

Reconciliation

How to Celebrate the Sacrament of Penance

Our Catholic Church treasures the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Many priests offer a communal celebration of penance, especially during Advent and Lent. But private reconciliation is usually available every week of the year.

If you would like to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, here's what to do:

Prepare. Prayerfully recall your sins. Some will be specific actions. Some represent a more general pattern of behavior.

Go to the priest. Visit when he is in the reconciliation room at your parish or ask for an appointment. You may either kneel anonymously behind a screen or sit in a chair where you may speak face to face.

Be welcome. You and the priest may greet each other. Make the Sign of the Cross. He may urge you to have confidence in God. You may indicate the interval since your last confession or anything else that will help. Just use common sense. Either you or the priest may read from Scripture.

Confess your sins. Some penitents begin with a formula like, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." But you don't have to. Let the priest know your sins. You may discuss the sins you confess so the priest can give you the best counsel.

Receive a penance. The priest will recommend some action after you leave to indicate to God the sincerity in your heart. Usually he suggests prayer or self-denial. If it sounds difficult, let him know.

Pray for forgiveness. The priest may invite you to say a prayer of sorrow aloud. If you remember the Act of Contrition, you may use it. But you may also speak simply from your heart.

One form of the Act of Contrition 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
Or
Lord Jesus, Son of God
have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Receive absolution. This is the best part. The priest proclaims absolution, and God forgives your sins. The prayer 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 in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Conclude. The priest may say, "Give thanks to the lord for he is good." If so, answer, "His mercy endures forever." Or he may conclude informally.

Change! Go forth, and with God's help, begin to live a new life of freedom from the slavery of sin!