

A Guide to Confession



As a lay person I believe the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the most powerful of all the Sacraments in the Catholic Church. It is also the one that is often overlooked in our modern society as we move more and more towards secularism. Why do we need to go and confess when we can go see a doctor or psychologist? The simple answer is that the sacrament is a gift to us directly from God who he knows us and knows we need it because:

- 1. We all sin**
- 2. We have a need to apologise**
- 3. We need to tell others what we have done**
- 4. We need to know we are forgiven (after all how can we forgive others if we ourselves are not forgiven from our sins.)**

It is often said that it is difficult these days to go to confession when we live in parishes where there are few priests and they know us so well. However when the priest is in the confessional he is in persona Christi (the person of Christ). This means that whether he is our friend or not, while he is celebrating this sacrament everything he hears is completely confidential and forgotten once he has absolved our sins.

The grace we receive from the sacrament can be a very poignant experience. This is often seen in places of pilgrimage when many conversions take place in people who have not received the sacrament for many years. The light-hearted feeling of joy and peace is reflected in the glow on their faces and the warmth of their smiles.

If it is a while since you have received this sacrament, talk to a priest. You will never know what you have missed if you do not go. Become fully alive in the faith of the Church!

(Below is a guide to Confession)

A Guide for Confession

The basic requirement for a good confession is to have the intention of returning to God like the "prodigal son" and to acknowledge our sins with true sorrow before the priest.

Sin in my Life

Modern society has lost a sense of sin. As a Catholic follower of Christ, I must make an effort to recognize sin in my daily actions, words and omissions. The Gospels show how important is the forgiveness of our sins. Lives of saints prove that the person who grows in holiness has a stronger sense of sin, sorrow for sins, and a need for the Sacrament of Penance or Confession.

The Differences in Sins

As a result of Original Sin, human nature is weakened. Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, takes away Original Sin, and turns us back toward God. The consequences of this weakness and the inclination to evil persist, and we often commit personal or actual sin.

Actual sin is sin which people commit. There are two kinds of actual sin, mortal and venial.

Mortal sin is a deadly offense against God, so horrible that it destroys the life of grace in the soul. Three simultaneous conditions must be fulfilled for a mortal sin: 1) the act must be something very serious; 2) the person must have sufficient understanding of what is being done; 3) the person must have sufficient freedom of the will.

Remember

If you need help—especially if you have been away for some time—simply ask the priest and he will help you by "walking" you through the steps to make a good confession.

Before Confession

Be truly sorry for your sins. The essential act of Penance, on the part of the penitent, is contrition, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit it again, out of the love one has for God and which is reborn with repentance. The resolution to avoid committing these sins in the future (amendment) is a sure sign that your sorrow is genuine and authentic. This does not mean that a promise never to fall again into sin is necessary. A resolution to try to avoid the near occasions of sin suffices for true repentance. God's grace in cooperation with the intention to rectify your life will give you the strength to resist and overcome temptation in the future.

Examination of Conscience

Before going to Confession you should make a review of mortal and venial sins since your last sacramental confession, and should express sorrow for sins,

hatred for sins and a firm resolution not to sin again.

A helpful pattern for examination of conscience is to review the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church:

- Have God and the pursuit of sanctity in Christ been the goal of my life? Have I denied my faith? Have I placed my trust in false teachings or substitutes for God? Did I despair of God's mercy?
- Have I avoided the profane use of God's name in my speech? Have I broken a solemn vow or promise?
- Have I honored every Sunday by avoiding unnecessary work, celebrating the Mass (also holydays)? Was I inattentive at, or unnecessarily late for Mass, or did I leave early? Have I neglected prayer for a long time?
- Have I shown Christ-like respect to parents, spouse, and family members, legitimate authorities? Have I been attentive to the religious education and formation of my children?
- Have I cared for the bodily health and safety of myself and all others? Did I abuse drugs or alcohol? Have I supported in any way abortion, "mercy killing," or suicide?
- Was I impatient, angry, envious, proud, jealous, revengeful, lazy? Have I forgiven others?
- Have I been just in my responsibilities to employer and employees? Have I discriminated against others because of race or other reasons?
- Have I been chaste in thought and word? Have I used sex only within marriage and while open to procreating life? Have I given myself sexual gratification? Did I deliberately look at impure TV, pictures, reading?
- Have I stolen anything from another, from my employer, from government? If so, am I ready to repay it? Did I fulfill my contracts? Did I rashly gamble, depriving my family of necessities?
- Have I spoken ill of any other person? Have I always told the truth? Have I kept secrets and confidences?
- Have I permitted sexual thoughts about someone to whom I am not married?
- Have I desired what belongs to other people? Have I wished ill on another?
- Have I been faithful to sacramental living (Holy Communion and Penance)?
- Have I helped make my parish community stronger and holier? Have I contributed to the support of the Church?
- Have I done penance by abstaining and fasting on obligatory days? Have I fasted before receiving communion?
- Have I been mindful of the poor? Do I accept God's will for me?

During Confession

After examining your conscience and telling God of your sorrow, go into the confessional. You may kneel at the screen or sit to talk face-to-face with the priest.

Begin your confession with the sign of the cross, "**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. My last confession was _____ weeks (months, years) ago.**"

The priest may read a passage from Holy Scripture.

Say the sins that you remember. Start with the one(s) that is most difficult to say. (In order to make a good confession the faithful must confess all mortal sins, according to kind and number.) After confessing all the sins you remember since your last good confession, you may conclude by saying, "I am

sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."

Listen to the words of the priest. He will assign you some penance. Doing the penance will diminish the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven. When invited, express some prayer of sorrow or Act of Contrition such as:

An Act of Contrition

O my 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 I have offended 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, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.

At the End of Confession

Listen to the words of absolution, the sacramental forgiveness of the Church through the ordained priest.

As you listen to the words of forgiveness you may make the sign of the cross with the priest. If he closes by saying, "**Give thanks to the Lord for He is good,**" answer, "**For His mercy endures forever.**"

After Confession

- Give thanks to God for forgiving you again. If you recall some serious sin you forgot to tell, rest assured that it has been forgiven with the others, but be sure to confess it in your next Confession.
- Do your assigned Penance.
- Resolve to return to the Sacrament of Reconciliation often. We Catholics are fortunate to have the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is the ordinary way for us to have our sins forgiven. This sacrament is a powerful help to get rid of our weaknesses, grow in holiness, and lead a balanced and virtuous life.

<http://www.catholic.org/prayers/confession.php>

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