

Why Some Catholics Hesitate to Use the Sacrament of Reconciliation

1. Can't I just confess my sins to God directly?

Without the word "just," the answer is yes. And for venial sins, all right. But why would Jesus give the apostles the power to forgive sins (John 20:23), if it were not needed? Proper preparation for Confession helps us make the sacramental experience more meaningful. Confessing our sins to a priest helps us encounter the living Christ. Receiving absolution reassures and comforts us, and validates our forgiveness.

2. What if, as a Catholic, I haven't gone to Confession for a long time, or ever?

Jesus teaches the parable about the Merciful Father of the Prodigal Son. He teaches himself as the Good Shepherd. The priest is called to represent Christ. Priests today are known for their compassion. Just be honest: "Father, it has been a rather long time since my last Confession, ___ years ago. "The priest will probably respond: "I am so glad you are here."

3. What if I am unaware or unsure of the form I should use?

In this guide are printed instructions to the steps of going to Confession. We may also ask the priest/confessor to assist us. If a person is unsure, simply ask the priest to assist. Jesus asked, "What father among you would hand his son a snake if he asked for a fish, or a scorpion if he asked for an egg?"

(Luke 11:11-12). The priest will be happy to help guide you.

4. What if I don't know or cannot remember the Act of Contrition?

A printed form is on the preceding page and will also be available at every church offering Wednesday night Confessions.

5. Confessing our sins can be difficult. What will the priest or others present and watching think of me?

Popes have been known to go to Confession once a week. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta went to Confession every eight days. We should think well of anyone who goes to Confession. Frankly, the priest humanly and spiritually admires anyone who approaches the sacrament, even more when a person confesses an exceptional "fall from grace" or struggles with an habitual/addictive sin. The priest is not there to judge the repentant person – "Judge not and you shall not be judged" (Luke 6:37), – but to understand, empathize, support, advise and forgive the sinner. Confession is apologizing truthfully for what we have done wrong, not justifying or bragging about our sins. "Owning up" is a sign of maturity, not weakness.

6. Why go to Confession when we may need to confess many or all the same sins again?

If that argument were valid, we could also ask: Why take out the garbage, why bathe, why

eat, why sleep, for that matter, why breathe? Many things in life are repetitive. The grace of the sacrament can strengthen us to avoid or lessen sin in the future.

7. What if I had a bad experience during a previous Confession (such as the priest scolding me for not having gone often enough, or for committing a sin which was either especially grievous or repetitive)?

You are not obliged to go back to that priest for Confession. Ask God to direct you. Many people ask their friends to recommend a confessor (just as we ask about a movie, a restaurant, a cell phone and so on). Also, don't hesitate to volunteer to another an especially helpful experience you had in Confession. "I went to Fr. Jones for Confession and he was very understanding and helpful to me. I find Fr. Smith such a good confessor to me. He made me feel at ease and was very supportive of my efforts to overcome sin."

That said, you should never ask someone else their sins, nor feel any obligation to tell them your sins. (Possible exception: if the sin directly affects them.)

8. What if I intentionally withheld a serious (mortal) sin from a previous Confession?

Simply be honest. For example, say: "Father due to embarrassment (guilt and/or shame) I intentionally did not confess the sin of (marital infidelity) in my last (or a previous) Confession.



A Sampling of Scripture Quotes on Sin and Forgiveness

"Whose sins you forgive, are forgiven; whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:23). (The risen Christ to the apostles.)

"If we say we have never sinned, we make God a liar and there is no truth in us" (I John 2:4).

"I have come to call not the self-righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). (Jesus to the Pharisees.)

"If your brother sins against you seven times a day and seven times a day turns back to you saying 'I am sorry,' forgive him" (Luke 7:4). (Jesus to Peter.)

"The Son of Man (Jesus) has come to search out and save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). (Jesus to the Pharisees.)

"There will be more joy in heaven over

one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent" (Luke 15:7). (Jesus, the Good Shepherd.)

"Let us eat and drink for this son of mine was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and is found" (Luke 15:24, 32). (The Merciful Father – God – to the Prodigal Son.)

"Woman, is there no one here to accuse you? Neither will I accuse you. Go and from now on, avoid this sin" (John 8:11). (Jesus to the woman who committed adultery.)

"Father, forgive them. For they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

"The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not, O Lord" (Psalm 25:7).

"Have mercy on me, O God, in your

goodness;

In the greatness of your compassion, wipe out my offense.

Thoroughly wash me from my guilt; and of my sins, cleanse me.

For I acknowledge my offense, and my sin is before me always." (Psalm 51:3-5)

"For I do not the good I should do, but the evil I should avoid. What a wretched man I am" (Romans 7:19).

"Whoever brings a sinner back from the error of his way will save his own soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

"If anyone sees his brother sinning, if the sin is not deadly, he should pray to God, who will give him life. There is such a thing as deadly sin" (I John 5:17).