

Reconciliation – The Basics

A good source is the purple instruction booklet from the former Archbishop Collins entitled "Reconciliation – Go in Peace." It's a small booklet of 23 pages & well worth the read of every page. And, yes, he does go into specific detail (on pg 14) on how to actually "do", or we say "celebrate", the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The highlights of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are:

- **Prepare** (use some of the helps such as the bookmark on the Examination of Conscience)
- **Pick the time/place** (Parishes have "penitential services" twice per year – Advent & Lent – where many priests come to celebrate with many parishioners; there are scheduled times for Reconciliation at all parishes (any of which you may go to) and you can always make an appointment with a priest by calling the office)
- **Begin**
 - **"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."... "it has been x number of weeks/months since my last confession" or "this is my 1st confession"**
 - **"these are my sins...."** (no rigid procedure for this part – some like to list, others work toward "themes" or "root causes"; the key is the examination of conscience. The one I prepared for you follows the Lord's Prayer, others follow the 7 deadly sins or the 10 Commandments and there are an infinite number of others as well. Don't get bogged down here! Use one for now...you will have a full life of Reconciliation to test out different approaches!).
 - Finish with something like: **"For these sins, and for any sins I may have forgotten, I am truly sorry"**. So, don't worry too much about forgetting anything. The Holy Spirit is there to help you. God knows your heart & your sins.
- **Priest will usually give some guidance/spiritual advice.** (I call these pure nuggets of gold!)
- **Priest will impose a penance.** Bishop Collins' booklet reads: *"Obviously, the forgiveness of sins is an act of God, and not something dependent on our penance. The penance however is an important element in the sacrament, as it allows the penitent to respond more fully to the grace of forgiveness. Throughout our history, God invites us frail creatures to participate in some small way at least in His saving action. Penance is a way of doing that. It also is a response to the fact that when we are forgiven, while we are totally at peace with God, we also experience the effects of sin, such as a weakened will to do good. The penance can help to mitigate those effects. In ancient time, the penances were severe, but now (since they are, in any case, only a token) they are usually a matter of saying a few prayers, or doing something that will help the penitent to grow spiritually."* Usually the penance is something that can be fulfilled right there in the Church (eg: pray 3 Our Fathers etc). Sometimes, it may involve making some form of reparation for the sin (returning a stolen item; or apologizing to a sister etc).
- **Priest asks penitent to make an Act of Contrition.** This could be as simple as: "O my God, I am sorry for my sins, and with your help I will try not to sin again." Or "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Or:
 - **"O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, & I detest all my sins, because of Your just punishments, but most of all because they offend You, my God, who are all-good & deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your Grace, to sin no more & to avoid the near occasion of sin."**
- **Priest becomes an instrument of God's grace as he absolves the penitent & makes a sign of the cross**
- **Make a sign of the Cross & thank the priest!**
- **Go do your penance (it completes your Reconciliation)**

It's important to understand the "seal of confession". The priest cannot reveal your confession to anyone. Bishop Collins' document talks more about it, but what really made it clear to me was to learn that the priest cannot even discuss the contents of your confession WITH YOU...once you step outside the confessional! So, there is no fear of a priest ever coming up to you & asking how you are doing with some sin you've been wrestling with! (*I can see it now eh? "so Bob...you still beating your wife?"...NOT!!! CAN'T HAPPEN!*) :0)

Finally – Sin

- **Read Bishop Collins' booklet on sin & temptation (p9-10)**
- **Read the Catechism paras 1854-1864**
 - **Mortal sin - a turning away from God. Involves 3 things:**
 - has to be grave matter (ie: this is bad)
 - committed with full knowledge (you know it's bad)
 - and deliberate consent (you intend to do it anyway!) That's mortal (ie: "a killer")
 - **Venial Sin** – offends and wounds (vice kills). (Note: the building up of venial sin can lead you to mortal sin. Recall the example of Mortal sin being one of turning your back completely on God, while venial sin is turning in small increments away from God...but those increments can add up to eventually having your back turned away from God. It is good to make a habit of recalling your Venial sin at various points through the Mass where venial sin can be washed away...provided you have a "contrite heart" of course. See the highlighted portions of the Mass pamphlet for those points in the Mass.
- **Note: It is a serious (Mortal) sin for a Catholic to miss Mass without good reason or a dispensation from a priest.** This is very important to understand. If you do not intend to live a proper Catholic life (*ie: attending Mass each weekend; living in such a way that does not bring scandal or disrespect to the Church etc*) you really should not become Catholic unless & until you are ready to make this a life-long discipline. You should wait until you are ready to live as a Catholic before becoming Catholic. **You literally put your soul in peril if your intention is to simply be a casual or nominal Catholic.** Many don't understand this, I know. Many have a **false** understanding that it's OK to receive Communion whenever they attend Mass after long absences with no legitimate reason. This is a serious sin. Mercifully, we have the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation to help you "turn back", reconcile with God & clean your "earthen vessel" to be worthy to receive Jesus again in the Eucharist. Simply put: you must repent of this sin and go to Confession before returning to Communion. It is heartbreaking for me to journey with those in the RCIA only to have them become "nominal" Catholics after the fact. (*Thankfully, this is not too often*) If it is heartbreaking for me...I can only imagine how it breaks the heart of God to see His gift of His Son in the Body & Blood taken so lightly.

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