



Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation

A guide to prepare for Confession, including any words and prayers that are commonly used.

Welcome to the sacrament of a **‘fresh start’**, a life-giving opportunity in your relationship with God and a chance to receive real forgiveness.

For the uncertain or reluctant, we understand. The following may help:

“It has been a long time since my last Confession – I’ve forgotten what to do.”

There is no need to be nervous or embarrassed – the important thing is that you are here with God ready to put your relationship with Him first. Everything you need is in this guide, so take your time, prepare and celebrate well.

“I do my best in life. Do I really have anything to confess?”

We often think we are doing our best, but if we take time to reflect deeply on our habits, thoughts, actions and relationships we will discover that we are doing things that stand in the way of living out God’s love fully. Don’t underestimate yourself, because we can all make changes for the better with the grace of God, and Confession gives us that fresh start.

“Why can’t I just say sorry to God? Do I really need a priest?”

The sacrament is between you and God, and God knows and loves you more than anyone ever could. Jesus Christ, God the Son, created our sacraments so that His grace could come through the Church, and here He lets us receive God’s mercy and forgiveness through His servant, the priest. Avoiding the sacrament deprives you of this real and certain grace and the joy of knowing you are forgiven.

How to Prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Before we come to confess our sins, we need to spend some time reflecting more deeply on *areas of our life* that need work. The following prompts can help us examine our conscience, and see where our thoughts and actions are harmful, self-centred or a barrier to the love of God.

Jesus said, “You shall **love the Lord your God** with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall **love your neighbour as yourself.**”

(Matthew 22:37-39)

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE (*for silent reflection*)

1. ‘Love the Lord your God...’

Do I honour God in thought, word and deed?

- Do I give God appropriate time in my day?
- Do I turn to God only when I’m in need?
- Do I pray regularly?
- Do I go to Sunday Mass or have I given up?
- Do I fully participate in Sunday Mass?
- Do I respect God’s Holy Name?
- Do I give thanks to God for the good things He has given me each day?
- Do I put my trust in God?

2. ‘Love your neighbour...’

Do I love my neighbour in thought, word and deed?

- Do I give my family members the respect they deserve?
- Do I make life difficult at home or work by my behaviour?

- Do I participate in gossip?
- Do I hold grudges or do I forgive?
- Do I use social media in a responsible and positive manner?
- Do I treat others fairly, honestly and with respect?
- Do I love my neighbour as myself and do my best to help them?

3. 'Love your neighbour as yourself...'

Do I respect myself in thought, word and deed?

- Do I respect the body that God has given me by leading a healthy lifestyle?
- Do I spend my time wisely or do I waste it?
- Do I work hard at making the most of my abilities?
- Am I self-centred at the expense of others?
- Am I a good role model as a friend or am I easily led astray?
- Do I respect the environment and avoid wasting resources?

A helpful prayer for preparation:

I ask you, my Father,
to help me look at the truth of my own life,
at all that is genuine and all that is false,
at all that is true and all the lies,
at all the fullness and all the emptiness.

I trust in you, my Father,
to come into my life
and brighten my darkness with your light,
and be for me the Truth
that will fill all my longing. Amen.

(Meister Eckhart)

What to do in Confession (*in five easy steps*)

1. Sign of the Cross

Begin by blessing yourself **“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”** This reminds us that Christ is present.

2. Say how long it has been since your last Confession

“Bless me Father for I have sinned, it has been ... years/months/weeks since my last Confession.”

3. Confess your sins

Use your own words – you can confide openly in the Priest. Tell him about areas in your life where you have not shown love for God, love for your neighbour and love for yourself.

4. Advice, Penance and Contrition

Listen to any spiritual advice the priest may give you. Ask about anything you do not understand. The priest will give you a penance to help you make amends for your sins and make a fresh start. Then he will ask you pray the Act of Sorrow, which is:

“O my God, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for all my sins, for not loving others and not loving You. Help me to live like Jesus and not sin again. Amen.”

5. Absolution

Finally, the Priest prays the words of absolution, giving you the forgiveness of God in the name of the Church. This concludes, ‘Through the ministry of the Church may God grant 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.’ You answer **“Amen,”** and leave.

After the sacrament, find somewhere quiet to pray your penance and give thanks to God. Your relationship is like new, and His plans for you are great.