

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH ABOUT THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION?

“Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” and exercises this divine power: “Your sins are forgiven.” Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, #1441)

“Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation, bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops’ collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (CCC, #1461)

“The sacrament’s traditional and essential elements are contrition, confession, absolution and satisfaction.” (National Catechetical Directory, 1977, #124)

“The Sacrament of Reconciliation, including individual and complete confession and absolution, remains the ordinary way of reconciling the faithful with God and with the Church. The Church holds and teaches that this method of receiving the sacrament is necessary and willed by Christ.” (NCD, #124)

“According to the Church’s command, “after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.” Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.” (CCC, #1457)

“Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit.” (CCC, #1458)

POINTS TO COVER WITH CHILDREN

1. God's mercy

- no sin God cannot forgive if we're sorry

2. Priest as representative of God and Church

- communal dimension
- my sins hurt others

3. Elements of Reconciliation (More than confession)

- contrition: being sorry
- confession: telling
- absolution: sign of forgiveness/cleansing
- penance: satisfaction, "making up" for your sins, showing God you are sorry

4. We Must Be Forgiving People as Well

- Our Father

5. Don't Pass on Your Own Hangups

- the dark box is gone
- being "forced" to go to confession, to make up sins is over

Vocabulary for Understanding Reconciliation

Reconciliation—sacrament of healing in which sinners are reconciled both with God and to the Church.

Absolution—comes from the Latin word, “to wash”; it is a prayer that the priest says while making the sign of the cross over the person receiving God’s forgiveness in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Act of Contrition—a prayer expressing sorrow for sin and an intention to do better.

Contrition—feeling sorrow for sinning and turning away from God.

Confession—telling your sins to the priest in the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Penance—the prayer, the good work, or action that a priest asks the person receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation to do in order to express an intention to become a better person.

Conscience—an inner sense that people have to help them recognize right from wrong and to help make moral decision. Although the root of moral conscience is innate, the formation of conscience is a community achievement.

Examination of Conscience—a sincere and honest effort a person makes to remember the sins committed and the bad things that he or she did.

Mortal Sin—a serious sin; a complete turning away from God’s love; a serious disruption in a person’s relationship with God.

Venial Sin—a less serious sin that shows a carelessness in a person’s relationship with God.

STEPS TO CONFESSION

Before going to confession, spend some time to examine your conscience to know your sins that you need to confess.

Greeting

Upon entering the confessional, the priest greets the penitent. After that the penitent begins with the sign of the cross.

Penitent: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Confession of Sins

Penitent: Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. This is my first confession and these are my sins:

Tell Father your sins. He will discuss your sins with you, give you a Penance to do outside the Confessional, and then ask you to say an Act of Contrition.

Act of Contrition

Say the act of contrition (either memorized or read from their cards.)

Prayer of Absolution

Priest: God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has reconciled the world to Himself and 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.

Penitent: Amen.

Dismissal

Priest (example): The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.

Penitent: Thanks be to God.

A Child Friendly Examination of Conscience

Although children rarely commit serious sins, it's important to teach them how to judge their actions and determine where they need to grow in love for God or others. Because children this age are concrete thinkers and are interested in rules, the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21) can provide a useful framework for helping them form and examine their consciences. The following is a child-friendly version of the Ten Commandments and related questions that can be used as an examination of conscience. For adults, the meaning of each of the Ten Commandments is discussed in detail in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (paragraphs 2052-2557).

- 1. "You shall have no other gods before me." (v.7):** Make God the most important thing in your life.
Have I put God first, or have I sometimes made other things in my life more important than God? Do I remember to talk to Him? Do I choose what God wants for me over what I want for myself?
- 2. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." (v.11):** Use God's name the right way.
Have I used God's name with care? Have I used God's name in the wrong way? (For example, saying "God" when I wasn't really talking to Him or talking about Him.)
- 3. "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (v.12):** Make Sunday a day to worship God.
Have I tried my best to worship God at Mass by singing, praying, and listening? Have I misbehaved during Mass?
- 4. "Honor your father and your mother." (v. 16):** Love your parents and follow their rules.
Have I obeyed my parents—even when they are not looking? Have I talked back to them?
- 5. "You shall not kill" (v. 17):** Be kind to the people and animals God made.
Have I been kind to others? Have I solved disagreements in a peaceful way? Have I fought with anyone? Have I taken good care of my pets?
- 6. "Neither shall you commit adultery" (v. 18):** Be respectful in the things you do with your body.
Have I followed God's rules in how I treat my body? Do I respect the bodies of others?
- 7. "Neither shall you steal" (v. 19):** Take care of other people's things; don't take what belongs to someone else.
Have I respected other peoples' things? Have I taken something that doesn't belong to me?

8. "Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor." (v. 20):

Tell the truth.

Have I told the truth? Have I told a lie or things that were only partly true?

9. "Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife" (v. 21a): Keep your thoughts and words clean.

Have I told or listened to any dirty jokes? Have I watched any movies or shows that I shouldn't have seen? Have I tried to keep my mind on good things?

10. "You shall not desire...anything that is your neighbor's" (v.21b): Be happy with the things you have.

Have I been happy with the things I have? Have I been jealous of others?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

These questions may help you.

Do I pray every day?

Do I think about other stuff during prayer time on purpose?

Do I try to listen to God's word at Mass?

Do I use God's name and Jesus' name with respect?

Do I speak God's name or Jesus' name without respect because I am mad or to impress my friends?

Do I cooperate with my parents as they are trying to get our family ready for CFF and Mass on Sunday morning?

Do I obey my parents, teachers and others who have the job of taking care of me?

Do I obey my parents the first time they tell me to do something?

Do I ever talk back to my parents?

Do I make fun of classmates, people who are different from me or old people?

Have I been angry?

Have I been stubborn?

Have I picked a fight or quarreled with friends or my brothers and sisters?

Have I called other people names?

Have I said bad words?

Did I purposely look at bad pictures?

Did I watch programs on T.V. where the talk or actions were bad?

Do I follow the house rules about using T.V., the computer, game boy etc. even if my parents aren't looking?

Do I put on my seat belt as soon as I am reminded?

Do I care for my health and follow safety rules?

Have I stolen anything?

Have I cheated on a test (stolen other people's answers)?

Do I share?

Do I share what I have with others, especially people in need?

Do I want everything for myself?

Do I tell the truth?

Have I lied to get out of trouble?

Have I lied to get someone else into trouble?

Have I destroyed other people's stuff on purpose (writing on walls, breaking a younger child's toy etc)?

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am 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.

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. Amen.

O my God, I am sorry for my sins.
In choosing to sin, and failing to do good,
I have sinned against You and Your church..
I firmly intend, with the help of Your Son,
to make up for my sins
and to love as I should. Amen.