



A Short Guide for Confession

What is Confession?

Confession 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 also is wounded by our sins.

This is good news for all of us, because we all are sinners and in need of God's forgiveness. In the sacrament of Penance, we meet Christ in the person of the priest, ready and eager to absolve us and restore us to new life. We confess our sins to God through his minister, the priest, who absolves us in the name of Christ.

For forgiveness of sins, three acts are required from the penitent as parts of the sacrament: contrition, confession and satisfaction.

- **Contrition** - or sincere sorrow for having offended God, is 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.

- **Satisfaction** - an important part of our healing is the "penance" the priest assigns, to help us make amends by doing something good for ourselves and others.

How to Make a Good Confession

Preparation: Before going to confession, take some time to examine your conscience. This might be done by reviewing your life in comparison to the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the example of Christ's life. Pray to God for forgiveness.

Going to Confession:

1. The priest will welcome you, and you both make the sign of the cross: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. You continue with these traditional words:

Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been (how long) since my last confession.

You might also add any other background that will allow the priest to be most helpful to you in the circumstances of your everyday life.

3. The priest will encourage you to have trust in God, and invite you to confess your sins.

Speak freely and honestly -nothing you say in confession will ever be repeated by the priest. The priest may talk with you about how to make up for the sins you confess. He will then assign an act of penance corresponding to the nature of the sins -this may take the form of prayer, self-denial, and especially service to one's neighbor.

4. Act of Contrition -you offer a prayer expressing sorrow for your sins and resolving not to sin again. You may say this in your own words, or use this traditional prayer:

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 Saviour Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

5. Following this prayer, the priest extends his hands over your head and says the words of absolution: 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. As the priest concludes this prayer, he will make the sign of the cross over your head - you bless yourself and respond, Amen.

6. The priest will invite you to **go in peace**.

After Confession: When you leave the confession room, **take a few minutes of private prayer and thanksgiving. Plan how you will complete the assigned act of penance.** Make a firm resolve to continue your conversion by a life renewed according to the Gospel and the love of God.

Sample Examination of Conscience

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

- Am I actively helping or hindering my relationship with God? Do I make regular efforts to pray, to grow in my faith life, to learn and come closer to God and God's ways?
- Does my life show that I love God above all else and my neighbor as myself? What takes me away from this kind of loving?
- Am I actively showing my care and concern for the people with whom I live and work and interact daily? Do I take care of the world around me? How well do I care for myself and the gifts that God has given me?
- Have I deliberately harmed myself or another by my words or actions, or by my failure to speak or act? Am I afraid I have done something that no one can forgive?

Consider these words of Christ as you reflect on your life, and ask yourself...

"...for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me ' Then they will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'"

When did I see someone hungry for a friend or a kind word, and decided I was too busy? When did I see someone thirsting for acceptance and I chose to shut the door? When did I see someone vulnerable and I refused to protect or defend them? When did I see someone sick or imprisoned by despair, anger, or guilt and I refused to visit them with hope, love and forgiveness? When did I put myself before someone else, and turned them into one of "the least of these"? Where have I sacrificed someone's dignity, and humanity for the sake of my own comfort and popularity?