

How to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Attitude We Bring to the Sacrament

It isn't easy to confess our sins. We don't like to admit our faults. Some people think Catholics think of themselves as 'no good.' If we need to confess our sins so often, then we are either very sinful or we fail to realize that Jesus has already seen to the forgiveness of our sins.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation knowing that forgiveness of our sins is made possible by the gift of Jesus' Crucifixion for our sins. Realizing this, as we prepare to celebrate this sacrament, we should not come in dread but with great hope. We come not in dread but we do come with *contrite* hearts, admitting we have sinned and thus need God's forgiveness and that God is eager to do that.

As we outline the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we need to keep God's forgiveness, love, and mercy at the center of our thoughts.

The Sacrament Itself

1. Kneeling at the screen or face to face

As you enter the confessional, you have a choice to make. You can go to the kneeler behind the screen. This is the traditional way, kneeling before God and remaining anonymous. Or, you can sit in the chair and go face to face, a little more personal, seeing the priest not as just a human being but as God's intermediary. Either way, the priest can never tell anyone what you say because of the Seal of Confession.

2. The Sign of the Cross

As we begin all our prayers, we begin here with the Sign of the Cross. It is especially appropriate to begin this sacrament where we seek God's forgiveness, with the image of the Cross where Jesus paid the price so that our sins will be forgiven.

3. Prayer and Scripture (Optional)

The priest may say a prayer here asking God's help for you to make a good confession of your sins. The priest may also read a passage from the Bible

reminding us of God's mercy. God's mercy is something to celebrate when we have sinned.

4. Confession of Sins

If it has been a long time since the last time you celebrated this sacrament and you don't know what to do, tell the priest you aren't sure what to do and he will help you.

Begin by saying how long it has been since the last time you received this sacrament.

We do this to frame the time period we are confessing.

Confess Your Sins.

This is where it is hard. We don't like to admit our failings. Yet here we are saying to the priest, the worst of our behaviors. We don't want the priest to think any less of us. Don't worry! The priest doesn't want to remember what you say in the confessional. But there is real value in speaking our sins out loud. It shows that we admit our failings and know we need God's help.

Receive Counsel.

Here the priest may ask questions about your sins. This is to help you understand the cause of your sinful behavior so that you may change. If it has been a while since your last confession and you asked the priest to help you, the priest may ask about other sins you haven't mentioned. This is not to increase your guilt. It's sole purpose is to help you make a thorough confession of all your sins.

5. Receiving a Penance

Then the priest will assign you a penance to complete after you leave the confessional. The penance is not punishment but something to express our sorrow for our sins and help us change (conversion). It may be to do a kind act for someone, read a passage from the Bible that might relate to your sins or to say prayers like the "Our Father" or "Hail Mary" seeking God's help and Mary's intercession to help you sin no more.

6. Act of Contrition

In the Act of Contrition, we express our sorrow for our sins, that our sins offend God, and our desire to change. Here is one.

*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.*

7. Absolution

This is what we come to receive, *the forgiveness of our sins*. The words of Absolution remind us that it is because of Jesus' Crucifixion that our sins are forgiven.

*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.*

To which we can respond with joy—**Amen**.

8. Dismissal

The priest then says words of dismissal, such as “Go in Peace” to which you respond “**Thanks be to God**” truly giving thanks for the gift of this sacrament through which we receive God’s forgiveness renewing us in joy and hope.

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