



■ *Oh, mercifullest one of all,
Oh, generous as dear,
None lived so lowly, none so small,
Thou couldst withhold thy tear:
How swift, in pure compassion,
How meek in charity,
To offer friendship to the one
Who begged but love of thee!
Oh, gentle word, and sweetest said!
Oh, tender hand, and first
To hold the warm, delicious bread
To lips burned black of thirst.*

*“After Spanish Proverb”
Dorothy Parker*

1 Sin harms our relationship with God.

We know from the Old Testament that God is “a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity, continuing his kindness for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness and crime and sin” (Exodus 34:6–7). The greatest teacher of God’s mercy and compassion is Jesus, the Son of God. By the things he did and the way he lived, Jesus showed us God’s mercy.

We all need God’s forgiveness because we all are inclined to sin. When we turn away from God and turn toward something that is not God, we sin. **Sin** is freely choosing to do something that we know is wrong and against God’s will. We can sin in thought, word, or action. We can also sin by omission—by *not* doing what God wants us to do. When we sin, our relationship with God is weakened by our unwillingness to live as God calls us to live.

Sin is always a personal choice. The world is a challenging place in which to live, and we are often tempted to do what is wrong. But a temptation is not a sin. It is an attraction to sin. Everyone is tempted. Even Jesus was tempted. In order to overcome temptation and avoid sin, we need God’s grace to be strong in making good choices.

There are different types of sin. An act or deed so grave that it breaks our relationship with God is called a **mortal sin**. In order for a sin to be a mortal sin, three conditions are necessary:

- The sinful action or attitude must involve a grave and serious matter.
- We must have clear knowledge that what we are doing is mortally sinful.
- We must freely choose and fully consent to this serious evil.

All three conditions must be met for any sin to be considered mortal.

Less serious sin is called **venial sin**. Venial sins do not break our relationship with God, but they weaken it. Venial sins do harm to others, to ourselves, or to our relationship with God and others.

Jesus taught us that God's mercy far exceeds any wrong or harmful action on our part. By his death on the cross and his rising to new life, Jesus saves us from sin. We must be willing to admit our weakness, however, and to turn to God for forgiveness and compassion.

What is sin? How does it affect our relationship with God and with others?

forgiven and our friendship with God and the entire Church is reestablished. We celebrate God's love and forgiveness and our love and forgiveness of one another.

When we are baptized, original sin and all the sins we have committed are forgiven. We are born into new life with Christ. The grace we receive at Baptism, however, does not keep us from sinning. We are still free to choose and to act, and at times we act without thinking of the consequences. But our conscience helps us to think about the consequences of our actions, and helps us to think before we act.

Conscience is the most basic awareness in us of what is right or wrong. It is the ability we have to decide whether an action is right or wrong. Conscience is always to be formed by the teachings of Christ and his Church. We are called upon to continue forming our conscience throughout life.

2 Reconciliation is the sacrament of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus, the Son of God, forgave the sins of those who truly believed in him. Jesus willed that his apostles do the same:

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

John 20:21-23

Only bishops (the successors of the apostles) and priests forgive our sins in the sacrament of Reconciliation. They do this in the person of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the **sacrament of Reconciliation**, through God's grace and mercy, our sins are



Our conscience is formed in many ways:

- by learning all we can about our faith and the teachings of the Church
- by praying to God, asking the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide us
- by reading and reflecting on Scripture
- by seeking advice from wise people we respect, such as parents, teachers, parish priests, and responsible friends
- by examining our conscience on a regular basis, thinking about how we have treated God, ourselves, and others.

Sometimes we may not take the time to see the impact our choices and actions have. We lose sight of where we are going. We may not realize the positive direction our lives have taken, or that we have strayed from the path that God calls us to take. When we examine our conscience, we honestly ask ourselves about our relationship with God and others.

Have you ever had a disagreement with someone and then reconciled with the person? Think about what happened. What did you do? What did the other person do?

Do YOU Know?

During an examination of conscience, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us judge the direction of our lives. Here are some possible questions you can ask yourself:

- Do I make anyone or anything more important to me than God is? Have I found time to read Scripture and listen to God's word? Do I pray?
- Have I treated God's name and the name of Jesus with reverence?
- Do I participate in Mass and keep Sunday holy by what I say and do?
- Have I respected, obeyed, and cared for my parent(s) and guardians? Have I been kind and considerate to my brothers and sisters?
- Am I a person who respects all life? Am I patient with the elderly, aware of the hungry and homeless, and respectful of those different from me?
- Do I treat my own body and the bodies of others respectfully? Have I harmed myself, or encouraged others to harm themselves, by improper use of things like drugs, alcohol, or food?
- Have I stolen anything from anyone?
- Am I a truthful person? Have I been fair and honest with friends, family, teachers, and myself?
- Do I try to do God's will in my relationships with others?
- Have I made God my treasure rather than material possessions?

3

We celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation.

As we prepare to seek and receive God's forgiveness, we should examine our conscience quietly and prayerfully. We should focus on whatever might separate us from God's life of grace. But we should also confess our venial sins as well. You may want to discuss this with the priest to whom you will confess your sins.

We can celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation individually or communally. When we assemble as a community to celebrate the sacrament, each of us meets with the priest individually and privately for confession and absolution. There are four main parts to the sacrament of Reconciliation:

- **Contrition.** Contrition is heartfelt sorrow for sins committed. This is the most important act of the penitent, or person seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. Sadness for the sin and the desire to sin no more must be genuine. Our intention must be to sin no more.

- **Confession of sins.** The penitent speaks with the priest, telling him what sins were committed. Admitting our sins allows us to take responsibility for our actions and to open up to God and the Church. The priest cannot tell anyone what he has heard in confession. We call this the seal of confession.
- **Penance.** Since sin weakens us and our relationship with God and others, we need to do something to show we are sorry for the sin. The priest gives us an act of penance to perform, such as saying a prayer or doing a good deed.
- **Absolution.** The priest, in the person of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, absolves (forgives) the penitent's sins. The priest makes the sign of the cross over the penitent and says the prayer of absolution.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is a wonderful way to praise God and thank him for his mercy and forgiveness. It is also a way to grow in God's life of grace and in the love of one another.

THE CHURCH CELEBRATES THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Celebrating Individually

The priest greets me.
 I make the sign of the cross.
 The priest asks me to trust in God's mercy.
 He or I may read something from the Bible.
 I talk with the priest about myself.
 I confess my sins.
 The priest talks to me about loving God and others.
 He gives me a penance.
 I make an act of contrition.
 In the name of God and the Church, the priest gives me absolution. (He may extend or place his hands on my head.)
 Together the priest and I give thanks to God for his forgiveness.

Celebrating Communally

We sing an opening hymn and the priest greets us.
 The priest prays an opening prayer.
 We listen to a reading from the Bible and a homily.
 We examine our conscience.
 We make an act of contrition.
 We may say a prayer or sing a song, and then pray the Our Father.
 Each of us then meets individually and privately with the priest.
 I confess my sins. The priest gives me penance.
 In the name of God and the Church, the priest gives me absolution. (He may extend or place his hands on my head.)
 After everyone has met with the priest, we join together to conclude the celebration. The priest blesses us, and we go in the peace and joy of Christ.