around me?

RITE OF RECONCILIATION STEPS

*If it has been a while, let the priest know and he can help guide you through the steps for a good confession.

1. 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 [length of time] ago."
3. Confess all of 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 of my sins."
5. The priest gives a penance and offers advice to help you be a better Catholic.
6. Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

AN 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.