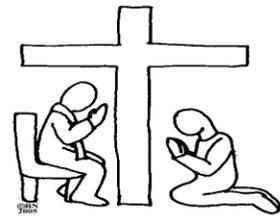


SACRAMENT OF PENANCE – CATECHETICAL HELPS



Regarding the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, it is appropriate to reinforce in our homes, parishes, and schools the key information on this sacrament of our Lord's mercy and forgiveness – the Sacrament of Penance.

- The Sacrament of Penance was instituted by Christ Jesus on Easter Sunday night, one of the first things He did after he rose from the dead, cf. John 20: 19-23.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists five names for the sacrament: the Sacrament of Penance, the Sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Sacrament of Forgiveness, and the Sacrament of Conversion.
- The Sacrament of Penance is a work of God's infinite mercy, which He desires to lavish upon all of us, but won't force upon any of us – we have the choice to accept or reject it and we do this through concrete acts.
- To truly understand the good news of God's grace and forgiveness, we must understand the bad news – namely sin and its effects, which God never desires, but, because he gives us the gift of free will, does allow.
- Adam and Eve, our first human parents, were created in a state of original holiness, innocence, and justice. They were in deep union with God and each other, free from suffering, strife, and death. However, in an act of radical disobedience to God, Adam and Eve freely chose to commit the original sin. Original sin is passed on to us – we did not commit it, but we inherit original sin and its effects.
- Personal sins are offenses that we commit against God by thought, word, deed, or omission.
- Personal sins are either mortal or venial. There is no middle category between the two.

- For a person to be guilty of mortal sin, three conditions must be present, cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, paragraphs 1858-59:
 - 1) The sin must be a grave matter.
 - 2) The person committing the offense must have full knowledge of the sinfulness of the act.
 - 3) The person committing the offense must give his / her deliberate consent to the act.

It is a precept of the Church that one make a sacramental confession at least once per year if one has been guilty of un-confessed mortal sin, cf. Canon 989). That said, this precept is a minimal standard! **Common pastoral advice is that it is wise to avail oneself of the Sacrament of Penance frequently... once a month is a good benchmark for which to aim.** Frequent sacramental confession helps us to grow in grace and holiness and to resist sin!

- If one is conscious of having committed mortal sin(s), he/she should go to the Sacrament of Penance as soon as is reasonably possible. The reason for this is that mortal sin deprives us of sanctifying grace and we need to be in sanctifying grace when we die to get to heaven! Sanctifying grace is the supernatural life of God in our souls that makes us holy and pleasing in His sight.

Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary way by which the faithful person who is aware of serious sin is reconciled with God and with the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses the person from confession of this type, in which case reconciliation can take place in other ways.

- Code of Canon Law 960

- It is not uncommon to hear people use the word mistake synonymously with sin. This is incorrect. Sins are intentional offenses against God. Mistakes are not intentional, thus, not sins. For example, if someone commits murder, adultery, theft, etc. he does not make a mistake, he commits a sin. Getting a math problem wrong, on the other hand, is a mistake, not a sin. So if I commit a sin, I should not say, "I made a mistake." Sins and mistakes are essentially different.

- Grace is the free and undeserved gift that God gives us to respond to our vocation (calling) to become his adopted children.
- God desires everyone to go to heaven and it is a truth of the Faith that God gives sufficient grace to each person to get to heaven. **God wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth** (1 Timothy 2:4). However, to get to heaven, we must cooperate with God's grace. An important way to do this is to frequent the Sacrament of Penance.
- Sanctifying grace is the free gift of his life that God makes to us. Sanctifying grace makes us holy and pleasing to God, cf. CCC 2023-2024. Those who die in a state of sanctifying grace and are perfectly purified when they die, go immediately to heaven. Those in heaven *are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face*, CCC 1023. *Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.* – CCC 1024
- *All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.* –CCC 1031
- The only way to lose sanctifying grace in one's soul is through mortal sin. *Individual and integral confession of grave sins followed by absolution remains the only ordinary means of reconciliation with God and with the Church.* – CCC 1497
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) teaches in paragraph 1033, *To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."*

- Following up on the previous point, ... *the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want “any to perish, but all to come to repentance – 2 Peter 3:9, CCC1037. We always trust in God’s love and mercy and that he pours out actual graces for repentance up to the end of life.*
- We should not despair of the salvation of any human being. It is a spiritual work of mercy to pray for the living and the dead. We should commend all people, living and deceased, to the fathomless mercy of God.
- In St. Faustina’s diary *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, this great 20th century saint wrote that Jesus said to her that in the Sacrament of Penance ...***the misery of the soul meets the God of mercy (1602) and that ...the greatest miracles take place and are incessantly repeated (1448) .***
- Several items should be emphasized regarding the teaching of the Sacrament of Penance:
 - It is important to teach people (including children) the form for going to Confession according to the Rite of Penance, including how to make an Act of Contrition. (This is included with the resources at the end of these tips). The Church teaches that the penitent (person making his/her Confession) should always have the opportunity to receive the sacrament anonymously and, if there are multiple priests hearing Confession, the freedom to choose his/her confessor.
- It is important to teach the absolute inviolability of the seal of confession. It is by the authority of Christ and through his power conferred on priests through ordination to the sacred priesthood that only validly ordained priests and bishops are able to absolve people from their sins.
- There is no sin, no matter how serious, nor are there any number of sins, that are too big or too many for God to forgive. God’s mercy is infinite!
- So many priests dedicate untold hours to hearing peoples’ confessions in the Sacrament of Penance. Let us emphasize some of the wonderful examples of priests who are now canonized saints who dedicated much of their ministry to this sacrament, e.g. St. John Vianney, St. John Bosco, St. Philip Neri, and St. Pio of Pietrelcina, to name just a few.

Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation Resources

A Guide to the Sacrament of Penance from the Pennsylvania Bishops

(Includes the steps for how to go to Confession):

<http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/GUIDEPEN.HTM>

Top 10 Reasons to go to Confession

<http://usccbmedia.blogspot.com/2011/07/confession-it-puts-you-straight-with.html>

Information on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/penance/index.cfm>

Examinations of Conscience

Examinations of Conscience for Adults:

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resource.php?n=563>

A Primer for Confession with an Examination of Conscience by Father Frederick Miller, New Hope Publications

<http://www.newhope-ky.org/catecheticalpamphlets.htm>

Examination of Conscience for Teenagers and Young Adults:

http://www.thelightisonforyou.org/pdfs/TheLightIsOnForYou_ExaminationForTeenagersAndYoungAdults.pdf

Examinations of Conscience for Children:

http://www.ncregister.com/info/confession_guide_for_children/

Living the 10 Commandments for Children by R Gortler/D. Piscitelli, Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.

<https://catalog.osv.com/Catalog.aspx?SimpleDisplay=true&ProductCode=T282>

Some Important Scripture passages when discussing the Sacrament of Penance:

Gospel of John 20: 19-23, 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Gospel of Matthew 18:18

Scripture passages on varying gravity of sin

1 John 5: 16-17

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Effects of the Sacrament of Penance

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 1468 – 1470, 1496

Grace

Catechism of the Catholic Church , Paragraphs 1987 – 2029

Sin

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 1849 – 1876

1984 Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II on the Sacrament of Penance: *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia_en.html

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