

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jesus) said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (John 20:19-23)

Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with Him. At the same time, it damages communion with the Church. For this reason, conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the Sacraments of Penance and Reconciliation.

Only God Forgives Sin

Only God forgives sins. Since He is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of His divine authority, He gives this power to men to exercise in His name.

Reconciliation with the Church

During His public life, Jesus not only forgave sins, but also made plain the effect of this forgiveness: he reintegrated forgiven sinners into the community of the People of God from which sin had alienated or even excluded them. A remarkable sign of this is the fact that Jesus receives sinners at His table, a gesture that expresses in an astonishing way both God's forgiveness and the return to the bosom of the People of God.

The Sacrament of Forgiveness

Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of His Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the Sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification.

The spiritual effects of the Sacrament of Penance are:

- 1) Reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace;
- 2) Reconciliation with the Church;
- 3) Remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins;

- 4) Remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin;
- 5) Peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation;
- 6) An increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

HOW TO GO TO CONFESSION

Examine your conscience: You can use the Ten Commandments (below) as a guide or the “Beatitudes” (Matthew Ch. 5)

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.
 - Do I give God time every day in prayer?
 - Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
 - Have I been involved with superstitious practices or have I been involved with the occult?
 - Do I seek to surrender myself to God’s word as taught by the Church?
 - Have I ever received communion in the state of mortal sin?
 - Have I ever deliberately told a lie in Confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?
 - Are there other “gods” in my life (money, security, power, people etc.)?
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
 - Have I used God’s name in vain: lightly or carelessly?
 - Have I wished evil upon any other person?
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.
 - Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation?
 - Have I tried to observe Sunday as a family day and a day of rest?
 - Do I do needless work on Sunday?
4. Honor your father and your mother.
 - Do I honor and obey my parents?
 - Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
 - Have I given my family good religious example?
 - Do I try to bring peace into my home life?
 - Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?
5. You shall not kill.
 - Have I had an abortion or encouraged or helped anyone to have an abortion?
 - Have I physically harmed anyone?
 - Have I abused alcohol or drugs?
 - Did I give scandal to anyone, thereby leading him or her into sin?
 - Have I been angry or resentful?
 - Have I harbored hatred in my heart?
 - Have I mutilated myself through any form of sterilization?

- Have I encouraged sterilization?
 - Have I engaged, in any way, in sins against human life such as artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization?
 - Have I participated in or approved of euthanasia?
 - Have I harmed my body by needless cutting?
6. You shall not commit adultery.
- Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thought and action?
 - Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control in my marriage?
 - Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other people as mere objects?
 - Do I seek to be pure in my thoughts, words, actions?
 - Am I careful to dress modestly?
7. You shall not steal.
- Have I stolen what is not mine?
 - Do I waste time at work, school, and home?
 - Do I gamble excessively, thereby denying my family of their needs?
 - Do I pay my debts promptly?
 - Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?
 - Have I cheated anyone out of what is justly theirs, for example creditors, insurance companies, big corporations?
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- Have I lied? Have I gossiped?
 - Do I speak badly of others behind their back?
 - Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
 - Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
 - Have I injured the reputation of others by slanders?
9. You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.
- Have I consented to impure thoughts?
 - Have I caused them by impure reading, movies, television, conversation or curiosity?
 - Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations?
 - Have I behaved in an inappropriate way with other people: flirting, being superficial etc.?
10. You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.
- Am I jealous of what other people have?
 - Do I envy the families or possessions of others?
 - Am I greedy or selfish?
 - Are material possessions the purpose of my life?

GOING TO CONFESSION

1. After the priest greets you with the Sign of the Cross, make the Sign of the Cross and say: "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how long) since my last confession. These are my sins."
2. Tell your sins simply and honestly to the priest. You might even want to discuss the circumstances and the root causes of your sins and ask the priest for advice or direction. You have to confess mortal sins and give a sense of how often. Don't be embarrassed.
3. Listen to the advice the priest gives you and accept the penance from him. Then make an Act of Contrition (below) for your sins.

AN ACT OF CONTRITION:

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 INTEND, WITH YOUR HELP, TO DO PENANCE, TO SIN NO MORE, AND TO AVOID WHATEVER LEADS ME TO SIN. OUR SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST SUFFERED AND DIED FOR US. IN HIS NAME, MY GOD, HAVE MERCY. AMEN.

4. The priest will then say the prayer of absolution. The penitent makes the sign of the cross at the end of the absolution prayer.
5. The priest will then conclude with the words: "Go in Peace." You respond, "Thanks be to God."
6. Spend some time with Our Lord thanking and praising Him for the gift of His mercy. Try to perform your penance as soon as possible.

Confessions are heard at Immaculate Conception Church every Saturday from 4:00 p.m. ~ 4:30 p.m. or by appointment. To schedule an appointment, please call the church office at (808) 245-2432.