

The Sacrament of Penance

Praying together

Come Holy Spirit

This week we especially ask the Holy Spirit to give us 'a new heart and a new spirit' through the forgiveness of our sins.

Listening to the Word

We hear about the sin of King David and how the prophet Nathan shamed him into sorrow with a story. We also hear King David's prayer of sorrow which tells of his broken heart.

Praise and thanks

When we pray, in addition to asking for things, we should also remember to praise and thank God for his wonderful deeds. We thank him for creating us and for giving us life, and for forgiving us our sins. We can also remember the good things that God has given to us as individuals.

A traditional prayer

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

A new heart create for me, O God

put a steadfast spirit within me

Do not cast me away from your presence,

nor deprive me

of your Holy Spirit.

(from the prayer of King David)



A sacrament with three names

When did you last go to Confession? Do you see it as an important part of your Catholic life? If you are worried about going to Confession, what most worries you? Have you 'grown up' in the way you go to Confession as you have grown up in other ways?

Today, we want to think about the sacrament of Confession so that you can use it to prepare well for your Confirmation. It has three names, each of which tells us something different about the sacrament.

The Sacrament of Penance

When you go to confession, you are given a penance to do. Often, this might be the task of saying a few short prayers. Whatever we do, we cannot 'make up' for our sins: Jesus has done that by his death on the cross. Our Penance is like a gift to us by which we can join in with him in all the good that he has brought to us. By our prayers and good works, we co-operate with him as he helps us to become the people he made us to be.

Sacramental Confession

Speaking our sins out loud means that we can be aware of just how much our Lord forgives us. We know that we are not worthy of his love and we remember how he is willing to take us back, heal us and give us strength.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

To be reconciled with someone means to be friends with them once again. Our Lord never breaks his friendship with us, he never turns us away. But by our sins, we ignore him, turn away from him and reject his love. In the sacrament of reconciliation, Jesus reaches out to us to restore our friendship with him. We have only to co-operate with him and to receive his grace.

God the Father... has sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins

Activity: Talking about Confession

We will ask you to get into groups so that it is easier for you to talk to each other about the sacrament of confession. If you go to confession, you can encourage others. If you have not been for a long time, this is an opportunity for you to make it a bit easier to go.

In your groups, ask the following questions and agree on one person to jot down your answers.

- ◆ Why should we go to Confession instead of just saying sorry to God on our own?
- ◆ What is the most difficult thing about going to Confession? How could you solve this problem?
- ◆ When you go to Confession now, how is it different from when you made your first Confession?
- ◆ Do you prefer to go 'face-to-face' or do you prefer to be anonymous? Why?
- ◆ What would most help you to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation better?



At Sunday Mass

Every Mass begins with an act of Penance. We often say the 'I confess...' together. We start by remembering that we do not deserve the wonderful gift of himself that Jesus brings to us in the Mass.

Next time you go to Mass, try to think beforehand just how much Jesus has forgiven you, how little you have really done to deserve his love that comes without any conditions.

Then again before Holy Communion, think carefully when the priest says 'This is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.' If you have been aware of our Lord's generous love for you, you can say from the heart the prayer which the centurion said

Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed

Scripture

In your bible, look up the story about the woman who was forgiven much and so showed great love for Jesus. (Luke 7.36-50)

Do you think that there is someone you might sneer at if they came to Jesus?

Imagine you are there at the scene. How would you feel when you heard Jesus speak so kindly to the woman?

How does this story help us to think about going to confession ourselves?

Follow up

- Read the leaflet on Confession slowly and carefully. Pray the prayers from your heart.
- In this way, try to prepare for your next confession as well as you can so that it really becomes a personal celebration of the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.