



## **Sacrament of Reconciliation**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a celebration of the merciful love of God. Through the gift of this sacrament, we are brought back together with the Father (reconciled) through the saving action of Jesus Christ, His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This gift, given to the Church by Jesus himself on the evening of the Resurrection (see John 20:21-23), brings the sinner into the embrace of the Father, Who seeks us out and forgives. No one is beyond that embrace; no one is too far gone. Now, we who approach this sacrament with faith in God's love and mercy and an honest awareness of our sins, with a sincere heart to try and live better, experience the depth of God's love.

### **Reconciliation and the Seal of Confession**

The Seal of Confession or the Seal of the Confessional is the absolute confidentiality for Roman Catholic Priests of anything that they learn from penitents during the course of confession. This aspect of confession should encourage young people to open up and share their true selves in order to experience the power of forgiveness through the Sacrament.

### **Biblical Reference of the Sacrament**

The Gospel of John gives the biblical context for the sacrament of Reconciliation. In John 20:19-23, Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection. They had been distraught and miserable as their leader, friend, and companion had been killed on the cross. While they had been told by Jesus himself that he would resurrect, the disciples were challenged by what this all meant. The disciples were also terrified by the fear of their own persecution! So, "on the evening of the first day of the week," when they were locked up in fear, the resurrected Jesus appeared to them. (Jn 20:20) Jesus encouraged them to go forth and spread the good news of his resurrection. He said to them, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (Jn 20:21) Jesus not only gave the disciples clear direction for their ministry, but he equipped them for it by breathing in them the Holy Spirit, who would be their guidance and strength on their journey as Disciples of Christ. In this passage, the disciples, who resemble the predecessors of our priests, are also given the special ability to forgive sins, which we now refer to as the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Other Scriptural Readings on the Sacrament include: Genesis 3:1-23, Matthew 18:21, and Luke 7:48-50

### **Quotes from the Catechism on Reconciliation**

"Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer labors for their conversion." (CCC, 1422)

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. (1423)



Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart). (1431)

The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works). (1438)

The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father: The fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy - all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. the beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life - pure worthy, and joyful - of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart of Christ Who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way. (1439)

The formula of absolution used in the Latin Church expresses the essential elements of this sacrament: the Father of mercies is the source of all forgiveness. He effects the reconciliation of sinners through the Passover of his Son and the gift of his Spirit, through the prayer and ministry of the Church:

God, the Father of mercies,  
through the death and the 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. (1449)

Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name. (1441)

In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, anticipates in a certain way the judgment to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin. In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and "does not come into judgment." (1470)



## Reconciliation Glossary and Activity

The following terminology can be used as part of an activity with young people. Write the words on a newsprint or a chalkboard. Invite the students to define the terms. See how many they can guess.

**CONTRITION:** The sorrow for and hatred of committed sins, coupled with the firm purpose to sin no more. Contrition is necessary to make a good Confession and for the priest, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to forgive a person for their sins in the Sacrament of Penance.

**PENANCE:** In general, an attitude of the heart in which one experiences regret for past sin and commits to a change in behavior or attitudes; particular acts of penance may include the practice of spiritual disciplines such as prayer or fasting, or participation in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

**ABSOLUTION:** An essential part of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which the priest, through the power of the Holy Spirit, pardons the sins of the person in confession, in the name of God and of the Church.

**MORTAL SIN:** An action so contrary to the will of God that it results in a complete separation from God and God's grace. As a consequence of that separation, the person is condemned to eternal death. This type of sin requires three conditions: it must involve grave matter, the person must have full knowledge of the evil of the act, and the person must give his or her full consent in committing the act.

**VENIAL SIN:** A less serious offence against the will of God that diminishes one's personal character and weakens but does not rupture one's relationship with God.

**SIN OF OMISSION:** Failure to do something good or neglecting one's conscience to do something good such as helping someone when one knows he/she could have done so, failure to attend mass when it was possible to do so.

**RECONCILIATION/CONFESSION:** One of the seven sacraments of the Church where a person receives forgiveness of sins and is reconciled through both God and the Church.

**CONVERSION:** A profound change of heart, turning away from sin and toward God.

**CONSCIENCE:** The "interior voice" of a person, a God-given internal sense of what is morally wrong or right. It leads people to understand themselves as responsible for their actions, and prompts them to do good and avoid evil.

**EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE:** Prayerful reflection on and assessment of one's own words, attitudes, and actions in light of the Gospel of Jesus; more specifically, the conscious evaluation of one's life in preparation for reception of the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

**SEAL OF CONFESSION:** The priest's obligation to keep absolutely secret what a penitent has told him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; also known as the sacrament seal.



## Step by Step Guide for Reconciliation

### Preparation

Before going to confession, take time to compare your life with the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the example of Christ and then pray to God for forgiveness.

### Going to Confession

After the priest welcomes you, both of you make the sign of the cross. Then you may wish to indicate facts about your life, the time of your last confession, difficulties in leading the Christian life, and anything else that may help you feel at ease.

### Confession of Sins and Act of Penance

Confess your sins. The priest then offers suitable advice and gives acts of penance or satisfaction, which may include prayer, self-denial, or works of mercy.

### Prayer of the Penitent

Pray a prayer expressing sorrow for your sins and resolving not to sin again. Two suggested prayers are given here:

*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. (Rite of Penance, no. 45)*

*Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Lamb of God; you take away the sins of the world. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit restore me to friendship with your Father, cleanse me from every stain of sin in the blood you shed for me, and raise me to new life for the glory of your name. (Rite of Penance, no. 91)*

### Absolution

The priest extends his hands over your head and pronounces the formula of absolution, making the sign of the cross over your head during the final words. You answer, 'Amen.'

### Dismissal

The priest dismisses you with the command to go in peace. Continue to express your conversion through a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God.



## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

It's not easy to walk into a confessional. Harder yet is being honest with yourself enough to walk in prepared to talk about what he's done wrong and how he can make amends.

To thoroughly examine your consciences, here are the 10 Commandments with corresponding questions helpful in preparing for the sacrament of reconciliation.

### 1. First Commandment

- *Do you worship the false gods of status, consumerism or peer approval?*
- *Do you ignore or avoid old friends in order to be part of the popular crowd? Do you make unreasonable demands on your parents for clothes or money?*
- *Do you give support to your peers when they tell racial or ethnic jokes? Do you show indifference toward the poor and think of them as losers by social standards?*

### 2. Second Commandment

- *Do you use language that you would never speak in front of your grandmother?*
- *Is your language a reflection of a low opinion of others and insults?*

### 3. Third Commandment

- *Do you skip mass because few of your friends go to church or because you feel that the gift of God's presence should be as entertaining as MTV?*

### 4. Fourth Commandment

- *Do you thank your parents for what they do for you?*
- *Do you offer to help around the house?*
- *Do you value your family members as much as you do your friends?*

### 5. Fifth Commandment

- *Do you value your life and that of others?*
- *Do you drink and drive or travel with those who do?*
- *Do you experiment with drugs and show no regard to their effect on your grades, your self-respect or your relationships?*
- *Have you ever hit your girlfriend or boyfriend?*

### 6. Sixth Commandment

- *Do you use other people for your own selfish pleasure?*
- *Do you lie to get others to act against their values?*
- *Do you see sex as a way to be popular or to rebel against your parents?*

### 7. Seventh Commandment

- *Do you cheat on tests or homework?*
- *Do you ever shoplift or take things that don't belong to you?*

### 8. Eighth Commandment

- *Do you gossip or pass on rumors that hurt other people?*
- *Can you be trusted to keep a confidence?*
- *Do you lie to protect your own ego, even if someone will be hurt?*

### 9. Ninth Commandment

- *Are you envious of others? Do you resent their popularity or success?*
- *Do you feel you have to put others down in order to feel better about yourself?*

### 10. Tenth Commandment

- *Do you resent your parents when they tell you they cannot afford to buy the things that you feel you need to keep up with your friends?*
- *Do you ever ask your parents what their financial worries are?*