

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

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Different Types of Sin

- Original Sin
 - The sin of Adam and Eve into which all human beings are born
 - Removed through Baptism
- Venial Sin
 - A lesser offense against God which does not result in the loss of heaven
- Mortal Sin
 - A grave offense against God which results in the loss of heaven
 - Removed through sacramental confession

Different Types of Sin

“If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God and he will give him life. This is only for those whose sin is not deadly.

There is such a thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray”

(1 John 5:16).

Different Types of Sin

Can mortal sin be forgiven outside of Confession?

- Confession is the ordinary way in which mortal sin is forgiven
- In extraordinary cases, when it is impossible to get to a priest, mortal sin can be forgiven outside of Confession (e.g., imminent death)
- In ordinary circumstances, when we are conscious of having committed a mortal sin, we should go to Confession as soon as possible
- If we cannot get there right away, we are obligated to go as soon as we can

The Good News

- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered and died on our behalf, making atonement for our sins.
- On the third day after His death, He rose again and now sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father.
- No matter what we have done in the past or failed to do, there is forgiveness for us in His Name and real hope that we too will rise again.
- We need only come to Him!

The Good News

How do we come to Jesus? How is the grace of His saving death and resurrection applied to us?

Typical Non-Catholic Christian View of Salvation

- Highly individualistic: “It’s just me and Jesus!”
- No need to do anything: “All I have to do is love Jesus!”
- No understanding of sacramental graces

Catholic Christian View of Salvation

- Sense of the community: “I belong to the Church, the Body of Christ!”
- Need for our belief in Jesus to become active in our works
- Dependence upon sacramental graces

The Good News

- Ultimately, the only question that matters is:

Are we coming to Jesus on His terms or our own?

- What does it mean to love Jesus?

Jesus said: “If you love me you will keep my commandments. ... He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me”

(John 14:15, 21).

The Role of the Church

- Jesus established the Church to dispense His saving grace to the world.

- He gave the Apostles the authority to forgive sins:
“Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them,
and whose sins you retain are retained”
(*John 20:23*).

“[God has] given us the ministry of reconciliation”
(*2 Corinthians 5:18*).

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The testimony of the Letter of James

- “Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful” (*James 5:14-16*).
- It says “confess your sins to one another” because in the early Church sins were confessed, not in private, but before the assembly
- Nevertheless, this was carried out under the authority of the presbyters – “summon the presbyters of the church”

The Ministry of Reconciliation

God works through human "instruments"

- ***God alone can heal*** — yet He has given healers the ministry of healing (He works through them to heal the body)
- ***God alone can forgive sins*** — yet He has given priests the ministry of forgiveness (He works through them to heal the soul)
- “He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father” (*John 14:12*).
- “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (*John 15:5*).

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Testimony of the early historical Christian writings

- *The Didache*, circa 70 - 150 A.D.:
“In church, make confession of your faults Assemble on the Lord’s Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one” (4, 14).
- Saint Ignatius of Antioch, c. 107 A.D.: “The Lord ... forgives all who repent, if their repentance leads to the unity of God and to the council of the bishop” (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 8).

The Sacraments and the Incarnation

Catholicism Is an “Incarnational” Religion

- In the Incarnation, God became man, the invisible God became visible.
- In the Sacraments, we receive the invisible grace of God through visible signs (i.e., water, oil, bread, wine, etc.) and through our bodily senses.
- In Confession, we receive God’s grace through speech (i.e., confessing our sins) and through hearing (i.e., the voice of the priest).

The Purpose of Penance

- The penance assigned by the priest is not a way of “earning” forgiveness.
- Our sins are wiped away by the priest’s absolution, *before the penance is carried out.*
- Penance is a drawing upon the merits of Christ to repair the harm our sins have caused — an invitation by God to participate in the healing of the wounds we have made.
- “Though he be healed, his wounds are not seen by God as wounds, but as honours. And as sin is punished here with sorrow and penance, in contrary fashion it will be rewarded in heaven by the courteous love of our Lord God almighty, who does not wish anyone who comes there to lose his labours” (Blessed Julia of Norwich, *Revelations* 17).

The Benefits of Confession

Confession to God Alone

- Coming to God on our terms, not His
- Tendency to downplay the seriousness of sin
- Less certainty of forgiveness
- Reduced sense of the communal aspect of sin
- Absence of sacramental graces

Confession to a Priest

- Going before an authority figure fosters the virtue of humility, the cure for pride
- Requires us to take responsibility for our actions
- Actually hearing the words “Your sins are forgiven” helps us to let go of guilt
- Re-establishes bond with community in a real way
- Sacramental graces help us to avoid committing the same sins in the future