

What is Reconciliation? What is Confession? What is Penance?

Reconciliation, Confession or Penance is a sacrament instituted by Jesus in His love and mercy to offer sinners forgiveness for offenses committed against God. At the same time sinners reconcile with the Church because it is also wounded by our sins.

Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people and God. In Reconciliation, we acknowledge our sins before God and His Church. We 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.

The forgiveness of sins involves four parts:

- **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.



Act of Contrition for Children

**O my God,
I am sorry for my sins.
In choosing to sin
And failing to do good,
I have sinned against you.
I promise, with the help of your Son, Jesus,
To make up for my sins
And to love you and others as I should.
Amen.**



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DAY of CONFESSIONS

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How to Make a Good Confession

Confession is not difficult, but 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, below, which are based on the 10 Commandments.
- Tell God how truly sorry you are for your sins.
- Make a firm resolution not to sin again.

How to Make an Examination of Conscience

Consider the following in preparing for your confession. There may be other things that weigh on your heart that are not part of these questions. Freely offer these to God, confident in God's tender mercy.

- Do I make my relationship with God my first priority? Do I take time for prayer and reflection? Do I celebrate the sacraments well prepared and regularly?
- Do I assist in the Church's mission? Do I give freely of my time, my resources and my prayer? Do people come to know God through my words and actions?
- Do I use the name of God to curse others? Does my language build others up or tear them down? Does my vocabulary give scandal to others?
- Do I take time to nourish the relationships in my life? Do I tend to the needs of my parents, my spouse, my children and my friends?
- Do I allow the Gospel to influence how I engage the community? Do I allow the Good News to affect my business practices and my engagement in politics?
- Do I seek to live with integrity and justice?
- Do I appreciate my sexuality as a gift and treat myself and others with dignity and respect? Do I engage in behaviours which belittle others?
- Do I work to promote the dignity of life from conception to natural death?
- Do I seek to create an environment where life can flourish? Do I choose to live simply so that I am able to share God's bounty with others?
- Do I live in a way which is moderate and balanced through what I eat and drink? Do I tend to the needs of my body with proper exercise and good living?
- Do I engage in gossip or in other conversations which harm the reputation of others? Do I belittle others to make myself feel bigger or to get ahead?
- Do I hold on to grudges or resentments? Do I extend forgiveness to others as I seek forgiveness from God?

Step by step: the 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.

STEP 1

The priest gives you a blessing or greeting.

He may share a brief Scripture passage.

STEP 2

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).

STEP 3

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.

STEP 4

Following your confession of sins, say:

"I am sorry for these and all of my sins."

STEP 5

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

STEP 6

Say an Act of Contrition:

"My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen."

The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.