



**A GUIDE TO
CONFESSION**

Confession Is a Sacrament

The Sacrament of Penance, commonly called Confession, is one of the seven sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church. Catholics believe that all of the sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ Himself. In the case of Confession, that institution occurred on Easter Sunday, when Christ first appeared to the apostles after His Resurrection. Breathing on them, he said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).

The Marks of the Sacrament

Catholics also believe that the sacraments are an outward sign of an inward grace. In this case, the outward sign is the absolution, or forgiveness of sins, that the priest grants to the person confessing his or her sins. The inward grace is the reconciliation of that person to God.

The Purpose of Confession

That reconciling of a person to God is the purpose of Confession. When we sin, we deprive ourselves of God's grace. And by doing so, we make it even easier to sin more. The only way out of this downward cycle is to acknowledge our sins, to repent of them, and to ask God's forgiveness. Then, in the Sacrament of Confession, grace can be restored to our souls, and we can once again resist sin.

What Is Required?

Three things are required to receive the sacrament worthily:

1. The person must be sorry for his or her sins.
2. The person must confess those sins fully, in kind and in number.
3. The person must do penance and make amends for his or her sins.

How Often Should You Go to Confession?

While Catholics are only required to go to Confession when they are aware that they have committed a mortal sin, the Church urges the faithful to take advantage of this sacrament often. A good rule of thumb is to go at least four times a year.

Why Is Confession Necessary?

Non-Catholics, and even many Catholics, often ask whether they can confess their sins directly to God, and whether God can forgive them without going through a priest. On the most basic level, of course, the answer is yes, and Catholics should make frequent acts of contrition, which are prayers in which we tell God that we are sorry for our sins and ask for His forgiveness.

But the question misses the point of Confession. The sacrament, by its very nature, confers graces that help us live a Christian life. Moreover, it was instituted by Christ as the proper form for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, we should not only be willing to receive the sacrament, but we should embrace it as a gift from a loving God.

Lord, grant me light to see myself as You see me and the grace to be truly sorry for my sins. Mary, help me to make a good confession.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

1. I am the Lord your God.

- Do I give God time every day in prayer?
- Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
- Have I ever received Communion in a state of mortal sin?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- Have I used God's name in vain: lightly or carelessly?
- Have I been angry with God?
- Have I wished evil upon another person?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation?
- Have I tried to observe Sunday as a family day and a day of rest?
- Do I do needless work on Sunday?

4. Honor your Father and your Mother.

- Do I honor and obey my parents?
- Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
- Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?

5. You shall not kill.

- Have I had an abortion or encouraged anyone to have an abortion?
- Have I physically harmed anyone?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs?
- Have I been angry or resentful?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

- Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thought and action?
- Have I engaged in any sexual activity outside of marriage?
- Have I been guilty of masturbation?
- Have I been guilty of homosexual activity?

7. You shall not steal.

- Have I stolen what is not mine?
- Do I waste time at work, school, or at home?
- Do I pay my debts promptly?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- Have I lied?
- Have I gossiped?
- Am I critical, negative, or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?

9. You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.

- Have I consented to impure thoughts?
- Do I seek to control my imagination?
- Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations?

10. You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.

- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Am I greedy or selfish?
- Are material possessions the purpose of my life?

HOW TO GO TO CONFESSION

1. Preparation: Before going to confession, the person examines his or her life (refer to the “Examination of Conscience” to the left) and then prays to God for forgiveness.

2. Going to Confession: After the priest welcomes you, say the following while you make the sign of the cross: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been ____ since my last confession.”

3. Confession of Sins: Then confess your sins, stating them and the approximate number of times you have committed them. When finished confessing, say: “I am sorry for these and all my sins.”

4. Act of Penance: The priest may offer you advice and will impose an act of penance, which may include prayer, self-denial, or works of mercy. (The penance is to be done as soon as possible after confession.)

5. Act of Contrition: The priest will invite you to express sorrow for your sins by reciting an Act of Contrition, such as the following:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for
having offended Thee, and I detest
all my sins because of Thy just
punishments, but most of all because
they offend Thee, my God, who are
all-good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve, with the help of
Thy grace, to sin no more and to
avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

6. Absolution: The priest extends his hands and pronounces the formula of absolution, making the sign of the cross during the final words. You answer, “Amen.”

7. Dismissal: The priest dismisses you with the command to go in peace. You answer: “Thanks be to God.”

Continue to express your conversion through a life renewed according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God.

