

The Sacrament of Reconciliation-Paul Turner

Our Catholic church treasures the sacrament of reconciliation and this opportunity of grace is usually available every week of the year.

If you'd like to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, here's what to do:

Prepare. Prayerfully recall your sins. Some will be specific actions. Some represent a more general pattern of behavior.

Go to the priest. Visit when he's in the reconciliation room at your parish or ask for an appointment. You may either kneel anonymously behind a screen or sit in a chair where you may speak face to face.

Be welcome. You and the priest may greet each other. Make the Sign of the Cross. He may urge you to have confidence in God. You may indicate the interval since your last confession or anything else that will help. Just use common sense. Either you or the priest may read from Scripture.

Confess your sins. Some penitents begin with a formula like, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." But you don't have to. Let the priest know your sins. You may discuss the sins you confess so the priest can give you the best counsel.

Receive a penance. The priest will recommend some action after you leave to indicate to God the sincerity in your heart. Usually he suggests prayer or self-denial. This has several purposes. It helps amend the past. It makes reparation for injury. It puts us on the road to a new life. And it offers "medicine" to keep us from the same "sickness." The act of penance reminds us that sin and forgiveness have a social aspect. The act of penance does not have to make up for all that we've done wrong. It couldn't. Only Christ could do (and has done) that. Rather, the act of penance has a simpler goal. It helps us turn away from the past and turn toward the future with the equipment we need to make the journey well.

Pray for forgiveness. The priest may invite you to say a prayer of sorrow aloud. If you remember the Act of Contrition, you may use it. But you may also speak simply from your heart.

Receive absolution. This is the best part. The priest proclaims absolution, and God forgives your sins.

Conclude. The priest may say, "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good." If so, answer, "His mercy endures forever." Or he may conclude informally.

Change! Go forth, and with God's help, begin to live a new life of freedom from the slavery of sin!