

From Your Pastor

“Come to Me, All You Who Labor and Are Burdened, and I will Give You Rest” (Mt 11:28)

Though some might find it surprising, one of the happiest times in the life of a priest is the moment that someone comes back the Sacrament of Penance after having been away from it for many years. In that moment, every priest recognizes very clearly that the confession about to take place can only be happening because of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit alone who leads us to Christ.

Once the Holy Spirit has moved someone to come back to Penance, the last thing that that person needs to be concerned about is what he or she should do or say in the confessional. One should never worry. The priest will always walk a returning penitent through the steps of the Sacrament. I mention the essentials here to be helpful.*

Before going to Confession, the penitent should do an “examination of conscience,” comparing his or her life with the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17), the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12) and the example of Christ in the Gospels.

At Confession, the penitent may confess anonymously or face-to-face with the priest. The choice is the penitent’s. It is made as the penitent enters the confessional room by kneeling at the screen or walking around it to the chair near the priest. Once the penitent has arrived, the following takes place:

- The priest and penitent make the Sign of the Cross and the penitent begins with these or similar words: “Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been _____ [time] since my last confession.” The penitent is also free, but not obliged, to mention anything about his or her life circumstances that might be helpful to the priest in understanding the forthcoming confession.
- The penitent makes a confession of sins. The priest then offers suitable advice and imposes an act of penance or satisfaction, which may include prayer, self-denial, or works of mercy.
- The penitent makes an act of contrition expressing sorrow for the sins confessed and the resolve, with God’s help, to avoid them in the future. Here are two examples of the act of contrition:

My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you,
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no
more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ
suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen

O my God,
I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee,
and I detest all my sins
because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell;
but most of all because they offend Thee, my God,
who art all good and deserving of all my love.
I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace
to confess my sins, to do penance,
and to amend my life.
Amen

- The priest pronounces the Church’s formula of absolution, making the Sign of the Cross. The penitent makes the Sign of the Cross and responds, “Amen.” The priest wishes the penitent peace and the Sacrament is concluded.

Following Confession, the penitent has the responsibility of completing the penance or satisfaction (prayer, self-denial, or work of mercy) given by the priest. It is recommended that this be done as soon as possible; if possible, in the church before leaving. The penitent now walks and with renewed grace and assistance from the Lord.



God bless each of you.

Mrs. Fay

* From *Celebrating the Sacrament of Penance: Questions and Answers*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.