

GUIDE TO THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is a sacrament of forgiveness, healing, and renewal. Through this sacrament, entrusted to the Church, God offers us the assured forgiveness of our sins and the strength to become more faithful followers of Jesus Christ. We approach the sacrament with a sincere sorrow for our sins and a desire to change. We leave the sacrament with the relief of repentance, gratitude for God's gift of forgiveness, and a resolution to move forward as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. We leave the sacrament whole again, as on the day of our baptism.

Prepare for the sacrament by first praying for the grace of the Holy Spirit's enlightenment, so that you may truly know your need for God's forgiveness and experience God's great and generous desire to forgive you. For example: *Holy Spirit, lead, guide and direct me as I reflect on my life and seek the forgiveness of my sins through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Amen*

An Examination of Conscience

Love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your strength...

- + Have I kept the gift of faith in God?
- + Do I trust in God?
- + Have I prayed?
- + Have I observed the Lord's Day by worshipping at Mass and resting from unnecessary work?
- + Have I respected God's holy name?

Love your neighbor as yourself...

- + How have I extended love and respect to my family, my parents, my children, my nation?
- + Have I respected life from conception to natural death? Done no harm to anyone? What about anger or resentments or endangering others or myself?
- + Have I respected God's gift of my sexuality? Reserved that gift's full expression to marriage and been open to generating new life? What about thoughts about others? Or acting out with them or with myself? What about a general sense of respect for sexuality and reverence for this gift of God?
- + Have I respected the goods of others? Not taken anything nor damaged anything? Worked honestly and justly compensated those who worked for me? Upheld principles of justice?
- + Have I respected the truth by not lying and not damaging the reputation of others?
- + Have I been respectful of others and what they have in my thoughts or have lust, envy, and jealousy held a grip on me?
- + Have I cared for those in need through outreach and support? Have I contributed to the common good of the society in which I live?

In Confession: (Feel free to bring this handout in with you.)

Inside the confessional, you may see both a kneeler behind a partition and a chair in front of the partition. If so, decide which method of participating in the sacrament will help you feel more comfortable. Begin by praying words like these:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was...

These are my sins... Confess your sins. Feel free to ask for help from the priest. Receive your penance from him.

Pray an act of contrition, speak from your heart or recite the formal prayer below:

*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 resolve with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Amen.*

Afterwards, do your penance and thank God for the gift of forgiveness.