

RECONCILIATION

a Short Guide

The sacrament of Reconciliation is the story of God's love that never turns away from us.

What is Reconciliation?

Reconciliation (also known as Confession or Penance) 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 is also wounded by our sins. Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people and God. In Reconciliation, we acknowledge our sins before God and His Church. We express our sorrow in a meaningful way, receive the forgiveness of Christ and His Church, make reparation for what we have done and resolve to do better in the future. The forgiveness of sins involves four parts:

- **Contrition:** a sincere sorrow for having offended God, and the most important act of the penitent. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.
- **Confession:** confronting our sins in a profound way to God by speaking about them —aloud— to the priest.
- **Penance:** an important part of our healing is the “penance” the priest imposes in reparation for our sins.
- **Absolution:** the priest speaks the words by which “God, the Father of Mercies” reconciles a sinner to Himself through the merits of the Cross.



The Return of the Prodigal Son
Rembrandt - 1669

Rite of Reconciliation

Reconciliation may be face-to-face or anonymous, with a screen between you and the priest. Choose the option that is the most comfortable for you.

1. The priest gives you a blessing or greeting. He may share a brief Scripture passage.
2. Make the Sign of the Cross and say: *“Bless me father, for I have sinned. My last confession was...”* (give the number of weeks, months or years).
3. Confess all of your sins to the priest. The priest will help you to make a good confession. If you are unsure about how to confess or you feel uneasy, just 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 assigns you a penance and offers advice to help you be a better Catholic.
6. Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

How to Make a Good Confession

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 our thoughts, words and actions for that which did not conform to God's command to love Him and one another through His laws and the laws of His Church. This is called an examination of conscience. To make an examination of conscience:

- Begin with a prayer asking for God's help.
- Review your life with the help of some questions, which are based on the 10 Commandments (see next panel).
- Tell God how truly sorry you are for your sins.
- Make a firm resolution not to sin again.

Examination of Conscience

Recall your sins. Prayerfully ask yourself what you have done with full knowledge and full consent against God's and the Church's commandments.

- How do you receive Christ into your life by welcoming the stranger? Caring for people in need? Putting your wants aside for the needs of other people?
- How do you proclaim Christ by your words and actions? Is it obvious by what you say and do that you are a disciple of Christ?
- How do you live the truth of the Gospel when it is unpopular to do so at work? In your family? With your friends?
- When have your anxieties and fears stopped you from making choices according to the Gospel?
- How have you asked the Holy Spirit to strengthen you in those moments?
- What are the areas of Christian life that you find most challenging? How have you sought help from the Christian community in these moments? How have you separated yourself from the community of faith in these moments?
- How is prayer a part of your life? What are ways that it might improve?
- What are ways that you include the Bible in your life? How do you draw strength and insight from God's word?
- Do you regularly participate in the Mass each Sunday? What are the obstacles that get in the way of full participation? How can the Christian community help you overcome those obstacles?
- Are there ways in which your actions hurt others? What steps can you take to bring about healing with people you have hurt? How can the Christian community help you reconcile with other you have hurt?



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- 3 Confess all of your sins to the priest. (If you are unsure or uneasy, tell him and ask for help.)
- 4 Say, "*I am sorry for these and all of my sins.*"
- 5 The priest assigns a penance and offers advice to help you be a better Catholic.
- 6 Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

Act of Contrition

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

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