

How to make your Confession

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23)

There are three steps to benefiting from the Sacrament of Penance:

1. Preparation
2. The confession itself
3. Penance

1. Preparation

Take some time to make an examination of conscience. The idea is to identify the sins you have committed since your last confession (or since Baptism if this is your first confession). A structure can be helpful, but it shouldn't shackle you. Ask God to help you find out all your sins, then try sincerely to discern them.

A suggested structure:

Duty to God

Have you attentively prayed morning and evening?

Have you been to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day? Have you been attentive and reverent?

Have you received communion reverently and in a state of grace?

Have you read the Bible, meditated and sought useful Christian spiritual reading?

Have you tried to love and serve God? Have you taken His Name in vain?

Have you tried to help the Church with time or money?

Have you sought to keep your faith strong and not allowed doubts to fester?

Duty to your Neighbour

Pride: Have you always shown respect to parents, teachers, pastors and those set over you?

Anger: Have you been quarrelsome or even violent?

Envy: Have you spoken and thought charitably of others?

Covetous: Have you been honest and generous?

Lust: Have you been faithful to your spouse and chaste in speech and actions?

Truth: Have you been truthful?

Friends: Have you set a good example?

Enemies: Have you held a grudge?

Duty to Yourself

Pride: Have you been modest and humble?

Gluttony: Have you been moderate in food and drink, and avoided drugs?

Lust: Have you been chaste in your thoughts?

Sloth: Have you been diligent in work and prayer?

Try to identify your Besetting Sin: your greatest and recurrent fault.

Be sensible: failing to attend Mass because you can't (church closed or ill in bed) is not the same as missing Mass because it is inconvenient to go.

2. Confession

Sometimes there will be a confessional in which you kneel while addressing the priest through a grille. More often, the priest will be sitting somewhere away from other people. You can either kneel beside his chair or sit on another chair to talk.

Sometimes there will be a card with some standard forms of words, sometimes not. The basics:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bless me Father for I have sinned.

My last confession was [when] OR This is my first confession.

Then just tell the priest what you have done wrong. Some people find it useful to have a scribbled note they have prepared during their examination of conscience, so they don't forget anything.

Finish off by saying something along the lines of, *For these and any other sins I cannot now remember I ask forgiveness.*

DOs & DON'Ts

DO tell the priest everything you can remember.

DON'T be embarrassed.

DO remember everything you say will remain secret.

DON'T make excuses or provide lots of circumstantial detail.

3. Penance

The priest might take a little time to discuss what you have confessed or to give you some advice. Then he will give you a penance as some degree of punishment for the sins that are about to be forgiven. This might take the form of some prayers to be said, a section of the Bible to be read attentively, or something similar. Then the priest will absolve you, and it's finished.

You must complete your penance before your next confession: most take a few minutes to do it straight away.

That is it. It can be a daunting thought if you haven't done it before, but, rather like sea swimming, once you take the plunge, it is immensely refreshing and beneficial.