

---

---

# The Sacrament of Confession

---

---

## **Different Types of Sin?**

Maybe you've heard of mortal vs venial sin but aren't sure what the difference is. Maybe you've heard that Catholics don't believe they can just confess sins directly to God (not accurate) or that they believe they need to confess all or some sins to a priest (accurate.) Let's look at the different types of sin, and how the Catholic Church views each of them.

***"All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not deadly." –1 John 5:17***

### Venial Sin

Venial sin is what Saint John is referring to in the verse above. By definition, venial sins are lesser offenses of sin that injure, but do not destroy one's relationship with God. These can happen when someone acts against God without thinking, and are usually not intentional defiance of God's commandments. These smaller sins can be confessed directly to God in prayer, and are also forgiven in the penitential rite of Mass.

### Mortal Sin

Mortal sins are grave offenses that sever our friendship with God. These are the serious, intentional sins in our lives, and the Church teaches that it is these sins that require Sacramental Confession. Grace is a real thing and since mortal sin destroys grace in our souls, we need the Sacrament to restore that grace. So what makes a sin mortal? A mortal sin cannot be committed accidentally and must meet three conditions:

- \*The act committed must be "grave matter," which means it breaks one of the Ten Commandments.
- \*The sinner must be fully aware that the act they are about to commit is against God's law.
- \*The sinner fully and freely consents to the act.

Any sin that does not meet these three requirements is considered venial.

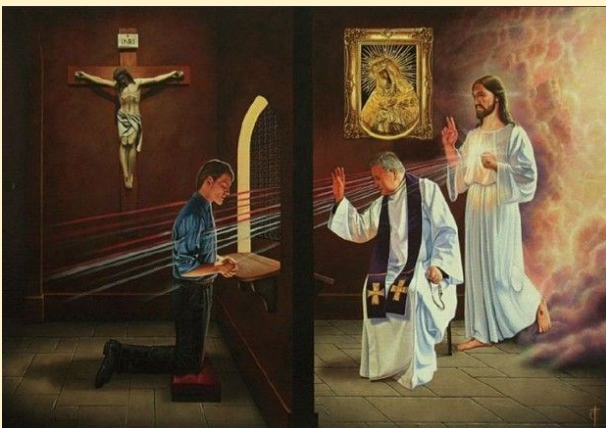
## What is the Sacrament of Confession?

The Sacrament of Penance, Reconciliation, or Confession, was instituted by Christ to forgive those sins committed after Baptism.

## Where is it in Scripture?

John 20:21-23 is a where Jesus directly instituted this Sacrament. It reads: "Jesus said to them again 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' And when He had said this He breathed on them, and said to them 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" Here we see Jesus giving His Apostles in a specific form, before Pentecost, and directing them that they are responsible for the forgiveness of sins. Logically, the only way they would know what sins to forgive is if they were first told the sins that needed to be forgiven.

This ministry was entrusted to the Apostles by Christ, and that power has been passed down through Apostolic Succession and the laying on of hands at ordination. Only a bishop or priest can administer this Sacrament.



## How can a human forgive sins?

As we see in the reading from John, Jesus endows the Apostles with His own Spirit. That is where the power to forgive sins comes from—from Christ Himself working through the priest. The image to the side shows how the power of confession works—the priest is an instrument for the mercy of the Lord.

## What if the priest tells my sins or thinks badly of me?!

The priest, by Church law, is forbidden to tell anyone what he hears in the confessional, ever. The Confessional is a sacred, holy, and confidential place for you to receive forgiveness and the mercy of God.

Also, your sins will not shock the priest or make him think less of you. Most all priests have "heard it all" and are concerned only with making sure that you receive the mercy and grace of God. If the thought of confessing makes you uncomfortable, most confessionals have an option for confessing anonymously, behind a screen.

## **Binding and Loosing**

The Sacrament of Confession also is one of the ways the Bishops and Priests fulfill the order of Jesus in Matthew 18:18: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Through Apostolic Succession the Church continues to interpret the Divine Law, and extend the mercy of Christ in the manner He commanded.



