

How to Make a Good Confession



What Is Confession?

Confession is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ 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 also is wounded by our sins. We know this sacrament by various names: the Sacrament of Penance, Confession, or Reconciliation.

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

— *Matthew 16:19*

This is good news for all of us, because we all are sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness. In the Sacrament of Penance, we meet Christ in the person of the priest, ready and eager to absolve us and restore us to new life. We confess our sins to God through His minister, the priest, who absolves us in the name of Christ.

Why should we confess? The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a sacrament of healing and a sacrament of conversion, returning us to the Father after our sin. We are to confess serious sins at least once a year; those aware of committing a mortal sin must receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation before receiving Holy Communion.

The Church also encourages us to go to confession more frequently, if possible, in order that we might deepen our relationship with God and grow in humility and virtue. Through the sacrament we also receive the grace to help us avoid future sin. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1458).





Making a Good Confession

Three acts are required from the penitent for forgiveness through the sacrament. These are contrition, confession, and satisfaction.

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

Confession requires confronting our sins in a profound way before God by acknowledging them aloud to a priest.

Satisfaction is the “penance” the priest imposes on the penitent to make amends for sin, an important part of our healing.

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 out thoughts, words, and actions that did not conform to God’s love, to His law, or to the laws of the Church. This review is called an “examination of conscience.”

To make an examination of conscience, we should:

- Begin with a prayer asking for God’s help.
- Review our lives with the help of some guiding questions (see reverse).
- Tell God we are truly sorry for our sins.
- Make a firm resolution to avoid sin.

“Of how much greater faith and salutary fear are they who confess their sins to the priest in a straight-forward manner and in sorrow, making an open declaration of conscience.”

— *St. Cyprian*

Steps in the Rite of Reconciliation

The penitent can go to confession privately behind a screen or face-to-face with the priest.

1. Begin by making the Sign of the Cross and greeting the priest: “Bless me father, for I have sinned.”

2. Then continue: “My last confession was . . .” (weeks, months, or years).


3. Confess your sins to the priest. He will help you make a good confession. If you are unsure of how to confess or you feel uneasy, 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.

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

5. The priest will assign you a penance and offer advice to help you be a better Catholic. The penance imposed will take into account your personal situation and support your spiritual good. It may be a prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service, or sacrifice; but it joins us in some way to Christ and to the cross.

6. Say an Act of Contrition, expressing sorrow for your sins.





7. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then will absolve you from your sins by saying the Prayer of Absolution, to which you make the Sign of the Cross and respond, “Amen.”

8. The priest will offer some proclamation of praise, such as “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,” to which you respond, “His mercy endures forever.”

9. The priest then will dismiss you. Because sin often harms others, you must make satisfaction for your sins by completing your assigned penance.

The humility required in confessing and completing penance helps us to submit again to God’s will and follow Him more closely. Confession is a blessing, offering peace, a clear mind, and a hopeful heart.

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

Examination of Conscience

Recall your sins. Calmly and honestly ask yourself what you have done with full knowledge and full consent against God 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 reading material that is hostile to Catholic teachings? Have I been involved in non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious practices, such as 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 fast and abstain on the prescribed days?
- ❖ Did I disobey my parents or 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 consent to, recommend, advise, or actively take part in an abortion?
- ❖ Did I willfully look at indecent pictures, watch immoral movies, or read immoral books or magazines? Did I engage in impure jokes or conversations? Did I

"The sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true "spiritual resurrection," restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God."

— *Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1468*

willfully entertain impure thoughts or commit impure acts, alone or with others? Did I use artificial means to prevent conception?

- ❖ Did I steal or damage another's property? Have I been honest in my business relations?
- ❖ Did I tell lies? Did I sin by gossiping about others? Did I judge others rashly in serious matters?
- ❖ Have I envied other people?



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Where to Go for More Information

Aquilina, Mike, and Fr. Kris D. Stubna, *What Catholics Believe: A Pocket Catechism*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, Nos. 1420-1498, 1846-1869

Pope John Paul II, *Misericordia dei* ("Mercy of God"), apostolic letter, April 7, 2002

Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Penance*, apostolic exhortation, 1984

Pope John Paul II, *Rediscovering the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, Holy Thursday letter, March 25, 2001

Savitskas, Charles, and Margaret Savitskas, *How To Talk With Your Children About Reconciliation*

Shaw, Russell, ed., *Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine*

Wuerl, Bishop Donald W.; Ronald Lawler, O.F.M. Cap.; and Thomas Comerford Lawler, *The Teaching of Christ*, pp. 262-266, 421-443

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"Prodigal Son," Bartolome Esteban Murillo