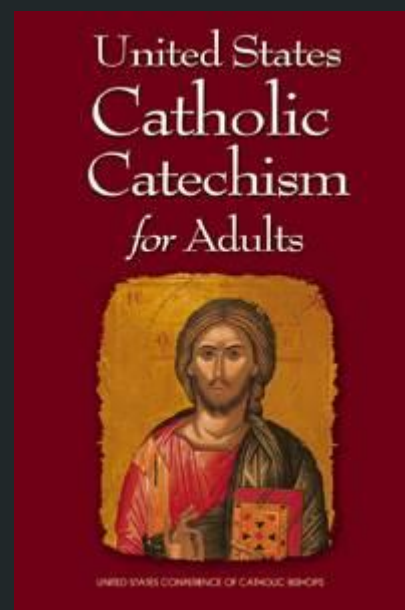


# The United States Catholic Catechism for Adults



## Chapter 18

### Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: God is Rich in Mercy

**“DELAY NOT YOUR CONVERSION TO THE LORD,  
PUT IT NOT OFF FROM DAY TO DAY.  
FOR SUDDENLY HIS WRATH FLAMES FORTH;  
AT THE TIME OF VENGEANCE YOU WILL BE  
DESTROYED.”**

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**SIRACH 5:7**

# TODAY'S LESSON:

Good morning, everyone, and welcome to our next session from the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults.

I will be discussing today the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Confession is one of the parts of the Catholic church in which Protestants have a difficult time understanding, much less accepting. They believe that the need to confess sin should be done between God and themselves, that the priest does not have the authority to forgive sin as he is not God.

But Protestants are not the only ones who misunderstand -- or do not understand completely -- this sacrament. Many Catholics are not well catechized in it. This session is limited to 75 minutes, so I will not be able to touch upon the depths of this sacrament. I do hope to be able to highlight the need for it, the effects of it, and how to prepare for it.

Let us start this chapter with a prayer to the Merciful Father.

# Let Us Pray: Merciful Father



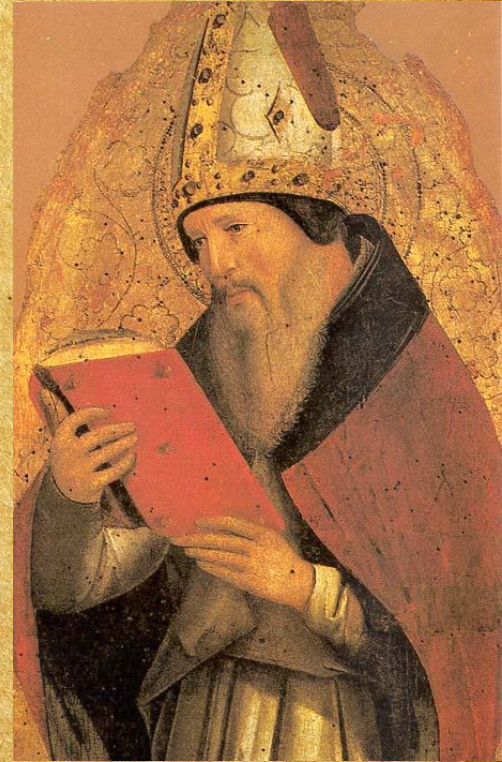
Infinitely merciful Father, I offer You by the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary with St. Joseph, the nine choirs of Angels and all the Saints, the adorations, praises, love and infinite holiness of Your beloved Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, His heart wounded and burning with love, all His blood shed for us, all His sacred wounds and in them my life and sufferings of all people, for my salvation and for the salvation of the whole world, the deliverance of all souls from Purgatory and the praise of Your merciful Father, I offer You the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ for those in agony today.

Amen.



# Augustine: The sinner who became a saint

1. Born in 354 in North Africa. His father was a pagan, but his mother, Monica, was a Christian. She wanted him to be baptized, but his rebellious adolescence led him away from the church.
2. He was one of the most intelligent men who ever lived and he had been raised as a Christian. But he lived a life of such impurity and with such a pride clouding his mind, that he could not see or understand the Divine Truth anymore. During Augustine's wild years, he had even had a mistress as well as a son, Adeodatus. For 17 years he lived in the obscurity of this sinful life.
3. But his mother, whom we now know by the name of St. Monica, prayed relentlessly for his conversion. An encounter he had during his reflections over whether or not to convert aided him in his debate. While in a garden one day, troubled, he heard a child singing a strange verse: "Take it and read, take it and read." He did just that, taking up Paul's letter to the Romans (13:13-14) in which Paul exhorts one to abandon the works of the flesh and to be clothed with Christ. Augustine recognized the grace of God and embraced conversion.
4. With the help of the Bishop of Milan at the time, Aurelius Ambrosius -- St. Ambrose -- Augustine once more became to believe that Christianity was the one true religion. Finally, in the year 387, Augustine, with several of his friends, as well as his son, Adeodatus, were baptised into the church by St. Ambrose.





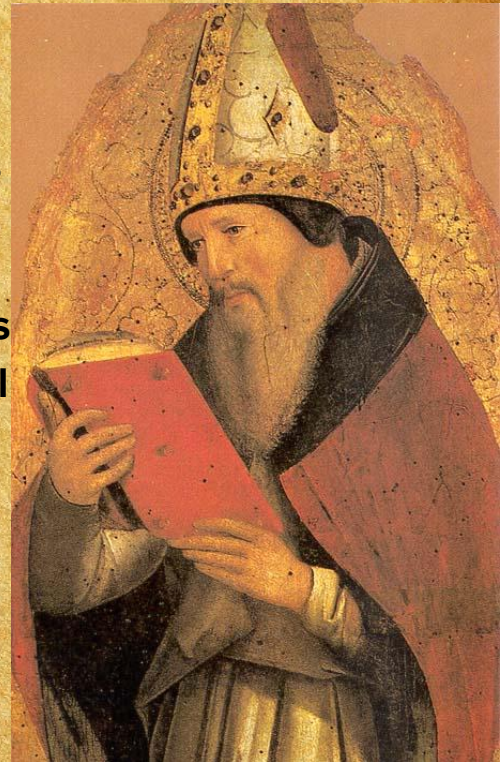
# Augustine: The sinner who became a saint

**Augustine quickly become a priest. Within 8 years of his conversion, he became bishop of Hippo, a town in North Africa. He wrote many books explaining and defending the faith. His most well known work is The Confessions, which outline his sinful youth to his conversion.**

**Augustine understood the effects of sin, having lived a major part of his life in it. He understood that because of sin, we are in need of continual conversion. He knew the power of grace and of God's mercy in His forgiveness of our sins, that forgiveness of our sin was won for us by Jesus Christ.**

**Today, we as Catholics can encounter that mercy and forgiveness.**

**We encounter it in the Sacrament of Penance.**





# Life in Christ threatened by sin

Over the last few classes, we have covered the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. Upon our reception of these, we become sharers of the divine life and temples of the Holy Spirit. We are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit and are strengthened in our service to the Body of Christ. We receive the Real Presence of Christ in a Holy meal and are transformed in doing so.

Upon the reception of these three sacraments, we have been fully integrated into a life with Christ.

But that life, that grace, is continuously under attack by sin.

But what does that mean?

# Life in Christ threatened by sin

Our life in Christ, in God's graces, can be illustrated using a campfire.

Christ's love for us is the fire. It gives us light. It gives us warmth. And it gives us community, as others are drawn around it as well. There is comfort there, a sense of well-being, of love

But when we sin, it is as if we are taking a step back, away from the fire. Away from the light, the warmth, our brethren. And the more we sin, the further away we move, until the moment when we realize that the fire is long gone, out of sight.

And we are left with darkness, cold, and isolation.

That is what sin does to us.

It takes us away from Christ

Leaving us nothing but the awareness that He is not with us.





# Sin

In today's world, sin has become relative. Society itself has become the new serpent, tempting us with what it knows we should not have nor do,

yet making us desire it by telling us that *it is good*.

We believe the untruth that what is sin for one is not necessarily sin for another. We believe that our “Personal relationship with Jesus” explains away what we do, that Jesus “knows” how we are and “understands” us.

*We have created Christ in our own image.*

But *all sin* is disobedience to God and harms our relationship with Him.



# Sin

The Catholic Church teaches about two types of sin:  
Venial sin and Mortal sin

## Venial Sin

Venial sin is a departure from the moral order in a less serious matter. It does not break our friendship with God, but it does injure it. Some examples might be gossiping, telling white lies, abusive language. Though these themselves can become mortal sins depending upon the severity of the consequences in committing them.

## Mortal Sin

Mortal sin is the knowing and willful violation of God's law in a serious matter, for example, idolatry, adultery, murder, slander. It causes the spiritual death of the soul and separates us from God. We commit mortal sin when we consciously and freely do something which God prohibits. For a sin to be mortal in nature, it must be grave matter, we must be aware of it being so, and we must willingly consent to it.

**Mortal sin causes a spiritual death of the soul and separates us from God. If we die without repenting, *we will lose Him for eternity.***





But there is, however,  
something which saves us  
from separating ourselves  
completely from Christ . . . .

**MERCY**

# Mercy

**God's mercy manifests itself in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. He reaches out to us and invites us to be healed, to be brought back unto Him. We just have to admit our sinfulness and be sorrowful for it.**

**For God's mercy is greater than any sin.**

**And Christ demonstrated that mercy during the time He dwelt amongst us.**



# Christ Forgave Sins

Jesus forgave many sins during His earthly ministry, something which only God could have done.

He forgave the paralytic, the sinful woman, the thief being crucified next to him, and even ***those who crucified him***. And so as to prove that He had the authority to forgive the sins, He made the paralytic walk and even rose from the dead.

And this forgiveness of sin was something which He gifted to His church after His resurrection.

*In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, "Peace be with you," and, after saying this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy at seeing the Lord, and he said to them again "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." After saying this he breathed on them and said:*

*"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained."*  
*Jn 20:22-23*

**In this we see the the authority to forgive sins passed along to the apostles --- the recipients of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the priests and the bishops.**

**They now act *in the person of Christ*, reconciling the sinner to God and the church in this sacrament of God's mercy.**

# Christ Forgave Sins

But how do we partake of the forgiveness  
which Christ offers us?



We must turn from sin and turn to God.

We must confess our sins.

And we must ask for His forgiveness.

C O N F E S S I O N



# A Sacrament by many names

The Sacrament of Confession has many names. That is because God's mercy is shown in many different ways through this sacrament.

It is a . . . .

- **Sacrament of Conversion:** In our conversion, we turn from sin and turn back to God.
- **Sacrament of Penance:** For we seek to make amends for our sins.
- **Sacrament of Confession:** We disclose to our Lord what we have done wrong so that we may ask forgiveness for those which we acknowledge are harmful in our relationship with Him
- **Sacrament of Forgiveness:** Because God, acting through the priest, *en persona Christi*, grants us pardon and peace
- **Sacrament of Reconciliation:** And by our confession, by our taking responsibility for what we have done, by owning up to our weaknesses, we are reconciled to God again.

# **The Liturgy Of The Sacrament Of Penance (and how to make a good confession)**

**A point to note is that we must understand that our confession begins before we approach the confessional.**

**As we seek out the healing of this Sacrament, we need to be aware of how we have displeased God, of how we have disobeyed Him, of how we have sinned against Him.**

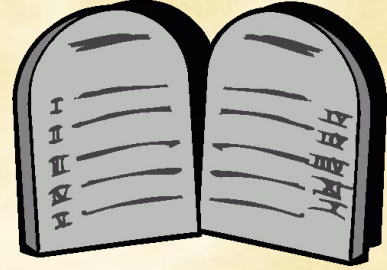
**Our confession is not something that we can make on a moment's notice. We need to prepare ourselves, for we are, after all, seeking God's forgiveness, seeking to be reconciled to Him.**

**We start with an examination of conscience.**





# Examination of Conscience



In a quiet, prayerful setting, as we prepare ourselves for this sacrament, we must take a look at our lives -- Examine our Consciences -- to recognize in what ways we have sinned.

## **We examine ourselves against the Ten Commandments.**

Did I treat other things more important than God? Did I take God's name in vain? Did I lie? Steal? Keep holy the sabbath? Cheat?

## **We examine ourselves against Catholic Social teaching.**

Did I respect the life and dignity of every person, alive, dying, in the womb? Do I support family, community, church? Did I give special attention to the needs of the poor? Do I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick?

## **We examine ourselves against Christ's teachings.**

Am I merciful towards others? Do I love my neighbour? Am I pure of heart? Do I strive to be a peacemaker? Am I humble? Do I render unto God what is His?

**We examine ourselves to discover the things we have done which are not pleasing to God.**

**But we must also examine ourselves to recognize that things that we did not do.**

**“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?”**

**He will answer them, “*Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.*” And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.**

**Matthew 25:44-46**

# **The Liturgy Of The Sacrament Of Penance (and how to make a good confession)**

**Having made an examination of conscience, approach the confessional, but not out of obligation and not with trepidation.**

- Approach the confessional with contrition of heart.**
- Approach it because you need the healing it offers.**
- Approach it because you wish to be united with God again.**

**And remember, it is not some mere man to whom you are speaking.  
The priest is present *in the person of Christ*.**

***You, at that moment of confession, are telling Christ Himself that you have sinned and are asking His forgiveness.***



# The Liturgy Of The Sacrament Of Penance (and how to make a good confession)

1. Greeting and blessing from the priest.
2. Reading from scripture.
3. The confession of sins -- Start with the most difficult ones, the mortal sins. These must be confessed to receive the healing of this sacrament. We take responsibility for our sins and, working with the priest, we can redirect ourselves for better spiritual growth and avoidance of sin
4. The giving and receiving of penance -- Penance takes into account the penitent's situation and serves to support his or her spiritual good. It may be a prayer, an offering, works of mercy, sacrifices or service to another. Penance is a way we share in the Cross and helps us to be more closely joined to Christ.
5. Act of Contrition -- For us to be forgiven, we need to be sorrowful for the sins we have committed. We show this sorrow by an act of contrition.

*O my God, I am sorry for my sins because I have offended you. I know I should love you above all things. Help me to do penance, to do better, and to avoid anything that might lead me to sin. Amen.*

# The Liturgy Of The Sacrament Of Penance

## (and how to make a good confession)

6. Absolution -- We are set free from our sins by the power that Christ entrusted to His church. Many profess that those words heard spoken by the priest, acting in the person of Christ, are the most joyful words they could hear:

***Et ego te absolvo a  
peccatis tuis en  
nomine Patris et  
Filii et Spiritus  
Sancti.***

***Yo te absuelvo de tus  
pecados en el nombre  
del Padre y del Hijo y  
del Espíritu Santo.***

***I absolve you from  
your sins in the name  
of the Father, and of  
the Son, and of the  
Holy Spirit.***

**AMEN!**

7. Proclamation of praise of God.  
8. Dismissal.



# The Liturgy Of The Sacrament Of Penance (and how to make a good confession)

Having made a good confession, we are:

1. Reconciled to God.
2. Restored to His grace.
3. Joined to Him in an intimate relationship.
4. Reunited with the church.
5. Left with a clean conscience and are spiritually consoled.
6. Able to forgive others as we have been forgiven (remember the Lord's Prayer.)
7. And made stronger in our spiritual challenges.

We must continue to recognize our sins and that we cannot live without God.

Jesus, in His mercy, forgave many during His earthly ministry.

**That mercy He showed then is here now for us all in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.**

# Final Thoughts

The reality today is that for many Catholics, confession is the forgotten Sacrament. Think back to the last time you confessed. Has it been some time? Confession should be the Sacrament in which we take part of almost as frequently as that of Communion. ***Almost as frequently as Communion.***

As Communion is not something that is owed to us, as it is a gift, so too is Confession.

The church teaches us that we should confess at least once a year. And that is so that we are at the most very basic level of spirituality. With confession once a year, we are completing the absolute minimum that we can to still consider ourselves practicing Catholics. That does not mean that we are saints or even good Catholics. By confessing once a year, we are just barely pulling ourselves up and out of Mortal sin.

By confessing just once a year, we are, in fact, Catholics in danger of losing our salvation for eternity.

As Catholics, we need to think about how we are living. We need to frequently examine our conscience. We need to take responsibility for our sins. We need to seek out reconciliation with our God.

And most of all, we need to hunger to hear those words:

***“I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.”***





# **Closing Prayer --- For use after Confession**

**O almighty and most merciful God, I give You thanks with all the powers of my soul for this and all other mercies, graces, and blessings bestowed on me, and prostrating myself at Your sacred feet, I offer myself to be henceforth forever Yours. Let nothing in life or death ever separate me from You! I renounce with my whole soul all my treasons against You, and all the abominations and sins of my past life. I renew my promises made in Baptism, and from this moment I dedicate myself eternally to Your love and service. Grant that for the time to come, I may detest sin more than death itself, and avoid all such occasions and companies as have unhappily brought me to it. This I resolve to do by the aid of Your divine grace, without which I can do nothing.**

**Amen.**



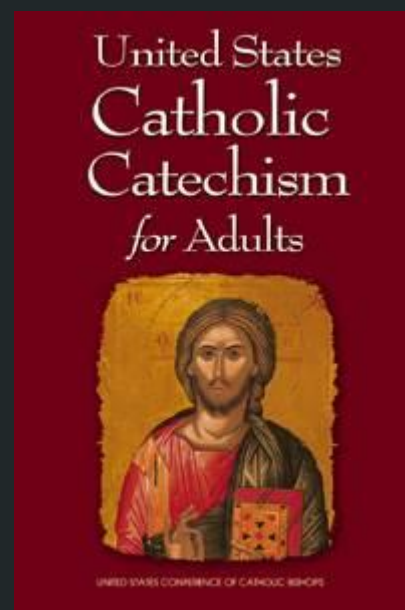
**KEEP  
CALM  
IT'S THE END  
OF  
MY PRESENTATION**



# Additional Resources

- [NABRE](#)
- [God's Gift of Forgiveness \(USCCB\)](#)
- [A Guide for Confession \(Catholic.org\)](#)
- [A Guide To The Sacrament Of Penance \(Pennsylvania Catholic Conference of Bishops\)](#)
- [The Sacrament of Penance \(Fisheaters.com\)](#)
- [The Sacrament of Penance \(New Advent.org\)](#)
- [Prayer before confession \(Catholic.org\)](#)

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