



## Common Questions about Confession

Diocese of Pittsburgh Lent 2018

### **Why should I go to Confession?**

Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people and God. Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation (also called Penance or Confession) to restore our relationship with God and with His Church when we have committed harm. Through the Sacrament, we acknowledge our sins, express our sorrow in a meaningful way, receive the forgiveness of Christ and His Church, make reparation for what we have done and resolve to do better in the future.

### **What takes place during the Sacrament of Reconciliation?**

The rite has four parts: contrition, confession, penance and absolution.

*Contrition:* a sincere sorrow for having offended God and the most important act of the penitent. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.

*Confession:* confronting our sins in a profound way by speaking about them —aloud— to the priest.

*Penance:* an act of reparation that the priest imposes to help us heal from our sins. Penance is not a punishment, but a sign of our willingness to turn to the Lord with all our heart.

*Absolution:* the priest speaks the words by which God, the Father of mercies, reconciles a sinner to Himself through the healing power of the Cross.

### **Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest?**

Confession to God through a priest is wise, helpful and biblical.

When we sin against God, we also sin against the Church community. The priest represents both Christ and the Church community. He hears the sin and offers forgiveness and guidance while keeping the Confession absolutely secret. We confront our sin in a much more profound way when we speak it out loud to another human being.

This sacrament was given to us by Jesus Himself. After His Resurrection, he told His Apostles, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ (John 20:22-23).

Those Apostles were the forerunners of all of our priests. Through ordination, they inherit Jesus’ power to forgive sins, to restore the sinner and to reconcile him or her with God and the Church.

### **Will the priest ever repeat what I have said in my confession?**

A priest can never reveal what he is told in a sacramental Confession. This obligation of absolute confidentiality and secrecy is profoundly serious. A priest who violates the seal of confession is punished with automatic excommunication. Rather than reveal anything about a Confession, a priest must be willing to face imprisonment or death.

### **What if I'm not comfortable with face-to-face Confession?**

It is the obligation of the priest to ensure that you have the ability to make an anonymous confession if you desire. Most confessionals or reconciliation rooms have both a screen behind which you can kneel during your confession and a chair where you can sit and confess face-to-face.

### **Won't the priest remember what I said? I'm embarrassed and don't want him to think badly of me.**

The priest is there to offer forgiveness, healing and guidance, not to keep a check-list of sins. Every priest hears many Confessions, and has probably heard far worse than yours. He too goes to Confession, so he knows how it feels to confront one's own sins and ask for forgiveness. But if you're uneasy about going to your own priest, visit a different parish for Confession.

### **Why does the priest sometimes ask for more information?**

He may ask for additional information to clarify what happened, to understand if the action you confessed was a one-time occurrence or a pattern, or to assess your understanding of the situation.

### **How often should I go to Confession?**

Under the Code of Canon Law, Catholics are required to receive the Sacrament at least once per year (more often if they have committed any mortal sins). That said, parishioners are encouraged to take advantage of the Sacrament at least monthly. This practice keeps us aware of our spiritual progress and provides the grace to overcome our sins.

### **Can I receive Communion without going to Confession?**

When you receive the Eucharist you affirm that you are in a state of grace, reconciled with God and the Church. The Sacrament of Confession provides that state of grace and reconciliation.

If you are in a state of mortal sin you must abstain from receiving the Eucharist until you go to Confession. A mortal sin (also called a serious sin) consists of a serious action through which a person turns away from God's law and from love for others, fully understands that doing so is wrong and freely chooses to do so anyway.

If you have committed venial sins, you may still receive the Eucharist at Mass. Venial sins wound our relationship with God, but consist of less serious matters than mortal sins or are performed without full knowledge or consent. Penitents are encouraged to confess venial sins regularly, however, since the repetition of these sins often leads to more serious sin.

### **Which is it: Confession, Penance or Reconciliation?**

Any of these is fine. All three names are drawn from sacred Scripture, the liturgy and the Tradition of the Church.

**I'm divorced. May I receive the sacrament of Reconciliation?**

If you are civilly divorced and have not remarried or were remarried in the Church after receiving an annulment for your prior marriage, you may participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you have remarried outside of the Church or have questions about your situation, we encourage you to speak with your parish priest. If you want to pursue an annulment of a prior marriage, there is no charge for doing so through the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

**How do I find Confession times apart from The Light is On for You?**

Parishes offer Confession regularly throughout the year and you are encouraged to go monthly. You can find a convenient time and place by clicking <http://diopitt.org/parishfinder>