

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Frequently Asked Question

What is the sacrament of Penance?

Penance is the sacrament by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven through the absolution of the priest.

The priest has the power to forgive sins from Jesus Christ, who said to His apostles and to their successors in the priesthood: "Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

These words of Christ oblige us to confess our sins because the priest cannot know whether he should forgive or retain our sins unless we tell them to him.

What are the effects of the sacrament of Penance, worthily received?

Penance, worthily received:

1. Restores or increases sanctifying grace;
2. Forgives our sins;
3. Reduces the eternal punishment (if necessary) and at least part of the temporal punishment due to our sins;
4. Helps us to avoid sinning in the future;
5. Restores the merits of our good works if they have been lost by mortal sin.

The sacrament of Penance also gives us the opportunity to receive spiritual advice and instruction from our confessor.

What must we do to receive the sacrament of Penance worthily?

To receive the sacrament of Penance worthily, we must:

1. Examine our conscience;
2. Be sorry for our sins;
3. Have the firm purpose of not sinning again;
4. Confess our sins to the priest;
5. Be willing to perform the penance the priest gives us.

Is it necessary to confess every sin?

It is necessary to confess every mortal sin which has not yet been confessed and forgiven; it is not necessary to confess our venial sins, but it is better to do so.

What is mortal sin?

Mortal sin is a grievous offense against the law of God. This sin is called mortal, or deadly, because it deprives you of sanctifying grace, takes away the merit of all your good actions, deprives you of the right to everlasting happiness in heaven, and makes you deserving of everlasting punishment in hell.

To make a sin mortal these three things are needed:

1. The thought, desire, word, action, or omission must be seriously wrong or considered seriously wrong;
2. The sinner, must be mindful of the serious wrong;
3. The sinner must fully consent to it.

What is venial sin?

Venial sin is a less serious offense against the law of God, which does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace, and which can be pardoned even without sacramental confession.

A sin can be venial in two ways:

1. the evil done is not seriously wrong;
2. the evil done is seriously wrong, but the sinner sincerely believes it is only slightly wrong, or does not give full consent to it.

Venial sin harms us by making us less devoted to the service of God, by weakening our power to resist mortal sin, and by making us deserving of God's punishments in this life or in purgatory.

Why does the priest give us a penance after confession?

The priest gives us a penance after confession so that we may make some atonement to God for our sins, receive help to avoid them in the future, and make some satisfaction for the temporal punishment (time in purgatory) due to them. Besides the penance given to us in confession, we can satisfy our debt of our temporal punishment by prayer, attending Mass, fasting, almsgiving, the works of mercy, the patient endurance of sufferings, and indulgences.