

# THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY: HOW TO CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Why not take advantage of a great opportunity, especially if you have not been to Confession in 5 or 10 or 20 years (or even longer). We promise you a warm welcome! We promise you an experience of joy! We promise you that you will have an encounter with Jesus that will leave you feeling the best that you have felt in a long, long time!

In case you feel a little rusty about going to the Sacrament of Penance, here are some basic steps for you to follow. Don't get worried too much about the "how to," though; the priest will be very willing to help you if you explain to him that you are nervous or unfamiliar with the rite.

**1. Prepare ahead of time.** Make sure you spend some time examining your conscience, prayerfully recalling your sins and preparing what you want to tell the priest. Think about specific actions, general patterns, and attitudes. Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**2. Go to the priest.** You can go anonymously behind a screen or curtain, or you can go face-to-face. If it's helpful, begin by making the Sign of the Cross and saying, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." Then tell the priest how long it has been since your last confession.

**3. Listen to Scripture.** The priest may read a short passage from the Bible, to remind you of God's mercy, or he may ask you to read something he provides for you. This reminds us that the main thing we do in the sacrament is to proclaim God's mercy and forgiveness.

**4. Confess your sins. Listen carefully for spiritual guidance he might offer.** Tell the priest your sins. Be as direct and succinct as possible, but give him enough information so he can offer some words of spiritual guidance and encouragement. Take to heart the way the priest is trying to help you.

**5. Receive your penance.** The priest will recommend some action, a penance, for you to do to indicate your sorrow and your conversion. It might

be to say a prayer, it might be to do some act of self-denial, or it might be to do some act of charity or service toward someone else. If it sounds too difficult to accomplish or if you have any questions, do not hesitate to talk it over with him.

**6. Pray an Act of Contrition.** The priest will ask you to say a prayer of contrition (sorrow) out loud. You may express your sorrow and your intention to avoid sin in the future in your own words, or you may use the words of a formal Act of Contrition, either one given to you to read by the priest, or one that you have brought or memorized. Here is one suggested form: *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 (Rite of Penance).*

**7. Receive absolution.** Here is the best part! The priest prays the prayer of absolution, proclaiming God's forgiveness of your sins. Reflect on these beautiful and powerful words said by the priest: *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, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Rite of Penance).*

**8. Conclude by praising God.** The priest may say something like, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good," and you may respond, "His mercy endures forever."

**9. Go forth forgiven, renewed, and changed!** Go forth, with God's help, to begin living your new life in freedom, having been freed from the slavery of sin. ✨

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