

Why Should I Go To Confession?

Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people and God. The sacrament of reconciliation (also called penance or confession) was given to us by Christ to help us reconcile with Christ and his Church when we have committed harm. Through the sacrament, we acknowledge our sins, express our sorrow in a meaningful way, receive the forgiveness of Christ and his Church, make reparation for what we have done and resolve to do better in the future.

During his public life, Jesus both forgave sins and reintegrated the sinners into the community. This is the goal of the sacrament of confession: to forgive sins and to provide reconciliation with the Church.

The rite for the sacrament of reconciliation involves four parts: contrition, confession, penance and absolution.

The Parts of Confession

Contrition: a sincere sorrow for having offended God and the most important act of the penitent. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.

Confession: confronting our sins in a profound way to God by speaking about them — aloud — to the priest.

Penance: an important part of our healing is the “penance” the priest imposes in reparation for our sins.

Absolution: the priest speaks the words by which “God, the Father of Mercies” reconciles a sinner to Himself through the merits of the cross.

Lighten Your Heart, Cleanse Your Soul

If you haven't been to confession in a while, Lent during the Year of Faith is the perfect time to come back to the sacrament of reconciliation. Here is a guide to help you prepare.

Guide to Confession

The sacrament of penance, or confession, brings about a change of heart through God's mercy and forgiveness. Experience the Lord's compassion through the sacrament of penance, which is made up of the following parts:

Before Confession

How to Make a Good Confession

Confession is not difficult, but it does require preparation. We should begin with prayer, placing ourselves in the presence of God, our loving Father. We seek healing and forgiveness through repentance and a resolve to sin no more. Then we review our lives since our last confession, searching our thoughts, words and actions for that which did not conform to God's command to love Him and one another through His laws and the laws of His Church. This is called an examination of conscience.

To make an examination of conscience:

- Begin with a prayer asking for God's help.
- Review your life with the help of some questions, which are based on the 10 Commandments (see below).
- Tell God how truly sorry you are for your sins.
- Make a firm resolution not to sin again.

Examination of Conscience

Recall your sins. Prayerfully ask yourself what you have done with full knowledge and full consent against God's and the Church's commandments.

- Do I pray to God every

day? Have I thanked God for His gifts to me?

■ Did I put my faith in danger through readings contrary to Catholic teachings or involvement in non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious practices: palm-reading or fortune-telling?

■ Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I curse or take a false oath?

■ Did I miss Mass

on Sundays or holy days of obligation through my own fault? Am I attentive at Mass? Did I keep fast and abstinence on the prescribed days?

■ Did I disobey my parents and lawful superiors in important matters?

■ Did I hate or quarrel with anyone, or desire revenge? Did I refuse to forgive? Was I disrespectful?

■ Did I get drunk? Did I take illicit drugs?

■ Did I willfully look at pornography, entertain impure thoughts or engage in impure conversations or actions? Did I use artificial means to prevent conception?

■ Was I unfaithful to my spouse? Did I engage in sexual activity outside of marriage?

■ Did I steal or damage another's property? Have I been honest and just in my business relations?

■ Have I been responsive to the needs of the poor and respected the dignity of others?

■ Did I tell lies? Did I sin by calumny, or detraction, of others? Did I judge others rashly in serious matters?

■ Have I envied other people?

During Confession

Rite of Reconciliation

Reconciliation may be face-to-face or anonymous, with a screen between you and the priest. Choose the option that is the most comfortable for you.

■ The priest gives you a blessing or greeting. He may share a brief Scripture passage.

■ Make the Sign of the Cross and say: “Bless me father, for I have sinned. My last confession was ...” (give the number of weeks, months or years).

■ Confess all of your sins to the priest. The priest will help you to make a good confession. If you are unsure about how to confess or you feel uneasy, just ask him to help you. Answer his questions without hiding anything out of fear or shame. Place your trust in God, a merciful Father who wants to forgive you.

■ Following your confession of sins, say: “I am sorry for these and all of my sins.”

■ The priest assigns you a penance and offers advice to help you be a better Catholic.

■ Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

Act of Contrition

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 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 confess my sins, do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

After Confession

Rejoice! You have received the forgiveness of Christ! What should you do when you leave? Remember the words you recited in the Act of Contrition: “I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.”



(Observer Illustration by Sharon Boehlefeld/CNS photo by Bob Roller)