

Receive

This is the heart of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We come to the “Tribunal of Mercy,” not to be judged, but to receive mercy.

“Let no soul fear to draw near me, even though its sins be as scarlet.”

The priest will invite us to accept a penance to perform that indicates our sorrow and desire to make restitution. It may seem to be a very small act, but what could we possibly give to God that he does not already have? He desires that we make this act of penance in the same way that he desires that we name our sins. It is a sign, an opportunity to demonstrate our sorrow and desire to make restitution.

For example, a small child breaks a window. He comes to his father in tears because he knows he shouldn't have thrown the ball at the window. He wants to give something to his father to show that he is sorry. So he goes to his piggy bank and gets a 10p coin.

The money came from his father in the first place and does not come close to the cost of the window. Will the father tell the child not to be so ridiculous, or will the father accept the coin and grant the child his immediate forgiveness. The tears of sorrow would have been enough to obtain the forgiveness from the father, but the coin showed to the child as well as to the father that he was indeed sorry for his action. (In this story the father would probably sneak the coin back into the piggy bank too.)

When we agree to receive the penance it is like the child's 10p coin. We want to offer something back like the child, taking from Jesus' redemptive act and putting it into the hands of the Father.

Then the priest pours out on us the incomparable gift left to the Church in the hands of priests - the total forgiveness of our sins.

The words of absolution make this very clear:

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. Amen.

Respond

Be Merciful as your Heavenly Father is Merciful

Now that we have received mercy, this is not just for ourselves, we're supposed to give it away. God wants to fill us with so much mercy that it will overflow from us to others. This gift of mercy to others is not optional, Jesus has said to us:

“Give freely what you have received as a gift” (Mt 10:8)

“Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34)

“Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36).

How are we to exercise mercy? By our actions, our words and our prayers, by performing the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and by developing an attitude of mercy in our daily lives.

We thus become “ambassadors of mercy” (2 Cor 5:20), instruments in the hand of God to bring his forgiveness and mercy to all those we meet in our daily lives.

Here in the Sacrament of Reconciliation we have a way to encounter the mercy of God. We call upon the Holy Spirit, who shows us our sins and invites us to repent and enables us to bring our sins to the source of mercy - the cross of Jesus Christ. There at the foot of the cross, we receive mercy and forgiveness and are sent as channels of mercy for others.

Confession

encountering the mercy of God



**“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.
It is (...) since I last went to confession”**

*No matter when your last confession was Jesus is waiting
like the merciful Father to receive you.*

*He is not concerned if your last confession was many,
many years ago or last week.*

*He is interested in you. In liberating you from all your lost
actions or failures to love. In coming and making his home
in you, bringing with him the joy of his friendship and love.
He wants your sins so that you are not in any way apart
from him.*

*There are some steps that will help this meeting with the
fullness of God's mercy bear abundant fruit:*

Reflect

Repent/Convert

Receive

Respond

*With grateful thanks to the Marian Fathers of the Immaculate
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‘Reconciliation: Encountering the Mercy of God’ by Fr George
Kosicki, CSB*

Reflect

In preparing for this encounter with Christ we need to call upon the Holy Spirit to ask him to show us our sins - to "convict" us of our sins (see Jn 16:8.)

Why do we need the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins? To make us feel guilty? No. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin so that we can see ourselves as we really are, recognising the depth of our sinfulness, our weakness, and our need for God's mercy.

As we allow the Holy Spirit to do this, we discover what sin is. Sin is simply a turning away from God. It doesn't harm God or diminish his love for us. It separates us from him.

If I turn away from the light of the sun and enter a cave, I place myself in darkness. The sun hasn't changed, and its light is still available to me. All I have to do is come out of the cave.

In the same way, when I turn away from God and enter the cave of my self-orientated concerns and desires, I place myself in sin. God hasn't changed, and his love and forgiveness are always available. I simply need to come back to his presence.

If we spend some time to reflect and pray to the Holy Spirit, asking and allowing him to walk us through the various types of sin so that we can see clearly the ways in which we have turned away from God - not so that we become depressed, but so that in the confessional we can come before God as we really are, convinced of our need for his mercy and longing to receive it.

Our confession becomes especially fruitful if we can first recognise and verbalise to the priest the area of our lives where we need mercy the most. The following list may be helpful in examining, under the light of the Holy Spirit, the possible types of sin in your life.

Sins of Commission

The sins against the Ten commandments:

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no false gods before me...
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Keep holy the Sabbath Day.
4. Honour your Father and your Mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.
9. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

Sins of Omission

- Omitting to love one another as Jesus loves us. (Jn 15:12)
- Omitting to be merciful as the Father is merciful. (Lk 6:36)
- Omitting to forgive another as we are forgiven. (Mt 6:14-15)

Sins of Waste

Waste of graces.

Waste of talents.

Waste of suffering.

The Father chose the way of suffering for His Son Jesus to bring forgiveness and mercy to all mankind. He has asked us to make use of our suffering uniting it with Christ's (See Phil 1:29; Col 1:24; Lk 9:23.)

Sins of Idolatry

Making idols of possessions.

Making idols of success.

Making idols of reputation (*and the list goes on...*)

Sins of Self-Salvation

Trying to save ourselves by our own efforts.

Trying to save ourselves without considering others.

Trying to live without God.

Repent/Convert

No one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive... For his mercy endures forever!

Pope Francis - Misericordiae Vultus

Having revealed to us the ways in which we have turned away from God, the Holy Spirit now invites us to turn back. This turning back is called "repentance" or "conversion."

We are now ready to enter the door of the confessional, aware of our sinfulness, to turn back to God through his representative, the priest.

We don't need to explain why or go into great details, just simply and concisely say out loud what we have done. Our Father in heaven knew our sins before we came to him. He asks us to state them out loud so that we know them too.

But we do not need to be destroyed by guilt or sadness! God is waiting for us in his representative, the priest, longing to give us all the graces to help us live again as a true Son or Daughter of the heavenly kingdom. He wants to grant us through this sacrament the strength, the hope, the faith, the love that we have wasted and so desperately need.

After we have recounted our sins, the priest will invite us to make an *act of contrition*:

O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you; and by the help of your grace I will not sin again.

The act of contrition summarises in a formula everything that we have remembered to say and anything we have forgotten and places it all in the merciful hands of God. It gives us the way to say sorry and ask for the help that only God can give to live a new life.