

The Sacrament of Penance & Reconciliation

WHAT	<p><u>1440</u> Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, <i>which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.</i>³⁸</p> <p>Jesus entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Church. The Sacrament of Penance is God's gift to us so that any sin committed after Baptism can be forgiven. <u>1422</u> "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." With absolution, we are reconciled to God and the Church. The Sacrament helps us stay close to the truth that we cannot live without God. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).</p> <p><u>1423</u> It is called the <i>sacrament of conversion</i> 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 <i>sacrament of Penance</i>, since it consecrates the Christian sinner's personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.</p> <p><u>1424</u> It is called the <i>sacrament of confession</i>, since the <i>disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament</i>. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.</p> <p>It is called the <i>sacrament of forgiveness</i>, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."⁶</p> <p>It is called the <i>sacrament of Reconciliation</i>, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God."⁷ He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."⁸</p> <p>Types of Sin After we are baptized and the stain or Original Sin is washed away, all sins are a result of our choices. <u>There are 2 types of sin:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Venial: a deliberate act, of minor consequence but one that wounds our relationship with God. ~ Mortal: a grave matter, committed deliberately and full understanding it is wrong and breaks our relationship with God.
WHO	<p><u>1457</u> According to the Church's command, "after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year." Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession.</p> <p>Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.</p>
SPIRITUAL EFFECTS	<p>The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace; - reconciliation with the Church; - remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins; - remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin; - peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; - an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

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EFFECTS	<p>1468 "The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship." <i>Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament.</i> For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation." Indeed 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.</p> <p>1469 This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it.</p> <p>It must be recalled that . . . this reconciliation with God leads, as it were, to other reconciliations, which repair the other breaches caused by sin. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation.⁷⁸</p>
Rite	<p>1491 The sacrament of Penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest's absolution. The <i>penitent's acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.</i></p> <p>1493 One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church, must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience. The confession of venial faults, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.</p> <p>1494 The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of "satisfaction" or "penance" to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ.</p> <p>1495 Only priests who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church can forgive sins in the name of Christ.</p> <p>1480 Like all the sacraments, Penance is a liturgical action. The elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: a greeting and blessing from the priest, reading the word of God to illuminate the conscience and elicit contrition, and an exhortation to repentance; the confession, which acknowledges sins and makes them known to the priest; the imposition and acceptance of a penance; the priest's absolution; a prayer of thanksgiving and praise and dismissal with the blessing of the priest.</p> <p>1459 Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.⁶² Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."</p> <p>1460 The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him."⁶³</p>

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Examin	<p>There are various types of examinations of conscience but regardless of which one you use to prepare yourself for the Sacrament it should be rooted in Scripture; particularly, the Ten Commandments and Beatitudes. Below are a few examples from the USCCB of Examinations of Conscience that can help you prepare for the Sacrament.</p> <p>Examination of Conscience based on the Ten Commandments</p> <p>Examination of Conscience for Young Adults</p> <p>Examination of Conscience for Single People</p> <p>Examination of Conscience for Married Persons</p>
Indulgences	<p>1471 The doctrine and practice of indulgences in the Church are closely linked to the effects of the sacrament of Penance.</p> <p>"An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints."⁸¹</p> <p>"An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin."⁸² The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead.⁸³</p>
FORMS OF PENANCE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE	<p><u>1434</u> The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, <i>fasting, prayer, and almsgiving</i>, which express conversion in <i>relation to oneself, to God, and to others</i>. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity "which covers a multitude of sins."³²</p> <p>1435 Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance.</p> <p><u>1436 Eucharist and Penance.</u> Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrifice of Christ which has reconciled us with God. Through the Eucharist those who live from the life of Christ are fed and strengthened. "It is a remedy to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sins."</p> <p>1437 Reading Sacred Scripture, praying the Liturgy of the Hours and the Our Father - every sincere act of worship or devotion revives the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of our sins.</p> <p><u>1438 The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year</u> (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice.³⁶ 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).</p> <p><u>1439</u> 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:³⁷ 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. <i>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.</i></p>

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Resources

For more information printed versions:

[How to Go to Confession](#)

[Litany of Humility](#)

There are many videos available on how to make a good confession – some examples here:

[How to make a Good Confession](#) (19:12 minutes)

[The difference between venial and mortal sins](#)