



SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION



“And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NABRE)

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, also known as Confession or Penance, is one of the two Sacraments of Healing, along with the Anointing of the Sick. This sacrament was instituted by Christ to offer the baptized the grace of forgiveness and reconciliation with God and the Church when they have sinned. It restores our relationship with God and strengthens us to live in greater fidelity to His will (CCC 1421).

Why Reconciliation Is Necessary

Through the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, we receive new life in Christ and are incorporated into His Body, the Church. However, human weakness remains, and we continue to struggle with sin—acts, words, or desires contrary to God’s law.

Sin harms or breaks our relationship with God, who is the source of all goodness, and it disrupts our relationships with others. As the Catechism teaches, sin is “*an offense against God*” and “*a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor*” (CCC 1849). For example:

- **Mortal Sin:** Grave sins, such as theft, adultery, or deliberate hatred, destroy charity in the soul and sever our relationship with God. Without repentance, mortal sin leads to spiritual death (CCC 1857).
- **Venial Sin:** Lesser sins, such as impatience or gossip, weaken our relationship with God and others, though they do not completely break it.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation provides a way for us to repair these relationships and to regain the grace we lose through sin.

Christ’s Institution of the Sacrament

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not a man-made practice but a gift instituted by Christ. During His earthly ministry, Jesus forgave sins, demonstrating His divine authority and His mission to heal broken relationships.

- When the paralyzed man was brought to Him, Jesus declared: “*Your sins are forgiven*” and then healed him, showing His power to forgive sin and restore wholeness (Luke 5:17-26).
- When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Him, Jesus forgave her, saying: “*Go, and from now on do not sin anymore*” (John 8:11).
- At the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus forgave the sinful woman who anointed His feet, saying: “*Your sins are forgiven because you have loved much*” (Luke 7:36-50).

After His Resurrection, Jesus extended this ministry of forgiveness to the Apostles. He breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and said: “*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained*” (John 20:22-23). This act established the Apostles—and their successors, the bishops and priests—as ministers of reconciliation in the Church.

How the Sacrament Works

The Sacrament of Reconciliation involves four key steps:

1. **Contrition:** The penitent feels genuine sorrow for sins committed, motivated by love for God and a desire to restore the relationship.
2. **Confession:** The penitent confesses sins to a priest, acknowledging fault and taking responsibility for wrongdoing.
3. **Absolution:** The priest, acting in the person of Christ, forgives sins through the

power of the Holy Spirit.

4. **Penance:** The penitent performs an act of satisfaction—such as prayer, service, or self-denial—to repair the harm caused by sin and to demonstrate a desire for conversion.

The Effects of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings profound spiritual benefits:

- **Forgiveness of Sin:** Mortal and venial sins are forgiven, and the penitent is reconciled with God.
- **Restoration of Grace:** The sacrament restores the grace lost through sin, strengthening the penitent's relationship with God.
- **Healing of the Soul:** Sin wounds the soul, but reconciliation brings spiritual healing and peace.
- **Strength to Resist Sin:** The grace received helps the penitent avoid future sin and grow in virtue.
- **Reconciliation with the Church:** Sin harms not only the individual but also the Church, the Body of Christ. The sacrament restores communion with the Church.

The Ongoing Call to Conversion

Reconciliation is not just a one-time event but part of an ongoing journey toward holiness. Jesus calls us to an interior conversion of heart, a turning away from sin and toward God. This conversion involves:

- **Repentance:** A sincere rejection of sin and a desire to change.
- **Faith in God's Mercy:** Trust in God's forgiveness, which is always available to the contrite heart.
- **Penance:** Acts of reparation that show love for God and neighbor, such as prayer, works of charity, and self-denial.

As the Catechism explains: *“Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return to God with all our heart”* (CCC 1431).

Examples of Conversion in Scripture

Throughout Scripture, we see God's mercy extended to sinners:

- The Prodigal Son returns to his father in repentance and is welcomed with open arms (*Luke 15:11-32*).
- Zacchaeus, the tax collector, repents of his greed and promises to make amends, and Jesus declares: *“Today salvation has come to this house”* (*Luke 19:9*).
- St. Peter, after denying Christ three times, is reconciled with Jesus, who restores him to his mission (*John 21:15-19*).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a gift of God's mercy, instituted by Christ to restore our relationship with Him and the Church. It is not merely about confessing sins but about receiving the grace to turn away from sin and toward a life of holiness. Through this sacrament, we experience the healing power of God's love and the joy of being reconciled with Him.