

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (RECONCILIATION)

### THE CONFESSIONAL

1. A *green light* or an *open door* is a signal that the priest is available to hear your confession.

2. When you enter the confessional, either: *kneel* behind a screen, or *sit face-to-face* with the priest in a chair. Choose the option that will help you make a good confession.

### RECEPTION OF THE PENITENT

#### 3. Sign of the Cross

The priest may then offer a short prayer.

### CONFESSION OF SINS

4. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (\_\_\_ months/years) since my last confession. [You may add any additional information about yourself that you feel might be helpful to the priest.]

5. The penitent shares his/her sins with God.\*

### COUNSEL

6. The priest is present to provide guidance, support and counsel; he is a servant of God's mercy. There may be a little conversation but, ultimately, you as the penitent determine what is talked about—it is *your* confession to God.

### PENANCE (I)

7. Based on the sins mentioned and any conversation you might have, the priest will give you a penance to carry out.\*\*

### ACT OF CONTRITION

8. This is a *formal* admission to God of sorrow, as well as the desire to get on a better course. In the recent past, there were set words; you may use these words or use your own. The important thing is to express your *contrition* with truthfulness in the heart. Here are three or four possibilities:

9. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

*or* 10. My God, I am sorry for having offended you. I have sinned against you and your Church. I firmly intend with the help of your grace, to do penance, to sin no more, and to love as I should. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for me. In his name, dear Father, have mercy.

*or* 11. O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. (Amen.)

*or* 12. Prayer/Words of your own choosing.

### ABSOLUTION

13. The priest 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."

### DISMISSAL

14. The priest will say: "Go in peace;" or "Your sins are forgiven, go in peace."

15. Thanks be to God.

### PENANCE (II)

16. Go and do the penance given to you by the priest. Doing the penance completes the sacrament.

### \* WHAT & HOW TO CONFESS???

The short answer: All mortal sins that you are aware of (see: CCC 1456). A mortal sin "destroys the charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God . . . by preferring an inferior good to him" (CCC 1855). A mortal sin is an *intentional rupture of one's relationship to God and God's divine law of charity*.

### 3 CONDITIONS FOR SIN TO BE "MORTAL"

- 1- It involves *grave matter*. The 10 Commandments are a start, but they are not everything. Consider: murder, blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, pride, despair, occult activity, intentionally getting drunk, dwelling on lustful thoughts, greed, envy, abuse, sloth, gluttony, hatred, abortion, etc. . . . "Grave matter" has largely to do with *life, death, and respect for God, others, and self*.
- 2- It requires *full knowledge* that a sin is, in fact, "grave matter."
- 3- It requires *complete consent*—a deliberate personal choice to violate the basic laws of life, death, and charity, and to *intentionally rupture* one's relationship to God, others, and self. (CCC 1858-1859)

BUT . . . Your *intent* is important to consider: was there malice in your heart, or is it simple human weakness? **Mortal sins are not necessarily black-and-white.** Talk to the priest about this.

It is sometimes helpful to mention to the priest how *often* the sin has been committed. This helps him (and you) understand if the sin is a significant part of your life, or is just a once-in-a-while occurrence.

## VENIAL SINS

**Venial sins** are your “everyday” human weaknesses: a moment of gossip or impatience, being a bad example, holding a grudge, etc. With venial sins, charity *still remains in your heart*, but it’s been somewhat weakened by sin.

Venial sins do not *need* to be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance, *but* it is often helpful to confess them to receive spiritual counsel from the priest, and to maintain that humble awareness of our everyday need for God’s compassionate mercy and guidance.

**A NOTE: Receiving the Eucharist with a spirit of contrition in your heart, and a sincere desire to grow in charity, cancels out venial sins.**

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### \*\* WHAT IS A PENANCE???

A penance is *not* a punishment; it is a *remedy* for better Christian living. It is about restoring right relationship with God and the Church.

A penance does two things: (1) it “makes up for” the sins we have done (we call this “satisfaction”), and (2) it helps us get on the right path again in life and faith.

With “devotional confessions” (simple and frequent confessions) penances tend to be other acts of devotion; for example, a decade of the Rosary, or the Divine Mercy Chaplet, or a series of Our Fathers.

With “conversational confessions” (situations that require more counsel and conversation) penances tend to be tailored to the sins mentioned; for example, praying for someone you gossiped about, etc.

## WHAT’S THE POINT OF THE SACRAMENT???

The point is to:

- (1) **CONFESS** our *need* for God’s mercy,
- (2) **CONFESS** our *faith* in God’s mercy,
- (3) **CONFESS** God *as God* in our life, and reestablish “right relationship” with God
  
- (4) **CONFESS** our sins to ourselves and God
- (5) **CONFESS** our sins to the Church (in the person of the ordained priest)
- (6) **CONFESS** that what we do (or don’t do) in our life *affects others*
  
- (6) **CONFESS** our desire to *be a better Catholic*
- (7) **CONFESS** our desire to *be more loving, more merciful, more faithful, more . . .*
  
- (8) **CONFESS, DO PENANCE, RECEIVE GOD’S GRACE AND MERCY**  
to get on the right path in life again;  
the path of our God, who is:  
“merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”  
[Ps 103:8]

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### OTHER RESOURCES

“From Sinners to Saints,” by Fr. Kurt Stasiak, OSB. Paulist Press, 2014.

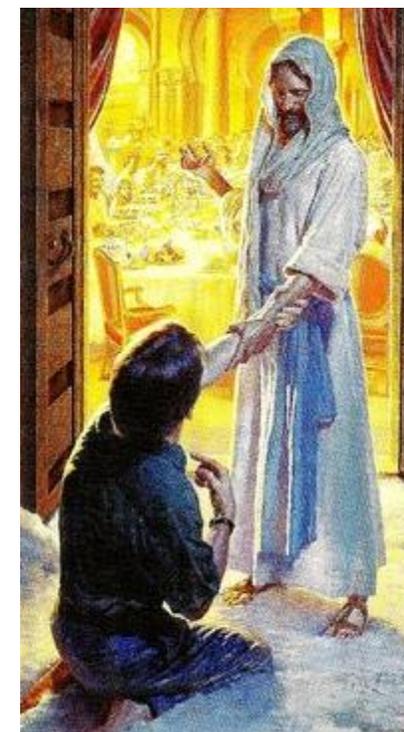
“The Sacrament of Reconciliation,” by David M. Coffey (“Lex Orandi” Series). Liturgical Press, 2001.

“Reconciliation: The Mercy of Christ,” by Vivian Boland, OP. Catholic Truth Society (Publishers to the Holy See), 2004.

Your parish priests, deacons, and pastoral ministers.

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

*Restoring  
Right Relationship  
With God & Church*



*“Return to me,” says the Lord.*

*“We are many parts of the one Body,”  
says Saint Paul.*