

## The Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation

*We have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God. Let us hold fast to our profession of faith. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet never sinned. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find help in time of need.* Hebrews 4:14-16

The Sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation) is one of the seven sacraments given to the Church by Christ. Through confession of our sins and their absolution in this sacrament, we are forgiven and reconciled with God and with the community of the Church. Our relationships with God and with others, damaged by our free choices to act against the virtue of charity, are healed by the grace of Christ's Cross and Resurrection, applied to our specific needs for mercy.

There are four parts to the Sacrament of Penance: **contrition** (sorrow for our sins); **confession** (naming our sins); **penance** (a way of making some reparation for our sins); **absolution** (the sacramental forgiveness of our sins).

Sin is any thought, word, or deed contrary to the will of God. We can sin either by action (choosing to do something we are obliged not to do) or by omission (choosing not to do something we are obliged to do). For a sin to be "**mortal**" (serious, grave), three conditions are required:

- 1) we act with full knowledge of what we are doing and are aware that it is wrong; and
- 2) we act with full freedom in choosing as we do; and
- 3) it is a serious matter in itself.

If any of these conditions are lacking in our actions or omissions, it is a "**venial**" sin. While sacramental confession/absolution is only required for serious (mortal) sin, we are also strongly encouraged to confess our venial sins (our lesser faults), since they also wound our relationship with God and others.

To make a good confession, we begin with a **sincere examination of conscience**. This is a time of reflection on our life of faith, identifying simply and humbly where we have made wrong choices contrary to God's will. This preparation for the sacrament is very important so that we can truly be healed of our faults. (*sample on reverse*)

To go to confession:

- 1) Begin with the **Sign of the Cross**. Father may say some words of welcome to confession.
- 2) Say: "**Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was \_\_\_\_\_**" (name how long it has been since your last confession ... for example, "two months ago" or "before Easter").
- 3) Then say: "**My sins are \_\_\_\_\_**" (here, you name your sins simply. Serious sins must be confessed in "number and kind" – for instance, "I missed Mass three times, I lied to hurt another twice, I drank alcohol underage once" ...). When you have finished your confession, end by saying, "For these and all my sins, I am truly sorry."
- 4) Father will give you a few words of advice and encouragement. He will then assign a penance to you – perhaps some prayers or good actions. He will then invite you to make an Act of Contrition.
- 5) Clearly and meaningfully, pray an Act of Contrition. There are many different forms that can be used; the most important thing is that you sincerely express your sorrow for having sinned and your intention to do better in the future. One common form of the Act of Contrition:

***O my God, I am sorry for all my sins because they displease You,  
Who are all good and deserving of all my love.  
With Your help, I will sin no more. Amen.***

6) Father will pray the prayer of Absolution, granting you "pardon and peace" from Christ through His Church. He will conclude with words such as: "God has forgiven you; go in peace." Respond: "**Thanks be to God**" and return to the church to pray in thanksgiving for God's mercy and perhaps to pray your penance.