

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

“The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.” (CCC #1421)

Purpose

Participants will refresh their learning and experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They will do that by working with the Rite of the Sacrament, using the prayers and ritual to reflect on forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing in their own lives. This session is designed for high school youth and may be done with groups from 10-60 participants.

Session at a Glance

7:00 p.m. Welcome and Prayer

7:10 p.m. Introduction and Overview

7:20 p.m. Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and Healing in the Movies

7:35 p.m. The Sacrament of Reconciliation:

Celebration of God’s Forgiveness - Call to Ongoing Conversion

Extend the Session: Examination of Conscience (add 15-30 minutes)

8:05 p.m. How to Go to Confession and Closing Prayer

Extend the Session: Reconciliation Service (60 minutes)

Extend the Session: Reconciliation, Forgiveness, and Healing in the Movies (15-30 minutes)

Consider facilitating a discussion with participants using one or more of the following examples (books, movies). Show the movie clip(s) or read/listen to chapter from the book, and ask participants to identify examples of reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing.

There may be other resources (movies, books) you or the youth may be familiar with that can be prepared for use ahead of time, but the following are some suggestions to get you started:

a. The scene in the *Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawntrader*: The chapter in which Eustace (now a dragon) repents of his treatment of and attitude towards his cousins and the crew of the Dawntrader and is forgiven and washed clean in the pool of Aslan. (Also excellent for baptism.)

b. In the movie and book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, there is a scene in which Boromir is dying and seeks forgiveness from Frodo for his attempt to take the Ring of Power. Later on, as the remaining Companions of the Ring Bearer prepare Boromir for his funerary rites, Aragorn strokes him gently and breathes on him – a sign of healing for his spiritual ailments, perhaps? (Anointing)

c. In the movie and book, *The Two Towers*, there is a scene in which Pippin seeks Gandalf’s forgiveness for stealing the palantir to look in it. Gandalf’s response eases Pippin’s fear and banishes his guilt.

d. In the movie, *The Green Mile*, there is a scene towards the end where corrections officer Edgecombe seeks the forgiveness of the prisoner, John Coffey (an alleged rapist and murder – later shown to be not guilty), for not being able to stop his execution, for treating him so violently, and for goading another prisoner into shooting the real criminal sadist.

e. In the movie, *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen Prejean’s practical faith leads her to confront a seriously nasty killer. Prejean agrees to act as spiritual advisor to Matthew Poncelet who is nearing execution for a brutal rape and double murder. He consistently refuses to admit guilt or to seek forgiveness. In one of the final scenes, as he is about to be executed, he looks in Sr. Helen’s eyes, he flashes back to the night of the brutal killing, and we finally glimpse his journey from cynical killer to, ultimately, the broken-down penitent.

f. The documentary, *The Power of Forgiveness* (<http://www.thepowerofforgiveness.com/about/>), may well be an aid in leading your group in to a discussion before talking about the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The website offers “forgiveness resources” and “How Forgiving Are You Quiz.” One of the stories included deals with the forgiveness of an Amish community towards the man (and his family) who senselessly shot several young girls in an Amish school. The example of this Amish community has been an inspiration to many.

Note to Leader: You will need a television or projector and DVD player. Your audio visual set up needs to be adequate for everyone to be able to hear/see the movie clips.

Extend the Session: Examination of Conscience (15-30 minutes)

Divide the participants into groups of three or four, inviting them to develop an *examination of conscience* for their own use or to be distributed to their peers for their use, too. Most *Examens* are based on the Ten Commandments, which is a fairly traditional approach for Catholics over the ages. However, it might also be useful to encourage the groups to use the Beatitudes when developing their *Examen*. Begin the time by talking briefly about the purpose of examining one’s conscience prior to celebrating the sacrament. Then give each group one or two commandments or beatitudes to work with; or give them one commandment and one beatitude. Offer them examples of what types of questions one could ask oneself when making an examination of conscience. Once done, gather their work, review it at a later time, and give it back to them at the next gathering in booklet form.

Note to Leader: A web search will garner you more than one example of an examination of conscience for young people. Critique them well before offering them to participants or using examples from them. Look for examples that allow young people to think about their lives and how they are trying to live up to the demands of the Gospel and Church teaching.

Extend the Session: Reconciliation Service (60 minutes)

After the session, invite participants to gather together and create a reconciliation service according to the Rite that can be used for a youth retreat later, or even offered to the pastor for use with the parish at Advent or Lent. Use the elements of the ritual from *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI, The Rite of Penance* (see **Resource 1, Preparation for Session Leader**).

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Nametags
- Materials for prayer setting
 - Small table covered with a nice cloth
 - Bible (use one that is not dirty or tattered)
 - Large candle
 - Cross or crucifix
 - Oil in bowl
- Stole (ask the pastor to borrow the stole he uses in the confessional for this evening’s session)
- 3 x 5 index cards, or similar sized paper, for each participant
- Pen or pencil for each participant
- **Handout 1, How to Go to Confession**, one for each participant
- **Resource 1, Preparation for Session Leader**

Prepare in Advance

1. Set up the gathering space so it is conducive to dialogue and sharing: *Suggestion:* The cluster style is good for presentations with breakout groups. Clusters easily return to being a single group. Tables can be either round or rectangles.

2. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and name tags. **Hospitality is important:** As the leader, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

Note to Leader: Given the time frame you have and the fact that you are going to be leading a session dealing with two sacraments, you may wish to have snacks available for the group as they arrive or before dismissal for the evening and not available during a break.

3. Set up a prayer area using the materials mentioned above.

4. Prepare a reader for the opening and closing prayers.

5. If you are going to extend the session by showing a movie clip, or breaking open a chapter of a book, make sure you have projector and screen (TV, DVD, DVD player), or have made copies of the chapter you are going to use. Remember that in order to use copyrighted material for educational purposes, it should be collected and destroyed after the session.

Session Outline

Welcome and Prayer (10 minutes)

Welcome the participants; if this is a new group for you or if they do not know each other well, it will be worthwhile to spend a few minutes doing a community building or warm-up activity.

Welcome to our session tonight as we explore one of the Sacraments of Healing—Reconciliation. Along with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, these sacraments enable the community of the Church to live the Gospel more deeply by healing the souls and bodies of those who are sick—whether from sin or physical illness.

All of us have sinned, whether that is easy to admit or not. Modern research into the “science” of forgiveness reinforces the idea that people who cannot seek or grant forgiveness do not mature, and they may even be impaired psychologically for the rest of their lives. The Gospel tells us, however, that we cannot continue in our praise and worship of God if we are not reconciled to our parents, our brother, our sister, our friend, our neighbor, etc. (Matthew 5:24)

With this in mind, let us now gather together to pray.

Call to Prayer

Prayer Leader:

Let us take a moment to center ourselves on God present within and among us. (Pause for about 30 seconds.) God gives us breath and with each breath we breathe in the Spirit of Peace and breathe out the concerns of our lives. (Invite participants to take several deep cleansing breaths.)

We begin with the sign of our faith. In the name of the Father ...

Gather

Prayer Leader:

"Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God the Father and from Jesus Christ who loved us and washed away our sins in his blood." (From the Rite)

Listen

Prayer Leader:

Please listen in the Scripture reading for the effect of Jesus' forgiveness in the life of the tax collector. You will be invited to share what you have heard after the reading.

The reader proclaims Luke 15:1-7. Allow a few moments of quiet reflection. After the reading, allow at least 5-6 people to share depending on the number of participants. (Alternatively, ask the participants to continue the prayer by sharing in groups of three for two minutes or so and then ask for some very few to share with the group.)

Respond

Prayer Leader:

I invite each of us to share how the tax collector responded to the forgiveness he received. I will share first, and then I will invite one person to share. After that person offers his/her thought, s/he will then invite someone else to share.

After the sharing:

Let us now respond to the reading with a very ancient Christian prayer. Repeat each line after me. You will learn it quickly, and we will continue to repeat it several times—inhaling a cleansing breath with the first line and exhaling that breath with the second.

Jesus, Son of the Living God

(Participants repeat the phrase)

Have mercy on me, a sinner.

(Participants repeat the phrase)

Continue repeating the mantra (The Jesus Prayer) until you feel the spirit of the prayer has opened the participants to the coming evening's experiences. If you would find it to be helpful, play some meditative instrumental music in the background.

Prayer Leader:

Let us now continue our time together in peace. Amen.

Introduction, Overview (5 minutes)

Before we begin our work together for the evening, let us review, for just a moment, what we know about sacraments in general. When the Vatican Council II met (1962-65), one of the most important things the gathered bishops did was to renew the liturgy—the communal prayer of the Church. This renewal included revising how the Church celebrates the seven sacraments. This is what the Council said about the meaning of the sacraments for our lives as Catholic Christians.

Note to Leader: It is not necessary to read the entire quote, but please emphasize that part of the text that is in bold print.

"The purpose of the sacraments is to **sanctify** men, to **build up** the body of Christ, and, finally, to **give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct**. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called 'sacraments of faith.' They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity.

It is therefore of the highest importance that the faithful should easily understand the sacramental signs, and should frequent with great eagerness those sacraments which were instituted to nourish the Christian life.” (SC no. 59) [Emphasis Added]

One of the things we want to do together tonight is to gain a deeper understanding of the sacramental signs of two sacraments—the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. But, first of all, let us remember what we already know about all the sacraments.

In your presentation, for the next few minutes, please emphasize the following about sacraments:

Sacraments are human activities — The ordinary things we do in life, ordinary things we use in life which, when celebrated ritually, are much more than symbolic—they contain the reality they express. We use water, bread, wine, oil; we wash bodies, touch the sick tenderly, lay on hands. We use human experience and earthly things to encounter God. Thus, when we wash an infant or an adult in the waters of baptism, we are REALLY washing away sin; when the priest offers the food of bread and wine to God the Father, the power of the Holy Spirit makes them REALLY the Body and Blood of Christ. We use words, gestures, rituals that are quite common but in the sacraments they come to contain a whole set of new meanings.

Sacraments are actions of the Church — They are always community rituals; NO sacrament is for a single person or a small subset of people. Even if the celebration is centered around that person or that small group, the sacrament, its meaning, and its effect are for the whole church.

Sacraments are the action of Christ — When the Church celebrates the sacraments, Christ celebrates the sacraments, for the Church is the Body of Christ. Sacraments are encounters with Christ, and we can only encounter Christ through faith. This is why baptism is the first and requisite sacrament for us. Not only do the sacraments express our faith; they nourish our faith; they strengthen our faith. We say that the sacraments “give grace”; i.e., they bring us into deeper friendship with Christ.

Reconciliation: Celebration of God’s Forgiveness—Call to Ongoing Conversion (30 minutes)

Step 1: (5-7 minutes)

What are your memories of your first confession?

How would you describe your current experience of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation?

What questions do you have at this stage of your life?

List the responses to this question on a sheet of newsprint or on a board.

Note to Leader: Questions may arise such as “Why do we/I have to go to confession?” “If I tell my sins to God, I know he forgives me, so why do I have to tell a priest?” “If our sins are forgiven during Mass (in the penitential rite), why do we need confession?” Honor these questions – assure them that you will help them answer them during the session tonight.

Step 2: (6-7 minutes)

I want you to think about how you would answer the following questions. After you have had time to reflect on your answers in silence, you will have an opportunity to share with your neighbor and then, if you wish, with the group.

Offer the questions one at a time. After each question, allow some quiet time for reflection, and then re-ask the question inviting general comments from those in the group.

Have you ever experienced forgiveness in your life? How would you describe your feelings on being forgiven by someone? On forgiving someone else?

How would you describe the effect of sin in your life/our lives?

Do you think there are some things about how you live your life that need to change if you are to live what Christ and the Church teach? Without being specific, can you name the areas of your life where you would like to see some change happen?

How do you think that change (conversion) can happen?

Step 3: (5 minutes)

All of us have done things that we are not proud of; that are hurtful to ourselves and others; actions that are sinful. Depending on how hurtful our actions have been, we experience guilt at what we have done; that is, we know that we should act differently. St. Paul experienced much the same in his life. He tells us, "What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate" (Romans 7:15).

With all of our mothers and fathers in the faith who have preceded us, we know we have sinned. We know that we must turn back to God, and re-focus our lives on Christ and the Gospel. This turning back or around again to God is called conversion; in Greek, the word is *metanoia*. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is Christ's and the Church's gift to us, helping us make those changes that turn our lives around again to God.

How the sacrament is celebrated has changed often during the life of the Church, and we do not have time here tonight to study the history of the sacrament. The Second Vatican Council revised the Rite of Penance so that we have been able to move beyond delivering a laundry list of sins to the priest in the confessional to an understanding of communal sin—which means that we recognize that our sins have an effect on others. This revision helps us understand that the gift of the sacrament is of immense help to move us to the perfection that Christ calls us to in the Gospel.

How many ways have you experienced the sacrament?

(Answers may include both individual and communal. Youth may also mention that sometimes that have confessed face to face and sometimes they have used the confessional with a screen between the priest and themselves.)

How would you compare the different ways Catholics can celebrate the sacrament? Which form of the rite do you like better? Why?

(Get a few answers from participants.)

The first form of the rite, individual confession, in some ways can be compared to the way Catholics "went to confession" for almost 300 years. The revised rite for individual confession is meant to give us a deeper and more personal experience as compared to the earlier rite. There is a place in the rite for the confession of our sins within the context of the reading of Scripture, of being reminded of God's mercy, and of sharing conversation and prayer with the priest. In this ritual environment we are absolved of our sins and sent away in peace. This form of the sacrament offers us an opportunity to reflect on our life and seek spiritual growth.

The second form of the rite places the sacrament of reconciliation in the context of a communal penance service. We experience this most often in our parish during the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent. Since this is the setting, there is no opportunity for extensive sharing and prayer with the priest since the time with him is necessarily short due to the numbers of people present. However, this communal rite serves to remind us that the sacrament of penance, like all of the other sacraments, has a definite community dimension. Despite all the ways the rite has changed over 2000 years of Church history, what remains clear is that sin and reconciliation are intimately connected to our relationship to the community. No sin is "private"; each sin we commit weakens our relationship within the community—either because our sin directly affects someone else, or because any sin weakens our ability to love and be in relationship with Christ who makes us one in community through his Body and Blood.

Because this is so, when we commit a serious (mortal) sin, in order to reconcile to God and to the community, it is not enough to confess our sin to God in private or to another person, because that will not put us right again with the community, and will not reconcile us to the Church. The rite provides that

we confess our sins to the priest. God will always forgive those who repent, but the priest represents the rest of the community of faith. So, even in individual confession, this connection with the priest serves to remind us that our sin affects the Church, our reconciliation causes the Church to rejoice, and our relationship to the Trinity is deepened because we commit ourselves to change, to live in the grace of our baptism.

Step 4: (8 minutes) **Elements of the Sacrament**

Refer to the participants' comments at the beginning about their memories of their first (and current) experiences with the sacrament and ask if they can name the "steps" in the sacrament. Hopefully, they will come up with

- Confession
- Penance
- Absolution/Reconciliation

Each of these three elements of the sacrament encourages us on the journey of conversion. Let's start with the first step—confession.

What does '**confession**' include? (Get comments from participants.)

This is the element of the sacrament that everyone, even non-Catholics, seem to know about. Unfortunately, our knowledge seems to rest in the reciting of the laundry list of sins that we talked about earlier. The true meaning of the word 'confession' has to do with praising God—"confessing" what God has done in our lives by bringing us to this moment. Telling our sins is secondary—what God does is always the most important part.

When we sit in the Reconciliation room face-to-face with the priest or in the confessional, we begin our experience of the sacrament with the Sign of the Cross, the sign of our redemption. After hearing the Word of God, we begin our confession of our sins. If we get worried, or concerned, or nervous, the priest will help us—the community is always with us.

What do you associate with the word '**penance**' when it comes to the sacrament? What do you think is the purpose of receiving a penance before we are absolved of our sins in the sacrament? (Get comments from participants.)

After we have confessed our sins, the priest proposes a penance so that we "make up" for our sin, so that we may continue our journey of conversion, and return wholeheartedly to God. In order to give us a proper penance, the priest has to have a true understanding of our sins, so we must carefully consider our confession. Though God forgives us freely and completely, the effects of our sin must be undone, and by accepting and doing the penance we are given, we are given the grace to continue to change our life over time—so we can become less selfish, more honest, more kind, more compassionate, more obedient, less oriented to things, and more oriented toward God.

The penance may be prayer, Scripture, acts of service or charity, etc. We accept our penance from the priest and then express our sorrow—by praying the *Act of Contrition*, reciting the *Jesus Prayer* as we prayed at the beginning of our session, or expressing sorrow in our own words.

The last step is '**absolution**'. At this moment in the sacrament, we experience the intimacy of God's love when the priest places his hands on our head and speaks the words of absolution and forgiveness:

"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.

Absolution is also called **reconciliation** and this gives the name to the sacrament. This element of the sacrament focuses on God's love for us, and in this love we are absolved and reconciled. At this moment of the sacrament, the community rejoices. In the restored rite, this is the moment in the sacramental celebration that brings the peace and the continued transformation that the priest prays for over us.

Step 5: (5 minutes)

Invite the participants to take a few moments to reflect on their past celebrations of the sacrament and their future ones:

Think for a moment about how you prepare well for and celebrate well the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What do you need to change in your life? How do you want your relationships with friends and families to be better? How do you want to deepen your relationship with God? (Get comments from participants.)

How to Go to Confession and Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Ask youth what makes it hard and what makes it easy to go to confession? Allow for several sample responses. Give each participant a copy of **Handout 1, How to Go to Confession**, to use as they prepare for their next celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Review the handout and provide information about opportunities to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation in your community.

Conclude with this reflection and prayer:

Let's end this reflection on the sacrament with the dismissal that we hear from the priest as he dismisses us from the sacramental celebration. But first, let us listen to the words from Pope Benedict XVI (Homily, Yankee Stadium, April 17, 2008):

"Let us trust in the Spirit's power to inspire conversion, to heal every wound, to overcome every division, and to inspire new life and freedom. How much we need these gifts! And how close at hand they are, particularly in the Sacrament of Penance! The liberating power of this sacrament, in which our honest confession of sin is met by God's merciful word of pardon and peace, needs to be rediscovered and reappropriated by every Catholic."

V. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

R. His mercy endures forever. (Participants repeat the phrase)

V. The Lord has freed us from our sins, let us be at peace.

R. Amen.

Announcements and Refreshments (10 minutes)

Thank the young people for their participation, make any necessary announcements, and invite them to enjoy some refreshments.

This session was written by Leota Roesch, Coordinator of Catechist Formation & Children's Catechesis, Department of Family Catechesis, Diocese of Phoenix.

Resource 1

Background Preparation for Session Leader

Introductory Statement for the Leader's Reflection on Confession

"When a Catholic comes from confession, he does truly, by definition, step out into that dawn of his own beginning... in that brief ritual God has really remade him in His own image. He may be grey and gouty; but he is only five minutes old." G.K. Chesterton wrote this as part of a response to George Bernard Shaw after the latter, distressed by Chesterton's

conversion to Catholicism, said that the thought of Chesterton kneeling in a confessional was “monstrously comical.” Chesterton’s response highlights an important theological construct about the Sacrament of Penance; namely, that the sacrament is a call to ongoing conversion. Our basic conversion is our initial turning to Christ in baptism. Adults looking towards baptism at the Easter Vigil, have come that far because the church has discerned with them evidence of conversion that will bring them to the font. For infants who are baptized, conversion, *metanoia*, is supported and fostered in the childhood years by family, friends, and the faith community. This all goes to say that Christ, in the sacrament, imparts a special grace on those who celebrate it so that they can continue to live out the charism of their baptism and live ever more faithful lives in relationship to Father, Son, and Spirit.

Citations from *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

← Sacraments of Healing

- **1420** Sin weakens our life in Christ which we received in Baptism
- **1421** “The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation, even among her own members. This is the purpose of the two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. “

← Sacrament of Reconciliation

- **1468** “... Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament....”
- **1469** The sacrament reconciles one with the Church and restores the bond of community among the people of God. NO sin is private.
- **1470** We are called to conversion.

Understanding the Sacraments: Penance and Understanding the Sacraments: Anointing by Lawrence E. Mick.
[Chicago: Liturgical Press, 2007.]

Leaders can find more background information on the Sacraments of Healing by searching www.americancatholic.org; especially helpful are articles in *Catholic Update* and *Youth Update*. A particularly helpful article is: *Ten Tips for Better Confessions: The Gift of Reconciliation* by Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M., S.T.D.

Committee on Divine Liturgy. *Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance: Questions and Answers*, Copyright © 2003, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/penance.shtml>

Leaders may find the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy by using the search engine at the Vatican website, <http://www.vatican.va/>. Venerable translations of the documents are those in volumes edited by Austin Flannery, OP and Walter M. Abbott, S.J. Additionally, the series by Bill Huebsch, *Vatican II in Plain English: The Constitutions* is very helpful today.

The Decree and Introduction to the Renewed Rite of Penance provide an in-depth theology of the sacrament. *The Rites of the Catholic Church as Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI, The Rite of Penance* (pp. 359-380) New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1976, 1983. The same is true for the theology of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (pp 603-615).

Handout 1

How to Go to Confession

Preparation: Before going to confession, compare your life with the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the example of Christ and then pray to God for forgiveness.

Going to Confession (*You are encouraged to sit face-to-face with the priest so that the experience of the sacrament is more personal for you.*)

The priest welcomes you and then you both make the sign of the cross, saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." Next the priest will urge you to have confidence in God.

If you are not known to the priest, it is important for you to indicate your current status in life., the time of your last confession, some difficulties you may have in leading the Christian life, and anything else that may help him celebrate the sacrament with you.

The Word of God: Then the priest or you may read a passage from the Bible. The Bishops of the United States suggest several passages including Ezekiel 11:19-20, Matthew 6:14-15, Mark 1:14-15, Romans 5:8-9, Ephesians 5:1-2, 1 John 1:6-7 and 9, or another text from Sacred Scripture.

Confession of Sins and the Act of Penance: You will then confess your sins. If necessary, the priest will help you to make a complete confession and to have sincere sorrow for sins against God. The sorrow you feel for your sins is known as contrition and must include a resolve/strong desire to sin no more and to avoid all future occasions of sin.

The priest then may offer you some advice to help you begin a new life/continue on your journey of conversion and, when appropriate, will lead you to resolve to make appropriate restitution for the harm you have caused others. The priest imposes an act of penance or satisfaction on you. The penance corresponds to the seriousness and nature of the sins and may take the form of prayer, self-denial, and especially service to your neighbor and works of mercy.

The Prayer of the Penitent: After this, you will pray a prayer expressing sorrow for your sins and resolving not to sin again. A card with several examples of the prayer may be provided in the confessional: If you do not know the prayer by heart, you may read it.

Here is one example of the *Prayer of the Penitent* – sometimes called an *Act of Contrition*. (From the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Divine Liturgy)

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.

Absolution by the Priest: Following this prayer, the priest extends his hands, or at least his right hand, over your head and pronounces the formula of absolution. As he says the final words he makes the sign of the cross over your head: Here is the prayer he will pray.

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.

You answer: Amen.

Proclamation of Praise: After receiving pardon for your sins, you will be invited to praise the mercy of God and give God thanks in a short invocation taken from Scripture, such as "Rejoice in the Lord and sing for joy, friends of God" (Ps 32:1-7, 10-11), "The Lord has remembered his mercy" (Lk 1:46-55), or "Blessed be God who chose us in Christ" (Eph 1:3-10). The priest will help you with this.

Dismissal of the Penitent: Then the priest will tell you to go in peace. After celebrating the sacrament, the Church invites you to continue your conversion and express it by a life renewed

according to the Gospel and more and more steeped in the love of God, for "love covers over a multitude of sins" (1 Pt 4:8).

Based on suggestions from the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship