

GOING TO CONFESSION 101

I have encouraged every Catholic to regularly celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a way to grow in holiness. Celebration of this sacrament is especially recommended during the Season of Lent as we look forward to Easter and the renewal of our baptismal promises. For those who may be “out of practice” with the sacrament, I offer this primer on celebrating the sacrament. Much of the work for a good celebration of a sacrament takes place prior to arriving at church. An honest, humble and thorough examination of conscience helps you to prepare.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is normally celebrated one-on-one, penitent and priest. During this time of pandemic, the order of service is slightly different, depending on whether you are celebrating at the House of Mercy or in a communal setting.

Once at church, say a prayer to the Holy Spirit, asking for the grace to make a good confession.

1. The priest will welcome you.
2. Begin the liturgy by making the Sign of the Cross.
3. A simple formula can get you going: “Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was _____ days/months/years ago and these are my sins.”
4. You then list the kind and number of your sins (e.g. I missed Mass 3 times; I lied 20 times) – feel free to bring a written list of your sins with you into the confessional.
5. The priest may ask you questions and/or offer you counsel and encouragement.
6. The priest will give you a penance (e.g. “For your penance, please pray 2 Hail Marys”).
7. The priest then invites you (the penitent) to make an Act of Contrition. There are no required words, although you need to include that you are sorry for your sins and that you will amend your life. A commonly used Act of Contrition is the following:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to good, I am sinned against You, whom I should love above all things.

I firmly intend, with the help of Your grace, 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. Amen.

8. The priest then prays the prayer of absolution (forgiveness):
God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son, has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God give you pardon and peace.
I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
9. You answer, “Amen.”
10. The priest may then say, “God has forgiven your sins. Go in peace.”
11. You respond, “Thanks be to God.”
12. You then leave and as soon as possible complete the penance the priest has assigned to you.

Believe it or not, celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the easy part. The hard part is actually amending our life so that we do not commit those sins again. For this, we need God’s grace, which God abundantly offers us, especially in the Eucharist, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. May God give you peace, courage and humility as you prepare to celebrate the Sacrament of his love and mercy.

Peace, Fr. Ralph Talbot