

Pardon & Peace

A GUIDE FOR CONFESSION

Many people have avoided celebrating the Sacrament of Penance, sometimes for years at a time, because they "don't know what to do." But confession doesn't need to be scary or intimidating!

The following brief guide will help you understand how to celebrate the Sacrament individually.

DAY OF RECONCILIATION
for our Parish Family

Saturday, March 14, 2026
1:00pm—4:00pm
St. James Cathedral

1 Preparation

The celebration of this sacrament begins at home, with the private preparation you make. This preparation is called the *examination of conscience.* We look at our own lives, our relationships with others, and our relationship with God in light of the example of Christ, the Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes. Usually, we know our sins all too well; the examination of conscience helps us to look at them in the light of the Gospel, and be better able to express them in confession.

The Lord God says: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart." Is my heart set on God, so that I really love God above all things? Or am I more concerned about the things of this world? 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 the Mass with attention and 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 contributed to the well-being and happiness of my family by patience and genuine love? Have I been an obedient child—a good parent—a faithful spouse? Do I truly do all I can to help those less fortunate? Do I look down on other people because of race, class, or creed? Am I concerned for the good of the community in which I live, or do I spend my life caring only for myself? Have I been ready for forgive those who have wronged me, or do I harbor hatred and the desire for retribution?

Christ our Lord says: "Be perfect as your Father is perfect." Where is my life really leading me? What use have I made of time, of health and strength, of the gifts God has given me? Do I use them to become more perfect every day? Have I been patient in accepting the sorrows and disappointments of this life? Have I reverenced 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 of the children of God, or am I the slave of forces within me?

2 Welcome of the Priest

You have the option of confessing your sins face to face, or of confessing anonymously. This is your choice. The priest welcomes you and then both you and he make the sign of the cross, saying, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Then in his own words the priest urges you to have confidence in God. Indicate your state of life (i.e. married, single, widowed, divorced), how long it has been since your last confession, and any other context 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. What he will do, however, is offer some advice to help you in starting a new life. He will also give you a simple "penance," which may take the form of prayer, self-denial, service to one's neighbor, or works 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. You can learn one of the following by heart, or feel free to bring this sheet with you.

> **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.**
>
> or:
>
> **Lord Jesus, you chose to be called the friend of sinners. By your saving death and resurrection free me from my sins. May your peace take root in my heart and bring forth a harvest of love, holiness, and truth.**
>
> or:
>
> **Father, I have sinned against you and am not worthy to be called your child. Have mercy on me, a sinner.**

6 Prayer of Absolution

Now the priest extends his hands over your head and prays the prayer of absolution, making the sign of the cross over you during the final words: "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." You respond, **Amen**.

7 Dismissal

Now the priest dismisses you. You respond, **Thanks be to God**. Go in peace!

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

ART CREDITS On the reverse side, *The Baptism of the Lord*, Hans Gottfried von Stockhausen, 1994