

Faith in 5 – Adults Sacrament of Reconciliation



1. One of the most beautiful sacraments instituted by Christ is the **Sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as Penance or Confession)**. We are reconciled with God through the forgiveness of sins committed because of His love and mercy. We are healed and made whole, because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. "He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world" (1 John 2:2).
2. Church law requires us to confess serious sins at least once a year. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 2042): "...You shall confess your sins at least once a year," ensures preparation for the Eucharist by the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation, which continues Baptism's work of conversion and forgiveness". In order to receive the Eucharist worthily (1 Corinthians 11:27), we are to be free from mortal sin. "Anyone who desires to receive Christ in Eucharistic communion must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance" (CCC 1415).

A good practice is to go to confession as often as once a month. One priest suggested if that were not feasible, to go to confession every time the car needs washing or the refrigerator needs cleaning. The practice of regular confession helps us recognize the depth of God's mercy for us and allows us to show the same mercy to others. It is said Pope St. John Paul II went to daily confession not only because he loved the sacrament so much, but that he knew its importance in his life and ministry.

3. A sincere, personal preparation is essential to the valid reception of the sacrament. The quality of a good confession involves an examination of conscience and a willingness to want to change. A thoughtful review of our sins should lead us to humility, sorrow and repentance.

Prayer is necessary for a repentant heart. Spending time in Adoration is both comforting and healing. Ask the Lord to reveal the root cause of your sins. Seek understanding behind the motivation and desire to sin and make the firm amendment to not sin again. This spiritual regimen is essential for the pursuit of holiness.

4. Using the [Ten Commandments as a guide](#) for the examination of conscience is one way to complete a personal review of sin. The idea of using this type of guide is not to go into confession feeling unworthy, but to be able to articulate to the priest where we have fallen short in our relationship with God and others.
5. Many people, especially those who have not been to confession in years are intimidated or embarrassed to seek the sacrament. Priests are bound by canon law to keep the 'seal of the confessional,' where they are forbidden to share details of a confession in all

circumstances. There is not a sin spoken they have not already heard. Most importantly, God wants to forgive us - He is happy when we repent. He alone forgives us of our sins. God works through the priest *in persona Christi* to bring you the grace.

6. Definitions:

a. **Absolution:** the remission of sin granted by the Church. It is an act where the priest in the person of Christ, releases man from his sin.

General absolution is possible only in emergent situations, where there are a number of people not able to go to individual confession. There must be repentance, but also at the first opportunity, an obligation for the penitent to go to individual confession to confess mortal sins. The priest must also inform the bishop that this was done. A communal penance service, while convenient, does NOT qualify for general absolution because it is not a grave situation. ([Code of Canon Law, 961, §1](#)).

b. **Act of Contrition:** a prayer expressing true sorrow for sins confessed. The penitent may use his own words or a [more formal prayer](#). The prayer should be sincere and heartfelt.

The standard one in the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

c. **Anonymous Confession:** the penitent is physically present before the priest, but the confession is not done face-to-face. A wall, screen or curtain divides them. In 1974, the new Rite of Penance was introduced: individual confessions may be done face-to-face with an option provided for an anonymity screen.

d. **Communal Penance Service:** a gathering of priests in a local area, at one church to hear individual confessions. This does not include communal confession of sins or absolution. Commonly seen during the Lenten and Advent seasons.

e. **Confessional:** [in a church] a room, an enclosed booth or stall divided by a wall, screen, or curtain where a priest sits to hear the confession of a penitent privately.

f. **Contrition:** According to CCC 1451, contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."

g. **Mortal sin:** an act which is grave or serious; heinous in God's eyes. The sinner has full knowledge of the sinful character of the act and how it violates God's eternal law. The sinner gives full consent of the will, having reflected on the act but deliberately wants to do it. Mortal sin destroys our union with God and the sanctifying grace in our souls.

h. **Venial sin:** an act of a less serious nature, which is grave but without full knowledge or complete consent. This sin wounds our relationship with God. If not corrected, may become a mortal sin.

i. **Penance:** at the end of confession, this is the act or actions given to the penitent in reparation of sins committed and to prove that the sorrow was sincere. Examples may be recitation of a prayer(s), an offering, works of mercy, service, or sacrifice. The priest considers an appropriate penance, based on the personal situation and what would encourage spiritual good.

7. **Confession, step - by - step:**



If you do not know what to do or say, please tell the priest. Priests are trained and happy to help you reconcile with God!

- a. Make the Sign of the Cross
- b. Say, "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how many weeks, months, years) since my last confession"
- c. Confess your sins (and not those of others!). Include both mortal and venial sins.
- d. Say, "I am truly sorry for all of my sins"
- e. The priest may give advice or counsel; the priest will assign a penance to you.
- f. Pray the Act of Contrition.
- g. Receive absolution from God through the priest.
- h. Make the Sign of the Cross at the end of the prayer.
- i. Leave, to complete your assigned penance. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His mercy.

8. **Why must I confess my sins to a priest if God will forgive me anyway?** Jesus gave authority to his disciples to exercise forgiveness in His Name (John 20:21-23): "As the Father has sent me, so I send you. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." Yes, only God can forgive sins, but as Catholics, we believe that God, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, bestowed His authority to priests to forgive sins in His name. There is a relief confessing sins and having the weight lifted off when hearing the prayer of absolution. The sacrament of reconciliation is healing and life-giving.

9. If there is a serious situation where you are not able to go to a priest for confession, or cannot find a priest, [Pope Francis states](#), "...[you] can go to God directly, be specific about ... sins, request pardon and experience God's loving forgiveness". Once the act of contrition is made, there should be a resolve to go to confession as soon as one is able. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, 1452): "When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible".

10. See [A Catholic Mom's Life Guide to Confession](#), including helpful YouTube links!

The sweetest words a Catholic receives after confession:

"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. Amen."

This is a free resource! For more information, visit www.acatholicmomslife.com