

THE SACRAMENT OF MERCY

In a recent letter to us entitled “Misericordia et Misera” (Mercy and Misery), Pope Francis reflects on the graces of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy which has just come to an end. He particularly focuses on the forgiveness Jesus gives. The Latin title of this letter just mentioned was used by St. Augustine in referring to the familiar Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery. When all the accusers dropped the stones with which they were about to stone her, and walked away, we see the image of God’s love when it touches the sinner. “The two of them alone remained: mercy and misery” comments St. Augustine. The misery of sin was clothed with the mercy of love.

Jesus simply says: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? ...Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and from now on do not sin again.” (Jn. 8: 8-11)

That was it. There was no discussion. There was no explanation. It was simply an admission of sin, forgiveness and a sending forth.

It is important to keep this in mind as you prepare for your encounter with God’s mercy in the sacrament. Express your sins and sorrow, receive forgiveness through the priest and go forth. By keeping it simple and straightforward God’s Mercy remains the focus. It is not proper, or fair to others waiting, to go into the confessional to have a discussion with another human being, the priest. There are other places and times for counseling or discussing religious topics. The confessional is an encounter with the merciful love of God who imparts forgiveness through the priest. Please keep this in mind when preparing for confession.



SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION



“HOW-TO” GO TO CONFESSION

1. Make an examination of conscience (see aid on next panel).
2. Enter the confessional. You can go behind the screen or sit face-to-face with the priest.
3. Begin by making the sign of the cross and saying, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Sometimes the priest will say a short prayer or read a passage from Scripture. If he doesn’t or after he does say...

“Bless me father for I have sinned for it has been _____ days/weeks/months/years since my last confession.”

4. Say the sins that you remember. (In order to make a good confession the faithful must confess all mortal sins, according to kind and number.) You may conclude by saying, "I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life." It is not necessary to explain the circumstances surrounding your sins unless the priest asks, which he may do to determine the nature and scope of a particular sin.
5. The priest may give some brief advise to help you and will assign you a penance, which you must complete after leaving the confessional.
6. When invited, slowly and thoughtfully pray an *Act of Contrition* such as:

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 I have offended 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.

7. The priest will pray the Prayer of Absolution over you. Listen to the words carefully. When he gets to the Sign of the Cross, cross yourself.

That’s it. You have completed your confession. Through God’s Mercy your sins are forgiven. **(Now don’t forget to complete your penance.)**



EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

A helpful aid to examine your conscience is to review the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church. This is not a complete list but should help you identify your sins.

- ✦ Have God and the pursuit of sanctity in Christ been the goal of my life? Have I denied my faith? Have I placed my trust in false teachings or substitutes for God? Did I despair of God's mercy?
- ✦ Have I avoided the profane use of God's name in my speech? Have I broken a solemn vow or promise?
- ✦ Have I honored every Sunday by avoiding unnecessary work, celebrating the Mass (also holydays)? Was I inattentive at, or unnecessarily late for Mass, or did I leave early? Have I neglected prayer for a long time?
- ✦ Have I shown Christ-like respect to parents, spouse, family members and legitimate authorities? Have I been attentive to the religious education and formation of my children?
- ✦ Have I cared for the bodily health and safety of myself and all others? Did I abuse drugs or alcohol? Have I supported in any way abortion, "mercy killing," or suicide?
- ✦ Was I impatient, angry, envious, proud, jealous, revengeful, and/or lazy? Have I forgiven others?
- ✦ Have I been just in my responsibilities to employer and employees? Have I discriminated against others for unjust reasons?
- ✦ Have I been chaste in thought and word? Have I engaged in the marital act only within marriage and while open to procreating life? Have I engaged in self-gratification? Did I deliberately look at impure TV, pictures or reading?
- ✦ Have I stolen anything from another, from my employer, from government or family? If so, am I ready to repay it? Did I fulfill my contracts? Did I rashly gamble, depriving my family of necessities?
- ✦ Have I spoken ill of any other person? Have I always told the truth? Have I kept secrets and confidences?
- ✦ Have I had impure thoughts?

You are encouraged to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation often. A good interval is every month but you can go more often if you would like or if you have committed a serious sin.