



Sacrament of Reconciliation/ Penance

The Gospel and Christian life

Jesus is clear about how Christians are to live. In all the gospels, in story after story, teaching after teaching, it comes down to **love**.

*A scholar of the law tested Jesus by asking,
"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"
He said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your mind.
This is the greatest and the first commandment.
The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."
Matthew 22: 35-40*

It really is that simple.
We are to love God first, with all of who we are.
This will naturally overflow into loving each other.

*We love because God first loved us.
If anyone says, "I love God," but hates their brother or sister is a liar;
for whoever does not love a brother or sister whom they have seen
cannot love God whom they have not seen.
1 John 4: 19-20*

However, we struggle with love.
If we look deeply in our own hearts, we see the conflict.
There is something inside us that wrestles to accept this command.
Often, we are like the scholar of the law in the Gospel of Luke.
We want clarifications.

*There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said,
"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"
He said in reply, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart,
with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind,
and your neighbor as yourself."
He replied to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."
But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"
Luke 10: 24-29*

Jesus responds to him and us with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus replied, "A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead.

*A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him,
he passed by on the opposite side.*

Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight.

*He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them.
Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him.*

The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction,

*'Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you,
I shall repay you on my way back.'*

Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"

He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 15:30-37



Love. We are to love God first, with all of our being, in everything we do. This overflows into love of neighbor. Yes, everyone. And ourselves. We are called to love ourselves too.

Why is this so difficult? Each of us has to answer for ourself.

Some common answers are:

Fear: What are we afraid of?
What is stopping us from embracing love?
What have we been told, perhaps when we were children, that makes us shy away from what we want deep in our souls?

Change: How would our choices change if we really loved God first?
What would happen if we loved strangers?
What might it cost us? Or even ourselves.
How would we live differently if we really loved ourselves?

Peer/ Societal Pressure: We talk about this with teens all the time, but if we're honest it's a never ending force. The need to fit in. The quest to 'succeed'. We are formed by the sites we visit, the music we listen to, the media we watch, books, movies, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok etc. Everything forms us, but which are good and healthy, and which are destructive? Which teach us to love, and which tear us down?

Different values: The hard question we must ask is:
do we really want to embrace the Gospel?
Do we really want to be Christians?
If so, we need excise from our lives all those other values ('gods')
that are competing for our attention.
Again, we talk about this with the teens & children,
but what about ourselves? What values are first in our lives?
If, as the old song goes, "They'll know we are Christians by our love",
what do others see if they look at our lives?
What comes first? Sleep? Exercise? Money? Power? Sports?

AND where do we 'hedge our bets'?

"O God wants me to spend time with my family, so a trip on Sunday is as important as mass."

"I can pray anywhere, anytime I want."

"I need to work."

"Those people aren't like us."

How often, if we're honest, do we twist the gospel to confirm to what we want it to say, not what it says? Especially when it comes to love, and the obvious corollary: forgiveness.

This is only a short list of some possibilities, but as we begin this discussion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation we must begin at the beginning, with the foundation of faith and Christian action. Remember the promise you made when you asked to have your children baptized.

*Parents, in asking for Baptism for your children,
You are undertaking the responsibility
of raising them in the faith
so that, keeping God's commandments,
they may love the Lord and their neighbor as Christ has taught us.*

Do you understand this responsibility?

Order of Baptism of Children

It was, and is, all about love.



Your thoughts:

Sin

Since the command of the Gospel is to love, then not loving, not following this command, is called “Sin”.

Saint Augustine called sin, “a word, an act, or a desire contrary to the eternal Law.” It is an offense against God in disobedience to God’s love. It wounds human nature and injures human solidarity.

#392 Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

All our lives are meant to be about love, yet we know the reality is we often sin.

Let us be clear from the outset that our God is a God of forgiveness, mercy and compassion. But we sin. To use another definition for sin, we ‘choose to do what we know is wrong.’ We bring brokenness into the world. We bring injury. We choose not to build up the Reign of God.

The Church, in wisdom passed down through the centuries, provides ways to think about sin. Some sin is obviously less serious, some is more serious. We refer to this as **venial and mortal sins**.



Venial sin involves a less serious matter. It weakens love and impedes our progress in the practice of virtue and moral good. Over time, repeated venial sin can have serious consequences. (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p.531*)

Mortal Sin involves grave matter, full knowledge and deliberate consent (freedom). It destroys a loving relationship with God. (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p.313*)

While it is extremely difficult to commit mortal sin, venial sins are common. It may help to *think about this in terms of a spectrum* as opposed to categorizing sins into silos. It isn’t about, “Well it’s only a venial sin. That’s not so bad.” It is more about recognizing our behavior as not loving, not living up to our Christian commitment. Also, we want to grow in our Christian life and make the world more attuned to the Reign of God. This is our mission. Sin works against our values. Therefore, we want to avoid sin and grow in grace.

Sometimes it is easy to recognize sin in our lives. That's because we have formed our **conscience** to be aware of a particular sin or attitude, or something that could lead us down that road. (And we have taken time to reflect a bit on how our lives are going.)

"Moral conscience, present in the heart of a person, is a judgement of reason which at the appropriate moment enjoins him or her to do good and avoid evil. Thanks to moral conscience, the human person perceives the moral quality of an act to be done or which has already been done, permitting her or him to assume responsibility for the act. When attentive to moral conscience, the prudent person can hear the voice of God who speaks to him or her."

#372 Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

As Christians we form and inform our consciences daily. We gather and discern information about an issue. We seek wisdom and guidance from the Word of God, in prayer, in the teachings of the Church. This is neither a simple nor easy process. As Catholics we know we cannot read the Bible simplistically, as if it contains easy, ready answers for all our complex, modern problems. We pray with it and learn from it. The teachings of the Church, though rooted in the Spirit, also have grown and even changed throughout history. Though fundamental dogma/truth, of course, remains, the application to present situations may have grown in wisdom and insight.

The Church says, "Our conscience is that inner sanctuary in which we listen to the voice of God . . ." (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, p.531*) and "A human being must always obey the certain judgement of their conscience. (# 1790 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,) It is extremely important that we take conscious time to keep our conscience formed and informed that our sense of right and wrong may be true and accurate.

What influences your conscience?

How do you think your children's consciences are being formed?

What would you keep? Change?

The aim of this instruction
is love from a pure heart,
a good conscience,
and a sincere faith.
1 Timothy 1:5

In addition to discerning venial and mortal sin in our lives, the Church also speaks of personal and social sin. Most often when we think of sin, we refer to the personal ones. “I did this or that.” **Sin is also social.** There are communal sins/sinfulness that we may allow or to which we contribute. These sins are bigger than one person, but each person is called to actively work against these offenses and build up the Reign of God.

Examples of these sins are racism, poverty, sexism and any injustice. Conversely, the Church teaches us to embrace the principles of social justice, such as the respect for life, the rights of workers and care for the earth.



What other examples of social sin do you see in our world?

How can we work against these sins and work for justice?

Social justice and social sin are certainly complex issues. We must address them in our lives and in our society. This is another reason that we aim to form our consciences carefully. Selfishness, arrogance, ignorance, peer pressure all work against justice and the Reign of God and work for sin.

Finally, recalling the words of the Confiteor we pray at mass, we say

“in my thoughts, in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do.”

Sin is all of this. It is in what we choose to do to God, self or others and what loving actions we should have done. It is found in our attitudes of prejudices, intolerance or self-loathing or egoism. It is when we knowingly could have done the good but chose otherwise.

What new ideas about sin have I encountered?

Have I thought about my sinful attitudes, not only my actions?

Conversion

The life of a Christian is one of constant conversion. For some there may be a moment of radical conversion. A person may be leading a life far away from Christian love and then make a very distinct transformation.

For others, conversion is a consistent, daily choice to move in the direction of love. Think about the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The younger son has a moment in midst of feeding the pigs when he chooses to give up his life of partying, selfishness and self-centeredness, admit his sins and ask his father to take him back. The older son is challenged in a different way. He is called to forgive his brother. Both hear the call to conversion.



There are many stories in the Bible of conversion. From the very beginning in the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4), and Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27-33) to King David (2 Samuel 11-12) and even Paul (Acts 9) and Peter (Acts 10) we hear stories of personal conversions.

The entire Bible is a call to communal conversion. God makes a covenant with the people. The story is always told as an act of love. We see it in Exodus at Mt Sinai when God initiates this bond with humanity. It is done, the Scriptures say, in *hesed*. This word is difficult to translate, but we try, as *faithful, loving kindness* or *mercy*. In the New Testament we see in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus a new covenant being made. A bond never to be broken and written in ultimate love.

From the Old Testament prophets, we hear this call to conversion of heart.

Every Ash Wednesday we hear from the prophet Joel,

“Rend your hearts, not your garments and return to the Lord your God. For gracious and merciful is God, slow to anger, rich in kindness and relenting in punishment.”

Joel 2:13

We are called to be transformed.

God abhors outward pious hypocrisy; doing sacrifices and ‘holy things’ just to appear religious. God wants conversion of heart.

*“I hate, I spurn your feasts (says the Lord), I take no pleasure in your solemnities.
Away with your noisy songs! I will not listen to the melodies of the harps.*

But if you would offer me holocausts, (burnt sacrifices),

Then let justice surge like water and righteousness like an unfailing stream.”

Amos 5: 21-24

How has conversion been part of your life?

Have you had a moment of deep conversion?

In looking at your life in hindsight, can you discern how you have grown over the years in understanding and faith?

Forgiveness

It is interesting how often we allow ourselves to fall into a web of sin. One thing is for certain, God is a God of forgiveness.

Throughout the scriptures we hear of God's forgiveness no matter what the sin. In the gospels Jesus forgives and restores people into communion with each other. We hear stories of lost sheep, coins and sons. Zacchaeus the tax collector, a woman caught in adultery, one who washes his feet with her tears, even a thief hanging next to Jesus on a cross. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. (See *Romans 8:31-39*)



If we are to grow in love, then it is important to evaluate honestly our actions and attitudes in light of love and the gospel. We need to prayerfully take time to see our lives as clearly as possible. An examination of conscience should be done regularly. For example, every night in our prayer we can take a look at our day and see when we were most loving and when we sinned. We can evaluate the reasons for both actions. This helps us grow in faith.

Five-step Daily Examen that St. Ignatius of Loyola practiced.

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

See: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

The Church has also set aside times when we as a community take a deeper look at sin. These are during Lent and Advent. Some sin may have deep origins in our personal lives or in our community. Like a dandelion in our lawn, in order to really remove it, we need to dig deep to pull out the roots and it probably will take more than one digging. We just keep working at it.



Since we are to be Christ to the world, we too are told to forgive sins.

Then Peter approaching asked him,

“Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often must I forgive them?

As many as seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times.”

Matthew 18: 21-22

Or

“Stop judging and you will not be judged.

Stop condemning and you will not be condemned.

Forgive and you will be forgiven.

Luke 6:37

Even in our daily prayer we say, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Forgiveness is essential to being a Christian. It isn't always easy but is necessary. Forgiveness removes the power of sin. When we are forgiven, we are no longer bound by our sins. We are free. Forgiving others has the same affect. We let go of our anger, bitterness and pain. The offense that has happened to us does not keep hurting us. Forgiveness ends all that. Healing begins with forgiveness.

Forgiveness does mean we allow ourselves to return to our sinful ways. We must strive to do better. Forgiving others also does not mean we allow ourselves to be abused or mistreated.

Forgiveness is a process, especially when the sin is great. We return to the commandment to love God, self and others and carefully discern how God would want us to move forward.

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom.

#2223

Catechism of the Catholic Church

How is forgiveness part of your family's life?

How can you grow in forgiveness?

How can you better model forgiveness in your life?

Grace

When we talk about sacraments we often talk about grace.

*"Grace is participation in the life of God. It introduces us to the intimacy of Trinitarian life."
#1997 Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*"The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life,
infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal us of sin and to sanctify it."
#1999 Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Grace is gift and presence and support and call. In many ways it is God's life poured "into" us. Grace is not earned or merited, but freely given by God, who loves us so deeply. We are called to respond to this grace. It is the force and strength that help us to love God, others and ourselves.

When we ask, "How can I forgive someone when they hurt me?" The answer is to work with the grace God gives you, the strength that will help you walk in this process of forgiveness. When we wonder how people can love so deeply, even strangers, we see the work of grace. When we stand up for justice, when we seek conversion, when lives are transformed, we see people living in grace.

How has grace been active in your life?

Why the Sacrament of Penance/ Reconciliation?

It is a natural question. The answer has roots in our historical development and human nature.

To be very clear: GOD forgives sin. The God who loves us is the one who forgives. So why do I 'have to' talk to the priest? Why does this sacrament exist?

In the first century after the death and resurrection of Jesus there were two sacramental moments. In Baptism all previous sin is forgiven. In Eucharist the community comes together to share the Body & Blood, healing and including all.

The church community saw in the Sunday gathering a time for reconciliation when the natural friction in communal life had occurred. (What we now would call venial sin.) Also remember it could take years for people to prepare for Baptism. There was a lot of conversion necessary to live the Christian life and only adults (and children old enough to understand) were baptized.

In the first few centuries many changes took place in the Church which influenced the growth of the sacraments. First, "mortal" sin happened which greatly disrupted the church communities. Adultery, murder and apostasy (denying the faith) destroyed the bonds between Christians. Communities struggled with forgiveness and conversion. How could anyone be a Christian and do these horrible sins? Where was their transformation to the Gospel? How could these members be trusted to be Christians when their actions may have caused great harm?



The answer was called canonical penance which was a public, one time option. Public because the sin was public and affected the community. It was only available once because this was serious. These sins are not to be taken lightly and the expectation is that after a conversion they shouldn't, wouldn't be committed at all.

In the course of time this public penance faded away, but the concerns remain.

The other important development was what we now might call spiritual direction. Good people in discerning their sin wanted guidance from holy people to help them live better lives. They sought out spiritual counselors, usually monks, to help them on their spiritual journey. In confessing their sins and struggles they would pray and discern a way to correct any harm they might have caused and a path to avoid doing it again. This was for what we now call venial sin. It was part of a person's growth in faith and holiness.

As the centuries passed together these two threads wove themselves into the sacrament.

So, why tell our sins to a priest? Because we *need* to do so. We need to name and claim and own what we've done wrong. We need to face our failings. This is a necessary part of change. If you are familiar with any 12 step group, the process begins with an acknowledgment.* If you have ever seen a counselor, you know it has to start with discussing the problem so that a path forward can begin. Honesty is essential to healing and reconciliation



*For example see <https://www.aa.org/the-twelve-steps>

Why a priest? Because we need a person to hear us and help us. The role of a priest is to represent the community and Christ. Like all of us, he is a sinner and understands the struggle of living a Christian life. As our spiritual leader he prays with us Sunday after Sunday and in this sacrament, he prays with each penitent in a particular way that we can hear the forgiveness of God and work with us to discern our healing and move toward wholeness.

“When he celebrates the sacrament of Penance, the priest is fulfilling the ministry of the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, of the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, of the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return, and of the just and impartial judge whose judgment is both just and merciful. The priest is the sign and the instrument of God's merciful love for the sinner.

The confessor is not the master of God's forgiveness, but its servant.”

#1465 - 1466 Catechism of the Catholic Church

Why do you think people are anxious to talk to a priest about their sins?

How can this be overcome?

The Parts of the Sacrament


The sacrament of Penance/ Reconciliation grew and developed through the course of centuries. We can see the roots of the sacrament in the ministry of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church over time.

**Today we have distilled four basic components of the sacrament:
Contrition, Confession, Satisfaction (Penance), Absolution.**

Contrition, simply put, is sorrow for sin. We recognize our lack of love in thought, word, deed or attitude. We may feel a sense of disappointment, sorrow, and even pain at our choices. We recognize we have not lived up to love and been best the Christian we could be. We may have that moment of conversion when we suddenly see our lives in a clearer light and recognize social sins we contribute to or attitudes against others that are not loving that we promote.

An “Examination of Conscience” may help us as we discern our sins and sinful attitudes.

Contrition is essential for forgiveness and must be present in order for the sacrament to occur. Priests (Confessors) generally assume the penitent is contrite by their presence. We affirm this when we pray an ‘Act of Contrition’.



Have mercy on me, God,
in accord with your merciful love;
in your abundant compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Thoroughly wash away my guilt;
and from my sin cleanse me.

Psalm 51

Confession we discussed above. We need to say and own our sin. It is important to our spiritual growth.

Penance is sometimes referred to as 'satisfaction'. Unfortunately, some people think of it as a punishment. This could not be further from the intent of the sacrament. Sin wrongs our neighbor and so repairing that injustice is necessary if it is possible. Part of penance is making the unjust, just. However, since sin also damages our spiritual health, we should also discern a path to grow in our life of faith.

"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 themselves, as well as their relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: they must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his or her sins.

#1459 Catechism of the Catholic Church

A penance may be a work of charity or justice, prayer or self-denial. It may be a daily reading of the Scriptures. Again, it is intended to repair harm caused by our sin and/or further our spiritual growth away from the source of our sin.

What penances may be helpful to assist a person on their spiritual journey?

If you were the confessor, what penance might you give yourself?

Absolution is the prayer of forgiveness. It beautifully sums up the sacrament.

*God, the Father of Mercies,
through the death and resurrection of his Son,
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit
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*

Sometimes the priest may choose to use only the last sentence. However, the whole prayer gives us a sense of the intent, power, ministry and mission of the work of the Spirit in this sacrament.

*May the same God,
who through the Prophet Nathan forgave David when he confessed his sins,
who forgave Peter when he wept bitterly,
the woman when she washed his feet with her tears,
the publican, and the prodigal son,
forgive you ...*

Byzantine Liturgy

Frequently Asked Questions

How often do I have to celebrate the sacrament?

Mortal Sin must be confessed in number and kind (how often and exactly what is the sin) at least once a year and certainly before coming to Eucharist. (*#989 Code of Canon Law*) This is rooted in canonical penance we talked about earlier. A mortal (serious) sin is so harmful it can't be ignored. It has destroyed or grievously injured a person's spirituality, and relationship to God, self and the community. Therefore, one has to be contrite, celebrate this sacrament and work toward healing before returning to the table with their sisters and brothers.

There is no law on venial sin and the sacrament. It is recommended once a year, usually during Lent.

Does a priest or deacon celebrate this sacrament?

ONLY a priest (or bishop) can hear a person's confession and give absolution.

Can the priest talk about what I say?

Absolutely not. This is called the "seal" of confession.

The seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner for any reason."

#983 Code of Canon Law

This is taken *extremely* seriously.

Why is the sacrament done in a private room and not in the open church?

This is done for the complete privacy of the penitent. If you are anxious for any reason, simply ask the priest if he could come into the Church or chapel. Your privacy and comfort are important.

Are there different ways to celebrate this sacrament?

In the official ritual book for this sacrament there are three rites.

- ♦ Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents.
- ♦ Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution.
This rite is often adapted for use in what we call “Communal Penance Services” often celebrated in Advent and Lent
- ♦ Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution.
This rite is designed for extreme circumstances and is not approved for use at this time in our normal situations.

You may also experience Penitential Services which are non-sacramental but are created to help us reflect on our lives and grow in faith. They may move a person to then celebrate Penance at another time, or challenge participants to make changes in their lives to be more Christ-like. These services are usually not led by a priest.

How to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Following is a guide to celebrating the sacrament.

We often are anxious to 'do it right', especially since we may not celebrate the sacrament often.

This sacrament is a bit fluid and the priest will guide you through it.

Our most important component is to just come and be healed.

Come and leave all the pain, sorrow and sin behind.

Before entering the Reconciliation Room take some time in prayer to prepare yourself. Reviewing an Examination of Conscience may be helpful.

Enter the Reconciliation Room when the outside light is turned "on" and/ or the door is open. This way you know a priest is inside and no one else is. When you enter you do have a choice of sitting in the chair or kneeling behind the screen. The preference is to just sit down and relax.

After situating yourself (the Penitent,) in the Reconciliation Room...

- ♦ Begin saying aloud the "Sign of the Cross."
+ **In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**
- ♦ Then ask for a blessing. Say... **Bless me Father for I have sinned, this is my first confession.** or **"my last confession was ____."**
No need to be exact here. The priest is just trying to find a context for this celebration.
- ♦ The priest *may* read from the Scriptures at this point or even later after he has listened to your confession.
- ♦ **Now begin confessing your sins.** Speak honestly and clearly. Take your time. *There is no right or wrong way to do this. Just begin.*
- ♦ After listening to you, the priest may discuss your sins and concerns. Remember, he is there to be a helper and spiritual guide. Then he will give you a penance. *He may ask you what you think would be a good penance. You can even suggest something that will help you grow in faith and avoid this sin.*

- ♦ **Pray aloud the “Act of Contrition”.** Any version is fine.

The most common is:

“O my God, I am sorry and repent with all my heart for all the wrong I have done
and for the good I have failed to do,
because by sinning I have offended you,
who are all good and worthy to be loved above all things.
I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace,
to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid the occasions of sin.

Through the merits of the Passion of our Savior Jesus Christ, Lord, have mercy.

Rite of Reconciliation, 2023

There is often a card with this prayer available in the Reconciliation Room.

- ♦ The priest then extends his hands over the penitent’s head and prays the prayer of absolution:

“God, the Father of mercies, through the Death and Resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and poured out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant 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.”

Rite of Reconciliation, 2023

- ♦ You, the Penitent, answers: **“Amen.”**
- ♦ Priest then says, *“God bless you”* or *“Go in the peace of Christ,”* as you have now been reconciled to Christ and to the Church.
- ♦ Get up and leave the Reconciliation Room.
- ♦ Then take a few minutes for quiet prayer in church before leaving for home.



Appendix

Act of Contrition

There are number of different "Act of Contrition" prayers.

While it is good to commit one to memory as part of our prayer life, the others may be a good source as we prepare to celebrate the sacrament, perhaps during the time of Lent, or when we are taking time for an examination of conscience.

The following are from the ritual book for the Rite of Penance

The most common is:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

Psalm 25: 6-7

**Remember that your compassion, O Lord
And your love are from of old.
In your kindness remember me,
Because of your goodness, O Lord.**

**Father of mercy, like the prodigal son
I return to you and say:
"I have sinned against you
And am no longer worthy to be called your son."
Christ Jesus, Savior of the world,
I pray with the repentant thief
To whom you promised Paradise:
"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."
Holy Spirit, fountain of love,
I call on you with trust:
"Purify my heart,
And help me walk as a child of the light."**

Psalm 51:

**Have mercy on me, God,
in accord with your merciful love;
in your abundant compassion
blot out my transgressions.**

**Thoroughly wash away my guilt;
and from my sin cleanse me.**

**For I know my transgressions;
my sin is always before me.
Against you, you alone have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your eyes
So that you are just in your word,
and without reproach
in your judgment.**

**Behold, I was born in guilt,
in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, you desire true sincerity;
and secretly you teach me wisdom.**

**Cleanse me with hyssop,
that I may be pure;
wash me,
and I will be whiter than snow.**

**You will let me hear gladness and joy;
the bones you have crushed
will rejoice.**

**Turn away your face from my sins;
blot out all my iniquities.**

**A clean heart create for me, God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Do not drive me from before your face,
nor take from me your holy spirit.**

**Or a simple shorter version
Psalm 51: 4-5**

**Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
And of my sin cleanse me.
For I acknowledge my offense,
And my sin is before me always.**

**Restore to me the gladness
of your salvation;
uphold me with a willing spirit.
I will teach the wicked your ways,
that sinners may return to you.
Rescue me from violent bloodshed,
God, my saving God,
and my tongue will sing joyfully
of your justice.**

**Lord, you will open my lips;
and my mouth
will proclaim your praise.
For you do not desire sacrifice
or I would give it;
a burnt offering you would not accept.**

**My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit;
a contrite, humbled heart, O God,
you will not scorn.**

**Treat Zion kindly
according to your good will;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then you will desire
the sacrifices of the just,
burnt offering and whole offerings;
then they will offer up young bulls
on your altar.**

**Lord Jesus,
You opened the eyes of the blind,
Healed the sick,
Forgave the sinful woman,
And after Peter's denial confirmed him in your love.
Listen to my prayer:
Forgive all my sins,
Renew your love in my heart,
Help me to live in perfect unity with my fellow Christians
That I may proclaim your saving power to all the world.**

**Lord Jesus Christ,
You are the Lamb of God;
You take away the sins of the world.
Through the grace of the Holy Spirit
Restore me to friendship with your Father,
Cleanse me from every stain of sin
In the blood you shed for me,
And raise me to new life
For the glory of your name.**

**Lord Jesus,
You chose to be called the friend of sinners.
By your saving death and resurrection
Free me from my sins.
May your peace take root in my heart
And bring forth a harvest
Of love, holiness and truth.**

**Lord God,
In your goodness have mercy on me:
Do not look on my sins,
But take away all my guilt.
Create in me a clean heart
And renew within me an upright spirit.**

**Lord Jesus, Son of God
Have mercy on me, a sinner.**

Glossary

All these terms are defined in reference to this sacrament.

Absolution: Prayer of the priest during the sacrament acknowledging the forgiveness of God.

Act of Contrition: Prayer of the penitent acknowledging sorrow for sin

Confession: The naming of sins or sinfulness by the penitent during the sacrament. It may also be used as a name for the sacrament.

Confessor: Refers to the priest when celebrating this sacrament.

Contrition: Heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed and the intention to sin no more.

Examination of Conscience: prayerful, self-reflection prior to celebrating the sacrament. The penitent may be guided by the Commandments, the gospel or other guided meditations often also referred to as an 'examination of conscience.'

Penance: The process of making amends for sins/ sinfulness, or prayer or some other act by which the penitent works to grow in conversion and avoid this sin. It may also be used as a name for the sacrament.

Penitent: Refers to the person celebrating the sacrament

Reconciliation, Sacrament Of: The sacramental celebration, in which, through God's mercy, the sinner is reconciled with God and also the Church, Christ's Body which is wounded by sin. *(Glossary, Catechism of the Catholic Church,)*

Reconciliation Room: Dedicated place in a church where this sacrament is normally celebrated.

"Seal" (of Confession): The confessor's obligation to keep absolutely secret what a penitent has told them in the Sacrament. Also known as the 'sacramental seal'. *(Glossary, Catechism of the Catholic Church)*

Suggested Scripture for Reflection

Exodus 20:1-17

Micah 6:1-8

Deuteronomy 5: 6-21

Ten Commandments

Walk humbly with your God

Ten Commandments

Psalms 27

Psalms 51

Psalms 85

Psalms 146

Matthew 3:1-12

Matthew 5:1-12a

Matthew 5-7

Mark 2: 1-12

Luke 3: 1-17

Luke 6: 17-49

Luke 8: 36-50

John the Baptist

The Beatitudes

Sermon on the Mount

Cure of the man who was paralyzed

John the Baptist

Sermon on the Plain

Pardon of a sinful woman

See also Matthew 26: 6-13; Mark 14:3-9

Luke 15:4-7

Luke 15: 8-10

Luke 15: 11-32

Luke 19: 1-10

John 8: 1-11

Ephesians 1: 3-7

1 John 1:5-9

Revelation 21:1-12

Parable of the Lost Sheep

Parable of the Lost Coins

Parable of the Prodigal Son

Story of Zacchaeus

The woman caught in adultery

God chose us

We must acknowledge our sin

I saw a new heaven and a new earth

Examination of Conscience

*There are many examinations one can find.
Some people use the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes.
Below are a few thoughts to use an example.*

Examination of Conscience for Parents

Do I love God? Have I shared faith with my children? How faithful have I been to prayer and to teaching my children how to pray?

Does my language show my respect and love for God? Have my children learned inappropriate or sinful words from me?

Do I keep Sunday holy? Do I work too much on Sunday? Do I try to set some time aside for God and family? Do I go to mass with my family each weekend?

What kind of authority do I exercise over my children? Am I just? Am I firm, but loving? Am I consistent in the rules I make and the consequences for breaking them?

What attitude do I have for those in authority over me? Do my children see me showing respect for civil and Church authorities?

How do I treat my own parents and other elderly people? What example do I give my children?

Am I a peaceful or a violent person? Which kinds of words and gestures do I use? Are my children comfortable around me... or afraid of my temper?

Do I value the lives of my family by the way I care for their physical needs?

Have I taught my children, by my words and example, respect for their own and other's sexuality?

Do I show respect without envy for the property of others and teach my family to respect others and their property?

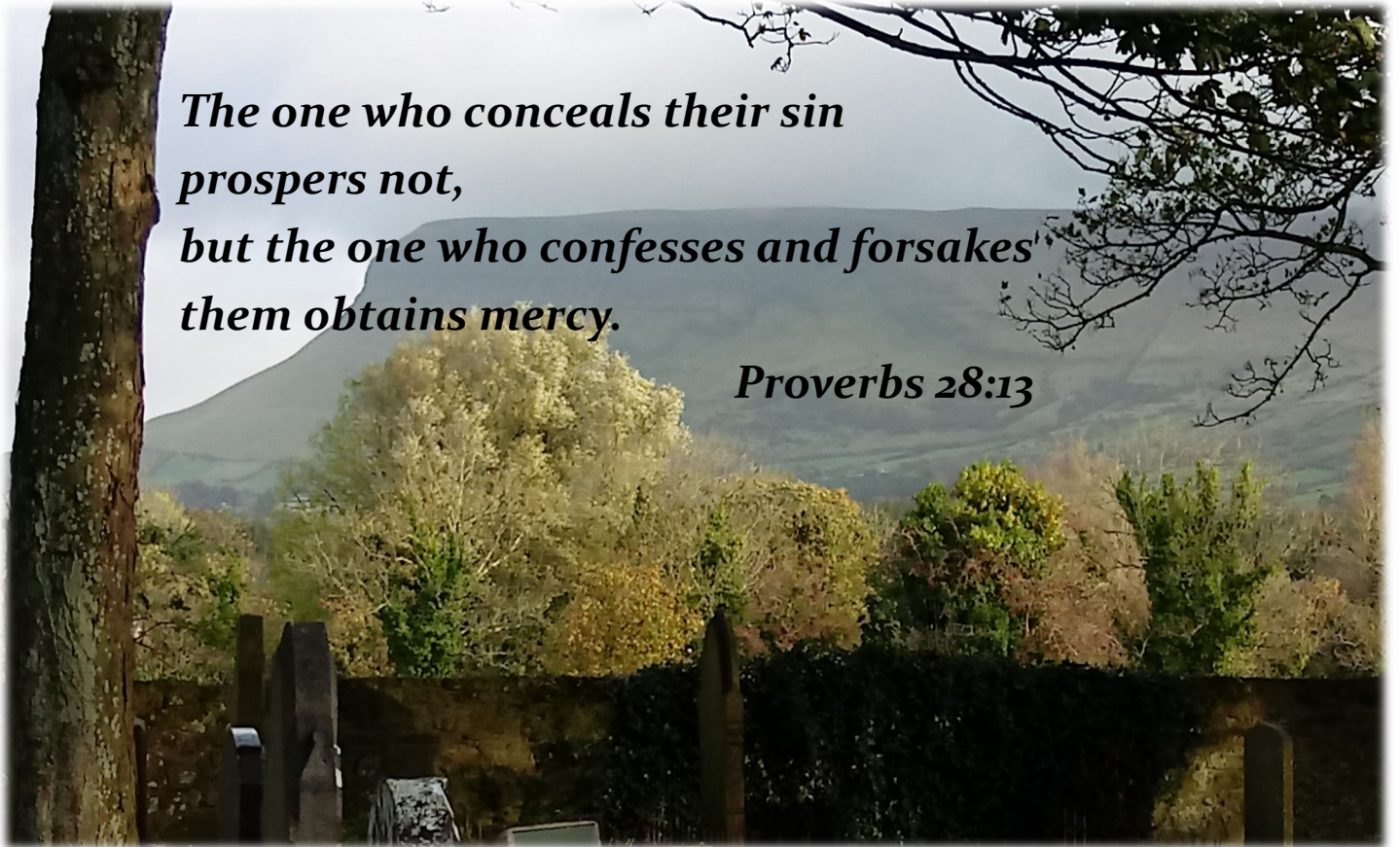
Have I taught my children, by my words and example, respect for their own and other's sexuality?

Do I show respect without envy for the property of others and teach my family to respect others and their property?

Am I a good steward of the material possessions God has entrusted to me for myself and for my family?

Do my children ever hear me lie? Am I trusted as an honest person?

Am I careful to guard the reputations of other people and to teach my children to do so?



***The one who conceals their sin
prosperes not,
but the one who confesses and forsakes
them obtains mercy.***

Proverbs 28:13

An Examination in Light of Catholic Social Teaching

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

- Do I respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception through natural death?
- Do I recognize the face of Christ reflected in all others around me whatever their race, class, age, or abilities?
- Do I work to protect the dignity of others when it is being threatened?

Am I committed to both protecting human life and to ensuring that every human being is able to live in dignity?

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

- Do I try to make positive contributions in my family and in my community?
- Are my beliefs, attitudes, and choices such that they strengthen or undermine the institution of the family?
- Am I aware of problems facing my local community and involved in efforts to find solutions? Do I stay informed and make my voice heard when needed?
- Do I support the efforts of poor persons to work for change in their neighborhoods and communities? Do my attitudes and interactions empower or disempower others?

Rights and Responsibilities

- Do I recognize and respect the economic, social, political, and cultural rights of others?
- Do I live in material comfort and excess while remaining insensitive to the needs of others whose rights are unfulfilled?
- Do I take seriously my responsibility to ensure that the rights of persons in need are realized?
- Do I urge those in power to implement programs and policies that give priority to the human dignity and rights of all, especially the vulnerable?

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

- Do I give special attention to the needs of the poor and vulnerable in my community and in the world?
- Am I disproportionately concerned for my own good at the expense of others?

Do I engage in service and advocacy work that protects the dignity of poor and vulnerable persons?

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

- As a worker, do I give my employer a fair day's work for my wages? As an owner, do I treat workers fairly?
- Do I treat all workers with whom I interact with respect, no matter their position or class?
- Do I support the rights of all workers to adequate wages, health insurance, vacation and sick leave? Do I affirm their right to form or join unions or worker associations?
- Do my purchasing choices take into account the hands involved in the production of what I buy? When possible, do I buy products produced by workers whose rights and dignity were respected?

Solidarity

- Does the way I spend my time reflect a genuine concern for others?
- Is solidarity incorporated into my prayer and spirituality? Do I lift up vulnerable people throughout the world in my prayer, or is it reserved for only my personal concerns?
- Am I attentive only to my local neighbors or also those across the globe?
- Do I see all members of the human family as my brothers and sisters?

Care for God's Creation

- Do I live out my responsibility to care for God's creation?
- Do I see my care for creation as connected to my concern for poor persons, who are most at risk from environmental problems?
- Do I litter? Live wastefully? Use energy too freely? Are there ways I could reduce consumption in my life?
- Are there ways I could change my daily practices and those of my family, school, workplace, or community to better conserve the earth's resources for future generations?

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examination-conscience-in-light-of-catholic-social-teaching>

See also:

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/civilize-it-examination-conscience-examen-de-conciencia>

<https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience>

Examination of Conscience Using the Stations of the Cross

Station 1: Jesus is Condemned to Death

How often do I ignore God?

How often do my words condemn God in the way that I speak to or about others?

Do I speak with love or with hatred/ spite?

Who am I in the crowd? Am I yelling to crucify Jesus or am I one begging and praying for this not to happen?

Do I condemn others?

Station 2: Jesus Carries the Cross

Do I turn to God to help me with my struggles, or do I take on all the burdens that lead to resentment?

Do I forget the times Jesus carried me?

Am I thankful that Jesus took my sins to the cross and continues to do so?

Station 3: Jesus Falls the First Time

Do I fall into temptation of others?

Does peer pressure, society pressure, work pressure – going along with the crowd – make me fall into sin? Do I realize it as it is happening?

Do I feel bad at any time during those temptations and push you down and away so I can do what I want?

Station 4: Jesus Meets His Mother

Do I hide things from my parents or loved ones?

Does the fear of my parent's or loved one's reactions lead me to more sin?

(In for a penny, in for a pound type of thinking)

Do I love my family and treat them with respect?

Station 5: Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Do I pass up an opportunity to help others?

Do I look the other way when I know I should help?

Do I let what others think of me hinder my helping others?

Do I stand up and help those with no voice?

Station 6: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Do I see God in others?

Do I remember that we all are made in God's image and treat them accordingly?

Do I put more worth in objects or activities that lead me away from God?

Do I step up when needed?

Do I put God first no matter what others may think?

(Much like Veronica bucking the crowd to get to Jesus)

Station 7: Jesus Falls the Second Time

Do I lie to others that care about me? Do I lie at all?

Have I failed to follow through on promises without care?

Do I go to God when I fail?

When I fail, do I ask for mercy, healing, and forgiveness?

Station 8: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Do I listen to the Word of God?

Do I attend mass and hear the Word of God? Truly listening and participating?

How often have I watched, read, or listened to things (or people) that lead me away from God?

Station 9: Jesus Falls the Third Time

How often do I let my sin weigh me down and cause me to fall?

Do I seek out help with my sin?

Station 10: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

How often do I judge others by their appearance?

Do I automatically judge others without knowing them; forgetting they are made in the image of God?

Do I go along with the crowd in judging others?

Do I tease or bully others by appearance?

Do I join in a group that bullies or torments others?

Do I tear others down to build myself up?

Do I define my own self-worth by my appearance or the way I look?

Do I deliberately destroy reputations?

Station 11: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

How often do I turn away from your mercy?
How often do I argue or find reasons not to go to church?
How often do I forget the reasons Jesus went to the cross?
Do I even recognize and acknowledge my sins?

Station 12: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Do I reflect on my sins daily?
Do I pause before using words or actions that may harm others?
Do I pray?
When I pray, is it just to “do it” or am I truly talking with God?

Station 13: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

And

Station 14: Jesus is placed in the Tomb

Do I lose hope that God loves me?
Do I use that loss of hope to walk away from God?
Do I trust in God?
Do I seek God not only when “lost” but just to be with God?
Do I help others seek God and help them find their way?

Reflective Questions on Stations of the Cross

Do I truly love and show God’s love to others?
Am I honest with myself and others in that love?
Do my actions reflect God’s love?