

Thursdays: 7:00 - 8:00 PM

Saturdays: 3:00 - 3:45 PM

or see the priest after Mass.

[How to go to Confession/ Reconciliation](#)

[Prayer - Examination of Conscience](#)

[The Daily Examen, a Way To Grow](#)

### **THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**

*The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and our bodies. . . has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation.*

- CCC, no. 1421

Because of human weakness, the new life in Christ, which we receive in the Sacraments of

Initiation, is often threatened by sin. Moreover, we all face sickness and death. God constantly reaches out to us to reconcile ourselves to him. Through the gifts of the Church, Jesus, our divine physician, has given us the Sacraments of Healing-Penance and Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick-for the forgiveness of sins and the ministry to the sick and the dying.

Sins committed after Baptism are forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, also called the Sacrament of Forgiveness, Confession, and Conversion. We will refer to the Sacrament both as Penance and as Reconciliation, using the terms interchangeably.

Divine mercy and conversion from sin are constant themes in Scripture. God's mercy makes possible the repentance of the sinner and the forgiveness of sin. Time and again in the Old Testament, the sins of the people are met with God's outreach of mercy and the invitation to be healed and return to a covenant relationship. Even when the beloved King David lied, committed adultery, and caused the death of an innocent man, he was not beyond God's mercy, to which he had a humble recourse. Psalm 51 gives us words to express the kind of contrition and to trust in God's forgiveness that David felt after committing these sins.

### **JESUS FORGAVE SINS**

The Gospels provide numerous examples of Christ's mission to forgive sins. When a paralytic was lowered through the roof of a house and placed at his feet, Christ first forgave the man's sins and then cured his affliction (cf. Lk 5:17-26). When a sinful woman knelt at his feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus forgave her sins because she had "loved much," unlike the Pharisee, who had little insight into his own sinfulness (cf. Lk 7:36-50). Christ's parable of the prodigal son illustrates the sublime meaning of his earthly ministry, which is to forgive sins, reconcile people to God, and lead us to true happiness (cf. Lk 15:11-32).

Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the dead to reconcile sinful people with God through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of new life with the Triune God. Even on the Cross, he forgave those who were killing him and had mercy on the repentant thief.

Only God can forgive our sins. But Jesus willed that the Church should be his instrument of forgiveness on earth. On Easter night the Risen Christ imparted to his Apostles his own power to forgive sins. He breathed on them, imparting the promised Holy Spirit, and said, "Peace be with you." Jesus was actually filling them with peace that is rooted in friendship with God. But he did more. He shared with them his own merciful mission. He breathed on them a second time and said, *As the Father has sent me, so I send you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.* (Jn 20:21-23)

That night Jesus gave the Church the ministry of the forgiveness of sins through the Apostles (cf. CCC, no. 1461). By the Sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops and priests continue this ministry to forgive sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In this Sacrament, the priest acts in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church, to reconcile the sinner to both God and the Church. "When he celebrates the Sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. . . The priest is the sign and instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner" (CCC, no. 1465).

The Sacrament of Penance involves a conversion of our hearts to God, a confession of sins to a priest, the forgiveness of our sins, a penance to make some amends for sin, and reconciliation with God and the Church. For those who commit mortal sin after Baptism, this Sacrament is necessary for being reconciled to God and the Church.

### **CONVERSION, CONFESSION, FORGIVENESS**

The Sacrament of Penance must be seen within the context of conversion from sin and a turn to God. Peter wept bitterly over his triple denial of Christ but received the grace of conversion and expressed it with a threefold confession of love for Jesus (cf. Lk 22:54-62; Jn 21:15-19). Paul was converted from persecuting Christians to becoming one of the greatest disciples of Christ who ever lived (d. Acts 9:1-31). These moments of conversion were only the beginning of their lifelong commitment to living in fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sin harms our relationship with God and damages our communion with the Church. Conversion of heart is the beginning of our journey back to God. Liturgically this happens in the Sacrament of Penance. In the history of the Church, this Sacrament has been celebrated in different ways. Beneath the changes, there have always been two essentials: the acts of the penitent and the acts of Christ through the ministry of the Church. Both go hand in hand. Conversion must involve a change of heart as well as a change of actions. Neither is possible without God's grace.

### **THE LITURGY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE**

In the Liturgy of Penance, the elements are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, a reading from Scripture, the confession of sins, the giving and accepting of a penance, an act of contrition, the priest's absolution, a proclamation of praise of God, and a dismissal. We offer here a description of the acts of the penitent and that of the priest.

#### **Contrition**

In order to be forgiven, we need to have sorrow for our sins. This means turning away from evil and turning to God. It includes the determination to avoid such sins in the future. Such sins may either be mortal or venial.

Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. The distinction between mortal and venial sin, already evident in Scripture (cf. 1 Jn 5:16-17), became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience. (CCC, no. 1854)

Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it. (CCC, no. 1855)

Contrition that arises from the love of God above all else is called "perfect contrition." This loving sorrow remits venial sins and even mortal sins so long as we resolve to confess them as soon as possible. When other motives, such as the ugliness of sin or fear of damnation, bring us to confession, this is called "imperfect contrition," which is sufficient for forgiveness in the Sacrament. The Holy Spirit moves us in either case and initiates the conversion.

### **Confession**

Confession liberates us from sins that trouble our hearts and makes it possible to be reconciled to God and others. We are asked to look into our souls and, with an honest and unblinking gaze, identify our sins. This opens our minds and hearts to God, moves us toward communion with the Church, and offers us a new future.

In confession, by naming our sins before the priest, who represents Christ, we face our failings more honestly and accept responsibility for our sins. It is also in confession that a priest and penitent can work together to find the direction needed for the penitent to grow spiritually and to avoid sin in the future (d. CCC, nos. 1455, 1456).

When we have examined our consciences and have taken responsibility for our sins, we then confess them to the priest. We must confess all our mortal sins in kind and number. The Church strongly recommends confessing venial sins, though this is not strictly necessary. In the Latin Church, children must go to confession before making their First Communion.

There are three rites of Reconciliation: the rite for the Reconciliation of individual penitents; the rite for the Reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution; and the rite of Reconciliation of penitents with general confession and absolution.

In the first rite, which is the most familiar, the penitent goes to a reconciliation room or a traditional confessional and either confesses face to face with the priest or kneels behind a screen to confess the sins. In the second rite, which usually happens in Advent or Lent, there is a communal service during which the Scripture is read and a homily is given. This is followed by individual confession and individual absolution.

General confession and absolution is the third rite and is used only in extraordinary situations, danger of death, or an insufficient number of confessors so that "penitents would be deprived of sacramental grace or holy communion for a long period of time through no fault of their own" (cf. CIC, can. 961). General absolution involves one priest's giving absolution to a group of people, who do not make individual confessions to a priest. Those penitents guilty of serious or grave sin are expected to make an individual confession as soon as possible but certainly within a year of receiving general absolution. Judgment as to whether the conditions for general absolution are present is a matter not for the confessor, but for the diocesan bishop to determine under the guidance of norms established by the Holy See.

### **WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?**

It is called the Sacrament of Conversion because it makes" sacramentally present Jesus' call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin. It is called the Sacrament of Penance, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction. It is called the Sacrament of Confession since the disclosure or confession of sins is an essential element of this Sacrament. In a profound sense, it is also a "confession" acknowledgment and praise-of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man. It is called the Sacrament of Forgiveness, since by the priest's sacramental absolution, God grants the penitent "pardon and peace." It is called the Sacrament of Reconciliation because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go, first be reconciled to your brother." (CCC, nos. 1423-1424, citing Mt 5:24)

### **Absolution from the Priest**

After we confess our sins to the priest, we are given some encouragement from the priest for our moral and spiritual growth. The priest then gives us a penance and asks us to say an Act of Contrition. Then the priest grants absolution, that is, he sets us free from our sins, using the power that Christ entrusted to the Church and by which he pardons the sins of the penitent (cf. CCC, no. 1424). In the Latin Church, the priest, representing Christ and bringing us his forgiveness, absolves us from our sins with these words:

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.

### Satisfaction

"Absolution takes away sin, but does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused" (CCC, no. 1459). It is obvious that we need to repair certain damages that our sins have caused, such as restoring the reputation of someone we have injured, returning money that we have stolen, or rectifying an injustice. Sin also weakens the relationship we have with God and others. Our inner life is harmed by sin and needs restoration.

This is the reason for acts of penance and satisfaction for sins. The penance given by the priest helps us to begin making satisfaction for our sins. Just as when we get physically out of shape, we need to take up some exercise, so also when the soul is morally out of shape, there is the challenge to adopt spiritual exercises that will restore it. Obviously, this is always done in cooperation with God's graces, which are essential for the healing.

Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders that sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is called "penance." (CCC, no. 1459)

### EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT

The Sacrament of Penance reconciles us with God. "The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship" (CCC, no. 1468).

This Sacrament also reconciles us with the Church. Sin should never be understood as a private or personal matter, because it harms our relationship with others and may even break our loving communion with the Church. The Sacrament of Penance repairs this break and has a renewing effect on the vitality of the Church itself.

In this Sacrament, the penitent receives the merciful judgment of God and is engaged on the journey of conversion that leads to future life with God. The Church also recommends that a person go regularly to confession, even if only for venial sins. This is because "the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our consciences, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit" (CCC, no. 1458).

### RECOGNIZE SIN-PRAISE GOD'S MERCY

The Sacrament of Penance is an experience of the gift of God's boundless mercy. Not only does it free us from our sins but it also challenges us to have the same kind of compassion and

forgiveness for those who sin against us. We are liberated to be forgivers. We obtain new insight into the words of the Prayer of St. Francis: "It is in pardoning that we are pardoned."

By the help of God's grace, our call to holiness will be clearer when we recover an awareness of the reality of sin and evil in the world and in our own souls. Scripture will be enormously helpful in this since it reveals sin and evil clearly and fearlessly. Scriptural realism does not hesitate to pronounce judgment on the good and evil that affects our lives. The New Testament is filled with calls to conversion and repentance, which need to be heard in our culture today.

If we say, "We are without sin," we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong doing. (1 Jn 1:8-9)

In our churches, we behold Jesus nailed to the Cross, an image that reminds us of his painful sacrifice to bring about the forgiveness of all our sins and guilt. If there were no sin, Jesus would not have suffered for our redemption. Each time we see the crucifix, we can reflect on the infinite mercy of God, who saves us through the reconciling act of Jesus.

Despite society's efforts to downplay the reality of sin, there is an instinctive recognition of its existence. Children generally know, even when not told, when they have done something morally wrong. Adults readily admit the evil of terrorism, unjust war, lies, unfair treatment of people, and similar matters. Society as a whole must also learn to admit the evil of abortion, physician-assisted suicide, and obtaining stem cells from embryos, which results in the death of embryonic human life. Denying evil corrupts us spiritually and psychologically. Rationalizing our own evil is even more destructive.

Jesus laid the foundation for the Sacrament of Penance during his ministry and confirmed it after his Resurrection. When Peter asked the number of times a person should forgive, Jesus told him that there should be no limit to forgiving. Jesus forgave Peter his triple denial, showed mercy to the woman taken in adultery, forgave the thief on the cross, and continually witnessed the mercy of God.

Jesus entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Church. The Sacrament of Penance is God's gift to us so that any sin committed after Baptism can be forgiven. In confession we have the opportunity to repent and recover the grace of friendship with God. It is a holy moment in which we place ourselves in his presence and honestly acknowledge our sins, especially mortal sins. With absolution, we are reconciled to God and the Church. The Sacrament helps us stay

close to the truth that we cannot live without God. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). While all the Sacraments bring us an experience of the mercy that comes from Christ's dying and rising, it is the Sacrament of Reconciliation that is the unique Sacrament of mercy.

### INDULGENCES

Every sin has consequences. It disrupts our communion with God and the Church, weakens our ability to resist temptation, and hurts others. The necessity of healing these consequences, once the sin itself has been forgiven, is called temporal punishment. Prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and other works of charity can take away entirely or diminish this temporal punishment. Because of the fullness of redemption obtained for us by Christ, the Church attaches to certain prayers and actions an *indulgence* or pardon, that is, the full or partial remission of temporal punishment due to sin. Christ, acting through the Church, brings about the healing of the consequences of sin when an individual uses such a prayer or engages in such an action.

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

- On Easter night Jesus appeared to the Apostles, greeted them with peace, and breathed on them, saying, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:22-23).
- "The Creed links 'the forgiveness of sins' with its profession of faith in the Holy Spirit, for the risen Christ entrusted to the apostles the power to forgive sins when he gave them the Holy Spirit" (CCC, no. 984).
- Sins committed before Baptism are forgiven by Baptism. Sins committed after Baptism are forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, also called the Sacrament of Forgiveness, Confession, and Conversion.
- Sin wounds our relationship with God and others and our human dignity. Faith reveals to us the destructive force of sin in our lives and the world.
- The path back to God after sin is a process of conversion initiated by his grace. The return to God includes sorrow for sin and the resolve to sin no more.
- In the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the acts of the penitent are contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The act of the priest is absolution for the sins of the penitent.
- Perfect contrition arises from love for God; imperfect contrition results from other motives.
- The penitent, after an examination of conscience, needs to confess all mortal sins. While it is not necessary to confess venial sins, the Church strongly recommends this practice.
- The priest proposes a penance to the penitent to repair the harm due to sin and to restore the penitent's commitment to be a disciple of Christ.
- Individual confession of grave sins according to kind and number is the only ordinary way of receiving absolution and reconciliation with God and the Church.
- The effects of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation include reconciliation with God and the Church, peace of conscience and spiritual consolation, the remission of eternal punishment due to mortal sin as well as some degree of temporal punishments, and a greater power to face spiritual challenges (cf. CCC, no. 1496).
- "Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin, for themselves and also for the souls in Purgatory" (CCC, no. 1498).