

# The Sacrament of Confession

## A guide.



*God our Father delights when we come to him, because he loves us more than we can imagine. In Confession, we meet the merciful love of God which passes through the heart of Jesus Christ. In confessing our sins, we are asking God for forgiveness and healing.*

## What is Reconciliation?

Reconciliation (also known as Confession or Penance) is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ in His love and mercy to offer us forgiveness and mercy for our sins committed against God. At the same time, we are reconciled with the community of the Church because that community is also wounded by our sins. Confession helps us to grow in love of God and our neighbour. It sets us free to serve Christ and those around us.

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.



## **How to Make a Good Confession**

*We should begin with prayer, placing ourselves in the presence of God.*

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Jesus, you love me more than I can know. You want me to be free from sin, ready to love you and my neighbour. I come before you, aware that I have sinned, and so need your mercy and love. I know your love for me is boundless and you desire to shower mercy upon me.

So I ask you to help me to make a good Confession.

Help me to find out my sins.

Help me to be sorry for them.

Help me to make up my mind not to sin again. Have mercy on me, O Lord, and forgive me.

Come Holy Spirit into my soul,  
Enlighten my mind that I may know the sins I ought to confess,  
and grant me Your grace to confess them fully,  
humbly and with contrite heart.

O Blessed Virgin,  
Mother of my Redeemer, and my mother.  
mirror of innocence and sanctity,  
and refuge of penitent sinners,  
intercede for me through the Passion of Your Son,  
that I may obtain the grace to make a good confession.  
You stood by the cross of your Son, stand by me now.

All you blessed Angels and Saints of God,  
pray for me, a sinner, that I may repent from my evil ways,  
that my heart may henceforth be forever united with yours in eternal love.  
Amen.

*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, prayerfully consider these questions*

**1. *I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.***

- Do I give God time every day in prayer?
- Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
- Have I been involved with superstitious practices or have I been involved with the occult?
- Do I seek to surrender myself to God's word as taught by the Church?
- Have I ever received communion in the state of mortal sin?
- Have I ever deliberately told a lie in Confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?
- Are there other "gods" in my life? Money, Security, Power, People, etc.?

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

- Have I used God's holy name in vain: lightly or carelessly?
- Have I wished evil upon any other person?
- Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object?
- Did I put my faith in danger through readings contrary to Catholic teachings or involvement in non-Catholic sects?
- Did I engage in superstitious practices: palm-reading or fortune-telling?

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

- Have I deliberately missed Holy 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. *Honour your father and your mother.***

- Do I honour and obey my parents?
- Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
- Have I given my family good religious example?
- Do I try to bring peace into my home life?
- Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?

**5. *You shall not kill.***

- Have I had an abortion or encouraged or helped anyone to have an abortion?
- Have I physically harmed anyone?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs?
- Did I give scandal to anyone, thereby leading him or her into sin?
- Have I been angry or resentful?
- Have I harboured hatred in my heart?
- Have I participated in or approved of euthanasia?

**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 used pornography?
- Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control in my marriage?
- Have I been guilty of masturbation?
- Do I seek to control my thoughts and imaginations?
- Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other people as mere objects?
- Have I engaged in impure conversation that would cause myself or others to sin?

**7. *You shall not steal.***

- Have I stolen what is not mine?
- Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?
- Do I waste time at work, school, and home?
- Do I gamble excessively, thereby denying my family of their needs?
- Do I pay my debts promptly?
- Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?
- Have I cheated anyone out of what is justly theirs, for example creditors, insurance companies, big corporations?
- Have squandered the resources of the earth, failing to care for it as God has commanded us to do.

**8. *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.***

- Have I lied? Have I gossiped?
- Do I speak badly of others behind their back?
- Am I sincere in my dealings with others?

- Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
- Have I injured the reputation of others by slanders?
- Have I used social media prudently, to build people up and not tear them down?

10. ***You shall not desire your neighbour's goods.***

- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Do I envy the families or possessions of others?
- Am I greedy or selfish?
- Are material possessions the purpose of my life?
- Am I generous with my time, my gifts and my money?

**For spouses:**

Do I pray for my husband or wife?

Am I critical of my spouse, putting them down in public or in private?

What efforts have I made to demonstrate and foster the warmth of my love and affection for my spouse?

Do I try to make up whenever there has been a disagreement or do I allow things to fester beneath the surface? Am I too proud to say 'Sorry'?

Do I mistreat my spouse verbally, emotionally or physically? Have we used artificial means of birth control in order to prevent having children?

**For parents:**

Have I neglected to teach my children their prayers and give them a Christian education?

Have I set my children a bad example by not bringing them to Holy Mass, or being careless about my religious duties?

Do I take care to ensure that my children do not witness arguments at home? Do I watch over the books they read and the television and videos they watch? Do I take care to 'befriend' my children? Am I over strict or over lax with them? Do I explain decisions to them and so help them grow to maturity?

## **Rite of Reconciliation**

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. Do not worry if it has been a while since you came to confession, just explain this to the priest.
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.

**O my God, because you are so good,  
I am very sorry that I have sinned against you  
and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.**

- or -

**I love you, Jesus, my love above all things,  
And I repent with my whole heart of having offended you.  
Never permit me to separate myself from you again,  
Grant that I may love you always, and then do with me what you  
will.**

7. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

8. Remember the carry out the penance that the priest has given you.

