

Pardon and Peace: How to Go to Confession

As part of Jubilee 2025, Pope Francis is encouraging the faithful to more fully participate in the Sacrament of Penance.

Many people have avoided celebrating the Sacrament of Penance, sometimes for years at a time, because they “don’t know what to do.” Confession shouldn’t be scary or intimidating. This brief guide is intended to help prepare you to celebrate this sacrament.



1. Examination of Conscience

Preparation usually begins with an individual examination of conscience. The examination of conscience is a valuable spiritual discipline in which we look at our lives in light of the Gospel and come to a deeper awareness of the sins we have committed. This simple examination of conscience helps us to reflect on our lives in light of Christ’s great commandment of love.

The Lord God says: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart.”

- Are there false gods that I worship by giving them greater attention and deeper trust than I give to God?
- Do I keep Sundays and feast days holy by participating in Mass with devotion?
- Have I been willing to be known as a Christian in private and public life?
- Do I offer God my difficulties, joys, and sorrows?
- Do I turn to God in times of temptation?

The Lord says: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

- Do I genuinely love my neighbor? Or do I use other people for my own ends?
- Have I been an obedient child? A good parent? A faithful spouse?
- Do I help those less fortunate than myself?
- Do I look down on other people because of their race, politics, religion or way of thinking?
- Am I concerned for the good of the community in which I live, or do I live only for myself?
- Have I been ready to forgive those who have wronged me?

Christ our Lord says: “Be perfect as your Father is perfect.”

- Where is my life really leading me? What use have I made with the gifts God has given me?
- Have I been patient in accepting the sorrows and disappointments of this life?
- Have I revered my body as a temple of the Holy Spirit?
- Have I gone against my conscience out of fear or hypocrisy?
- Do I experience the freedom that comes from being a child of God and serving him, or am I a slave of worldly forces?

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this sacrament called confession, penance or reconciliation?

Yes! This sacrament has been called by all three names. We make our confession to a priest; we do penance, and we receive absolution. Through this sacrament, we receive reconciliation with God. Today, the Church refers to this sacrament as the Sacrament of Penance or Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Why do we need a sacrament of Reconciliation?

We need the sacrament of Reconciliation because sin doesn’t just damage us as individuals. “Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time, it damages communion with the Church.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 1440) In sacramental confession, we receive God’s forgiveness through the priest, who “is not the master of God’s forgiveness, but its servant” (CCC 1466).

What sins should be confessed, and do I go to confession even if I haven’t committed a mortal sin?

The Church teaches that “all serious (mortal) sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession” (CCC 1456). At the same

2. Welcome of the Priest

You normally have the option of confessing your sins face to face, or anonymously, behind a screen. The priest welcomes you, and then both you and he make the sign of the cross. Then in his own words the priest urges you to have confidence in God. If you don't know the priest, you may want to indicate your state of life (i.e. married, single, widowed, divorced), how long it has been since your last confession, and anything else that may help your confessor.

3. Confession of Sins

Next, the priest invites you to confess your sins. Occasionally, the priest may ask questions to help you in making a full confession. The confession of sins should be as complete as possible. That doesn't mean it needs to take a long time. The important thing is that the penitent "looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible." (Catechism 1455)

4. Advice of the Priest

Sacramental confession is not therapy; the priest will not attempt to solve your problems for you. He may offer some advice to help you. He will also give you a simple 'penance,' which may take the form of prayer, self-denial, service to one's neighbor, or work of mercy.

5. Prayer of the Penitent

Next, the priest invites you to pray an act of contrition. There are many different options for this prayer. Here is a familiar 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.

6. Prayer of Absolution

Now, the priest prays the prayer of absolution, making the sign of the cross during his final words. Make the sign of the cross and respond, "Amen."

7. Dismissal

Now the priest dismisses you, usually by saying, "Go in peace." Respond, "Thanks be to God," and then, go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord!

Adapted from *Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance: Questions and Answers*, a publication of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Questions continued

confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is strongly recommended, for it helps us to form our conscience and fight against patterns of weakness that can lead us to sin. (CCC 1458)

What are the effects of this sacrament?

Through the grace of this sacrament, we are reconciled at every level. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II: "The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation."

