

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Through the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, the new life of Christ is received. But the weakness of human nature and our inclination to sin continue to remain and affect our lives. The Church offers us the **Sacraments of Healing**, namely, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, to assist us on our journey toward holiness in union with and in friendship with God.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus forgave sin and healed those who were spiritually and physically broken. Jesus willed that the Church continue, even today, His work of healing and salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the purpose of the two Sacraments of Healing.¹

1. Reconciliation is a sacrament of the New Covenant, instituted by Christ in which forgiveness of sin committed after Baptism is granted through the Priest's absolution to those who, with sincere sorrow, confess their sins and promise to make satisfaction for the sin.²
2. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can be addressed interchangeably as the Sacrament of Conversion, or Penance, or Confession.³ It is considered as the Sacrament of Conversion because we are called to turn from our weakened nature toward sin and return to God from whom we have strayed.⁴

As a Sacrament of Penance, it describes the satisfaction to be made as amends for the sins committed and confessed. Simply, it is a Sacrament of Confession whereby we acknowledge our errors and seek absolution.

3. Christ conferred upon the Apostles the ministry of forgiving sin. By the Sacrament of Holy Orders, Bishops and Priests continue this ministry to forgive sin in the name of the Holy Trinity. The priest acts in the person of Christ to reconcile the sinner both to God and to the Church. By sin we distance ourselves from the commonality of the Church, which is the Mystical body of Christ.
4. Sin injures and weakens the sinner as well as his/her relationship with God and neighbor. Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain other things. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."⁵ Sin, then, is turning away from the love of God and His will for our eternal happiness, and, in its stead, seeking one's own pleasure and will.
5. Sins are evaluated according to their gravity or seriousness. A **Mortal Sin**,

¹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 396, para. 1421) Print.

² The Sacrament of Penance – Catholic Encyclopedia

³ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 415, para. 1486) Print.

⁴ Ezek. 18:21

⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 505, para. 1849, citing St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*. no.22) Print.

labeled such to signify its gravity that would be fatal to our personal salvation, is the performance of physical or mental action against the Divine Law, consciously and freely chosen. For a sin to be considered mortal, the act must be of a grave nature, committed with full knowledge of its seriousness, and done with full free consent. Mortal sin destroys the loving relationship with God, and if not repented, it results in a loss of God's grace and exclusion from the Kingdom of God.⁶

A **Venial Sin** is a departure from the moral order in a less serious manner. It does not completely separate us from God, however it weakens that love and impedes our practice in the virtues and in acts of goodness.⁷

Virtue is a disposition for doing good that is habitual and firm. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but also to give the best of himself/herself. A virtuous person tends to follow the good with his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.⁸

6. The Gospels provide numerous occasions of Jesus' mercy and His forgiveness of sin. When the woman who was caught in adultery and was to be stoned, Jesus, having dispersed the crowd, asked, "*Where are your accusers? . . . nor do I condemn you; go and sin no more.*"⁹ When the paralytic was placed at the feet of Jesus, He first forgave the man's sins and then cured his affliction.¹⁰ When the sinful woman knelt at His feet at the house of the Pharisee, Jesus forgave her sins because she "*had loved much.*"¹¹ Jesus' actions throughout His ministry were a ministry of forgiveness of sin, of reconciling people to God, and leading everyone to true happiness.
7. Only God can forgive sin, but Jesus willed that the Church be the instrument for forgiveness and reconciliation that He attained for us on the Cross with his Blood. He entrusted the power of absolution from sin to His Apostles when, after His Resurrection, '*He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.*'"¹² By instituting this Sacrament, the baptized are offered a new possibility of conversion, forgiveness and healing of the spirit.
8. The new life we receive at Baptism has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin. Throughout life, we struggle for conversion directed toward holiness and the eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.¹³ This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work; it is a

⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (pp. 507-508, para. 1857-1861) Print.

⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (pp. 508-509, para. 1862-1864) Print.

⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 495, para. 1803) Print.

⁹ John 8:8-12

¹⁰ Luke 5:17-26

¹¹ Luke 7:36-50

¹² John 20:22-23

¹³ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 397, para. 1426) Print.

movement of a contrite heart drawn and moved by faith to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.¹⁴

9. Jesus' call to conversion does not call for fasting and mortification for its own sake, but for conversion of heart, an interior conversion. Without such, forgiveness remains sterile and false; interior conversion urges expressions in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.¹⁵ Interior repentance is a radical re-orientation of our whole life, a return to God with our heart, a turning away from evil and repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His graces.¹⁶
10. Conversion is first of all a work of the Grace of God who urges our hearts to return to Him. God gives us strength to begin anew. It is in the discovering of the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin, and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from Him.¹⁷
11. The penance that is imposed upon the confession of one's sins is to make satisfaction for the evil committed. Just as a wrongful act against another person requires doing what is possible to repair the harm (e.g. return of a stolen article, or pay compensation for injury) so too, sinful act requires a satisfactory action to make up for the offense committed. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. The sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin; he must make satisfaction for his sin, which we call "penance."¹⁸
12. The penance the Priest imposes takes into account the person's personal situation, and considers the gravity and nature of the sin committed. Such penance may consist of prayers, an offering, Works of Mercy, service to neighbor, voluntary self-denial, and above all the acceptance of the burden he must bear in fulfilling the given penance.¹⁹
13. It is not easy for man to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues. Everyone should always ask for the graces of light and strength, frequent the sacraments, cooperate with the Holy Spirit, and follow His call to love what is good and shun evil.²⁰

¹⁴ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 398, para.1428) Print; Psalms 51:17; John 6:44; 1 John 4:10

¹⁵ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 399, para.1430) Print.

¹⁶ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 399, para.1431) Print.

¹⁷ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 399, para.1432) Print.

¹⁸ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 407, para.1459) Print.

¹⁹ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 407, para.1460) Print.

²⁰ Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 497, para.1811) Print.