



St. Wilfrid's Church, Preston

Helps for the Sacrament of Reconciliation



The Sacrament of Reconciliation

This Sacrament is a celebration of the forgiveness of God and, as with all sacraments, it gives us something we need. This Sacrament aims to bring pardon and healing which, if we can accept the forgiveness it offers, will bring us peace.

We know, of course, that God can forgive without our going to Confession, but the Sacrament can work at two levels: on the psychological level the act of speaking about our sins, all that we feel guilty about them, and then hearing the words of absolution, “I absolve you from your sins”, can be a powerful experience; whilst on the spiritual level we receive God’s grace to strengthen us and help us in our progress towards God.

Is it a sin?

Traditionally, the Church has seen sin as doing something wrong that we know is wrong. To sin we must also have the freedom not to sin. So, if someone forces us to act in a certain way, then we are not guilty of sin. If we cannot do something because of sickness, then it clearly is not a sin.

Obviously, some things are worse than others. Traditionally we have made a distinction between minor sins, which we call “venial”, and major ones, which are known as “mortal”. To commit a truly “mortal” sin, we have to have the desire to cut ourselves off from God. In the past, the Church was probably too harsh in what she considered “mortal” sin.

However, when looking at our failings, it is good to take notice of those things we did that hurt others, or ourselves, without our intending it. We should learn from our mistakes.

What is right or wrong?

There are many things, particularly in the area of relationships and sexuality, where there is a great deal of debate. People vary in their belief as to what is the right and loving way to behave. Where there is doubt, Catholics are obliged to study the Church’s teaching on the subject. This is called “informing our conscience”. We are then obliged to make up our minds and do what we honestly believe is good, loving and honest in our particular circumstances. In the end, we will be judged on whether, or not, we followed our own conscience.

But I’ll only do it again!

Sometimes, we can feel Confession is a waste of time because we have a very strong suspicion that we will be committing the same sins again before long.

We don’t need to be sure we can turn over a new leaf to come to confession.



We might pray:

“Lord, if you want me to change then give me the grace to change; on my own I can do nothing.”

If we still keep doing what we think is wrong, then perhaps, God isn't as worried about this “sin” as we are; or perhaps, we need it to keep us humble. (Paul's thorn in the flesh).

Maybe too, without Confession we would develop a much less sensitive conscience and, gradually, start sinning in much bigger ways.

Preparation for Confession

Prayer for Help—use this prayer or your own words

Loving God,

You brought me here in the name of your Son

to receive your mercy, grace and forgiveness

In my time of need.

Open my eyes to see all the wrong I have done.

Where sin has separated me from you,

May your love unite me to you again.

Where sin has brought weakness,

May your power heal and strengthen me.

Give me a new heart so that my life

May reflect the image of your Son.



Scripture Readings – choose one to read slowly and ponder on it.

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy.

For as the heavens are high above the earth

So strong is God's love for those who fear God.

As far as the east is from the west, so far does the Lord remove our sins.



(From Psalm 102)

Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.
Do not judge and you will not be judged yourself;
Do not condemn and you will not be condemned yourself;
Grant pardon and you will be pardoned. (Luke 6)

If we say we have no sin in us,
We are deceiving ourselves and refusing to admit the truth;
But if we acknowledge our sins,
Then God who is faithful and just will purify us from everything that is wrong.
We have our advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is just;
He is the sacrifice that takes our sins away, and not only ours but the whole world's.
(1 John 1)

What woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one,
Light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly until she found it?
And then, when she has found it, call together her friends and neighbours?
"Rejoice with me", she would say, "I have found the drachma I lost".
In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.
(Luke 15:8-10)

Examination of Conscience

Look back over the time since you last came to Confession.
Is there anything that really weighs on your conscience?
What are the sins you remember?



Some people like to look back over the time since their last Confession, others prefer to look at the Ten Commandments and see if anything comes to mind.

Have you hurt anyone by what you have said or done?

Have you not respected God, or others, or yourself?

Remember, all sins are failures to follow Christ's teaching when he said:

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind,
and love your neighbour as you love yourself."**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

In the confessionals in St. Wilfrid's, except for the one near St. Jude's statue, you have the choice of remaining behind a screen, or of talking to the priest face to face. If you prefer to see the priest, walk past the screen and sit on the chair provided.



In either case, begin by making the Sign of the Cross out loud:

“In the name of the Father....”

The priest may then give you a blessing.

Then tell the priest how long it is since your last confession. It will help him also if you say something about yourself in general terms e.g. if you are at school, are married, retired etc. This is to help the priest to help you.

Then say in your own words how you have sinned. If you have any problems about this say so and the priest will try to help you. When you have finished he may offer some advice or prayer. If you would like to talk further about any area of your life, or would like some advice, then don't hesitate to talk to the priest.



Penance

In order to show repentance and a willingness to begin a new life, the priest will suggest a penance, which is often a prayer, or an act of self-denial, or something to help others.

Prayer of Sorrow

The priest will ask you to express your sorrow aloud by making a Prayer of Sorrow (An Act of Contrition). Use your own words, or choose **one** of the prayers below.

Lord Jesus, you chose to be called the friend of sinners.

By your saving death and resurrection free me from my sins.

May your peace take root in my heart

And bring forth a harvest of love, holiness and truth.

God our Father, I thank you for loving me.

I am sorry for all my sins, for what I have done and 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.

O my God, because you are so good,
I am very sorry that I have sinned against you,
And with the help of your grace I will not sin again.

forgive
US OUR TRESPASSES
forgive
+ AS WE
THOSE WHO TRESPASS
AGAINST US

Thanksgiving



When you have come out of the confessional, do not be in a hurry to leave the church.

Kneel, or sit, quietly for a few minutes.

If you have been asked to pray as a penance, pray now, if at all possible.

Think over any advice you may have been given.

Ask God to help you grow in love for Him and for the people you meet.

Some final thoughts

The words of Absolution give us assurance that whatever we have done wrong, God has forgiven us. However, although we know God has forgiven us, it is difficult to forgive ourselves, or other people.

Often the Sacrament of Reconciliation is not the end of the forgiveness process. Sometimes, there is another person I cannot bring myself to forgive, a person I feel resentful towards. I may need a lot of time in prayerful reflection, asking God to give me the grace to forgive. It might help trying to see the world from the other person's point of view. There is no point in telling myself that I shouldn't feel resentful or angry. Feelings just come; we cannot control them. I need to admit how I feel. I need to express my feelings in a safe way. Then I need to ask God's help to be able to let go of the angry and resentful feelings. After all, the only person hurt when I feel angry is myself.

Sometimes too, you can get annoyed with yourself, especially if you feel you have let yourself down. One way to help forgive yourself is to imagine you are giving advice to someone else. What would you say to someone who told you your story? Wouldn't you be more compassionate?

Scruples

For people who are trying to be good, one of the ways the evil one gets a foothold is to sow doubts. We doubt we are really forgiven. We doubt we have told the priest all our sins. We think we may have forgotten a sin, or two, along the way. Ultimately, we are tempted to believe God is not our loving Father. If we get the urge to go to confession

weekly, or more frequently, just to confess sins that we forgot, then it's a sign that we are too scrupulous. This is a temptation. We need to be firm with such thoughts. When we have been to confession, all our sins are forgiven, those we mentioned and those we forgot. Trust God. He loves you. If you loved a person, could you imagine you would want to punish them for any little thing they might do wrong? How much more will God forgive and be gentle and compassionate?



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email: stwilfridspa@gmail.com

or leave a note in the Sacristy with your contact details.