



“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”

JOHN 20:23

Repeating the Same Sin — What the Church Teaches

1. Repetition creates a habit – the road to vice

The Catechism tells us that **“the repetition of sins – even venial ones – engenders vices, among which are the capital sins.”**

When a particular fault is committed again and again, it acquires a *habitual* character: the mind and will become accustomed to the same pattern of failure.

2. Vice is a habit, not a single act

The Catholic Encyclopedia defines **vice** as “a habit inclining one to sin. It is the product of repeated sinful acts of a given kind and when formed is in some sense also their cause.” Thus the *story* of the sin repeats because the habit itself now drives the person toward the same wrongdoing.

3. How a habit works in the Thomistic sense

St. Thomas Aquinas explains that a person’s acts are *ordered* toward their ultimate end (God). Even **venial** sins can be “habitually ordered” toward God, meaning the sinner still intends the act to be done for God’s sake, though the act falls short of true charity. The habit supplies a *stable* direction for the will; it does not force the act, but it makes it easier to repeat the same fault. As William C. Mattison notes, habits “causally influence the person’s activity” and can predispose one to repeat the same sin.

4. When a repeated sin “returns” after forgiveness

In the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas warns that **“the sin which follows repentance brings back ... the debt of punishment ... not as caused by the forgiven sin but as caused by this last sin being committed, ... aggravated in view of those previous sins.”**

The new act is not merely a fresh fault; it carries the weight of the previous repetitions, making the moral damage more serious.

5. Addiction and the “after-effects” of sin

Wojciech Giertych observes that habitual failure can become an **addiction** – a disordered attraction that persists even after the original sin is forgiven. These “after-effects of sin” remain as weakened dispositions, requiring ongoing conversion and virtue to overcome.

6. Breaking the cycle

Step	What the Church recommends	Why it works
Examination of conscience	Use a structured examination (e.g., the Ten Commandments) to see the recurring pattern.	Makes the habit visible.
Confession (Sacrament of Reconciliation)	Confess the repeated sin, receive absolution and a concrete penance.	Grace removes the guilt; penance combats the habit.
Cultivation of virtues	Practice the infused virtue that counters the vice (e.g., temperance against gluttony, chastity against lust).	Virtues re-orient the will toward God, destroying the old habit.
Frequent reception of the Eucharist	Receive Christ’s Body as spiritual nourishment.	Strengthens charity, the “last end” that habitually orders all acts.
Spiritual direction or accompaniment	Seek a trusted priest or lay guide to monitor progress.	Provides accountability and practical advice.
Prayer for interior conversion	Ask for the Holy Spirit to “renew the mind” (Rom 12:2).	Grace reshapes the interior dispositions that underlie the habit.

7. A pastoral picture

Imagine a person who repeatedly lies to protect pride. Each lie becomes a “story” that is retold in similar circumstances. The lie is no longer a single act; it is a **habit** that inclines the will toward deception.

The Church's teaching tells us that such a habit must be uprooted through the **grace of the sacraments**, the **practice of virtue**, and **persistent prayer**.

8. Summary

- Repeating the same sin creates a **habit (vice)** that predisposes further failure.
- Even venial sins, when habitually repeated, acquire a “habitual ordering” toward God, but they still weaken charity.
- After forgiveness, a new sin can “**bring back**” the moral weight of earlier repetitions.
- Overcoming the pattern requires the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**, **growth in virtue**, **regular Eucharist**, and **ongoing prayer and direction**.

May the Holy Spirit grant you the grace to recognize recurring faults, break the cycle, and walk ever more fully toward the love of God.