



Celebrating the Rite of Penance: The Sacrament of Reconciliation

It may have been a while since you last celebrated this sacrament of God's mercy. If so, this leaflet offers a helpful reminder of how we celebrate it, and it puts into your hands some of the prayers we use.

For those who celebrate the sacrament regularly, this card reminds us of why we do what we do, and might help us better understand what we take part in and what God offers us through this simple pattern of words and actions.

Preparing for your Confession

Jesus calls us all to be made new in him that we might live in him, here and now, set free from the mess and the hurt of sin.

Jesus offers himself to us in the Eucharist as spiritual food and drink to help us to live healthily in him.

He offers us his love and life in the sacrament of Penance also. He does this to help us to attend more directly to those particular things which mark and mar our lives. In this Sacrament of fresh beginnings God offers us his compassion and healing, to restore us to the fullness of life.

Prepare for your Confession by calling to mind your sins and failings. Some people find it helpful to reflect on their lives in the light of Jesus' words:

'The Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is that. You must love your neighbour as yourself.'

(Mark 30-31)

Meeting with the priest

The priest will welcome you as you come into the place where the Sacrament is to be celebrated.

Most people find it helpful to sit where they can see the priest so as to speak with him more naturally. Normally there will also be the option of kneeling behind a screen should you prefer that.

Make the 'Sign of the Cross' together with the priest.

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

It is often helpful - if the priest does not know you - to briefly introduce yourself to him. This helps him to know something of your circumstances in life. For example, if you are married or single; a parent or not; working or unemployed; whether in good health or suffering from serious illness. You might also mention how long it is since you last celebrated this sacrament.

The priest may then invite you to listen to a passage of

scripture, reminding of God's call for us to turn from sin, and to receive his love.

The priest will then invite you to place your trust in God's love and mercy and to confess any sins that you wish to place before God.

Confessing your sins, repenting, and asking for forgiveness

Mention to the priest the things that are on your conscience and for which you ask forgiveness from God and the Church.

If you forget what you want to mention do not worry. The priest is there to help you with your confession.

Often, after your confession, the priest will have a brief conversation with you, trying to explore how you might best grow stronger in God's grace and mercy.

The priest will also offer you a penance. This is something for you to do after your celebration of this Sacrament to reinforce the life of grace restored to you. Doing your penance you demonstrate to God and yourself your desire to reject sin and turn back to what is good. Sometimes the penance will take the form of a prayer, sometimes it may take a more practical form.

The priest will then invite you to say a prayer, expressing your sorrow for sin. There are many prayers of sorrow. Here are two.

Lord Jesus, Son of God,
have mercy on me a sinner.

or

God our Father,
I thank you for loving me.
I am sorry for all my sins,
for what I have done
and for what I have failed to do.

I will sincerely try to love you and others in everything I do and say.
Help me to walk in your light today and always.

Praying God's forgiveness

The priest will extend his hands over your head, or at least extend his right hand towards you.

He will then say the prayer of absolution, praying for God's forgiveness and praying that you will have the peace of Christ in your heart.

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.

At the end of the priest's prayer, you make this prayer your own by saying: **Amen.**

Giving thanks to God

After the absolution the priest will speak briefly again of God's love and mercy.

For example:

The Lord has freed you from sin.
May he bring you safely
to his kingdom in heaven.
Glory to him for ever.

You respond: **Amen.**

The priest will then invite you to:
Go in the peace of Christ.

You should respond: **Thanks be to God.**