

## **An Overview of Confession**

On April 25, 2022, the Vatican formally approved an updated translation of the Order of Penance to be used for celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) in the United States. The new ritual books are now published and the updates can begin on Ash Wednesday of this year (February 22, 2023). Using this and the season of Lent as our motivation, we will be publishing a small catechesis on this wonderful Sacrament over the next several weeks. Look for handouts like this in the bulletin every Sunday during Lent!

The handouts will address the following topics:

February 19: An Overview of Confession Including the Updated Language

February 26: Confession in the Life and History of the Church

March 5: The Preparation of the Priest and the Penitent

March 12: The Welcoming of the Penitent and the Reading of the Word of God

March 19: The Confession of Sins and the Acceptance of an Act of Penance

March 26: The Prayer of the Penitent and Absolution by the Priest

April 2: Proclamation of Praise and Dismissal of the Penitent

### **What to Expect Going to Confession**

Before enumerating the steps to confession, it should be noted that it is important to spend time asking the Holy Spirit to help give you courage and to reveal your heart so that you may make as complete a confession as possible.

#### **1. The Sign of the Cross**

The penitent begins by making the sign of the cross with the priest. It is a good reminder for us that what we celebrate in confession is a continuation of the victory that Christ won for us on the cross.

#### **2. Welcoming of the Penitent**

The priest then welcomes the penitent with an encouragement to trust in God's mercy. You may hear him say something along the lines of this: "May the grace of the Holy Spirit illumine your heart, so that with confidence you may confess your sins and come to know the mercy of God."

#### **3. Reading from Sacred Scripture**

There follows an *optional* brief reading from Sacred Scripture. This helps us to focus the continuing call to conversion, but also to focus on God's mercy which is promised to a repentant sinner.

#### **4. Confessing Sins**

Then follows the confession of all mortal sins one has knowledge of (it is also appropriate to confess venial sins). We shouldn't simply cherry pick what is bothering us the most, and we must not hold anything back because we are afraid of what the priest might think. We trust in God's mercy acting through the priest, and we know the more we open ourselves up by being vulnerable with God, the more we are in a position to receive the fullness of grace that he wants to give us!

It is customary (although not required) in the United States to begin with "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." It is important, however, to let the priest know how long it has been since your previous confession as this helps when giving counsel. We should also give the amount of times we struggled with a sin to the best of our knowledge (it is okay to be approximate if necessary); this also allows for better counsel.

#### **5. Counsel from the Priest and Assignment of Penance**

The priest then offers counsel to encourage the penitent to continue to seek to live a virtuous life focused on the love of God and assigns a penance.

#### **6. Prayer of the Penitent**

This is commonly fulfilled by the 'Act of Contrition' or another prayer available on the sheet. Perhaps the most common version is "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because of your just punishments, but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen." It is also possible to make up your own, provided it **asks God's forgiveness**, and should **make known the penitent's contrition and resolution to live a new life with God's help**. Simpler is probably better.

#### **7. Prayer of Absolution**

The prayer of absolution follows. Once the capitalized words are said, your sins are considered forgiven! "God, the Father of mercies, through the Death and Resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and poured out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant 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." The penitent responds "Amen."

#### **8. Proclamation of Praise and Dismissal**

Finally, there is a proclamation of praise of God and dismissal by the priest: "May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the Saints, whatever good you do and whatever evil you endure, be for you a remedy for sin, an increase of grace, and the reward of eternal life. Go in peace." The penitent responds "Thanks be to God."