

SACRAMENTS OF HEALING

Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Dear People of St. Andrew the Apostle:

Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the forgiveness of our sins and for the healing of our souls. Reconciliation and forgiveness, the showering upon us of God's mercy, is not a new thought in our Judaic-Christian tradition. John the Baptist was preparing people for the advent of the Messiah by a "baptism of repentance", signifying sorrow for past sins and being united to God in a new way. But the Baptist was also quick to point out that another was to come who would baptize "in the Spirit".



Jesus anointed His apostles with the Spirit twice:

1. When he appeared to them in the Upper Room after His resurrection, breathed upon them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." (John 20:22-23)
2. On the first Pentecost when the Spirit came upon the apostles like tongues of fire. In Jewish thought, the only one who could actually forgive or retain the effects of sin was God. Here the Son of God pours out the Holy Spirit and specifically passes on the power of God to forgive and to retain the effects of sin. What a blessing to know that our sins are actually forgiven.

Did Jesus intend to pass on this power only to His apostles, or through the Apostles to pass on the power of forgiveness to priests? It is clear that the early Church understood the power as belonging to the priests. Reconciliation was regarded in the early Church as a "second Baptism", a renewal of our relationship with the Lord. It was conferred after a major sin such as murder, apostasy, or infidelity in marriage. After confessing their sins, members of the early church were assigned to the "Order of Penitents" to perform their penance, which often lasted several months to a year. They were actually absolved at the conclusion of their penance and readmitted to Communion at the celebration of Holy Thursday – the Feast of the Lord's Supper. Their penance included wearing sackcloth and ashes, standing outside the Church asking people for their prayers, and being dismissed from Mass at the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word.

Within monasteries a practice of spiritual direction arose where older monks gave spiritual guidance to younger monks. This included the confession of sins and absolution for the sins. People began coming to the monasteries seeking the same kind of spiritual guidance. Eventually the practice of individual reconciliation through confession and absolution – as we know it today – took hold in the Church.

There are FIVE steps in a good Confession:

1. Developing an awareness of sin and a need for God. Most often this happens at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and we do an Examination of Conscience to determine our sins.
2. True sorrow for our sins and a firm purpose of amendment...our choice to refrain from sin to the extent possible in thanksgiving for our experience of God's mercy.
3. Confession to a priest, who acts in the person of and in the name of Jesus. This includes a Prayer of Sorrow (or Act of Contrition) for our sins. Acceptance of a Penance.
4. ABSOLUTION from our sins. Our sins are washed away into the ocean of God's mercy.
5. Performance of our Penance.



Why must Catholics go to a Priest?

Jesus did not pass on the power of forgiveness to everyone. He passed it on to His apostles, and through them to those who were later chosen and ordained as priests. While I suppose one could "take their chances" with some other way of seeking forgiveness from God, I would not recommend it, since this is the way Jesus set it up. Going to a priest puts a human face on God's mercy.

What is the purpose of the Penance?

It is easy to say to God, "I am sorry". It is more meaningful, however, to put our sorrow into concrete action that shows God how much we love Him and appreciate His offer of forgiveness. The Penance is an action that demonstrates both our sorrow for sin and our determination to do better in the future.

What is Sin in our World Today?

One way to think about sin is that it is an offense against God – a breaking of His commandments. When we think this way, we can use the Ten Commandments as a way of examining our conscience and determining what we need to confess and ask His forgiveness.

Another way to think about sin is to think about the person we are becoming – through our actions and behaviors, are we becoming the best version of ourselves that God intends us to be? When we think about sin this way, we can use Saint Paul's characteristics of love as outlined in his first letter to the Corinthians (chapter 13, verses 4-7) for God is love and we are called to become the best version of ourselves by becoming more like Jesus, who is God.



LOVE IS PATIENT.

Am I becoming a person who is patient? What causes me to be impatient, especially with my brothers and sisters, with my parents, with my friends, with teachers and supervisors?

LOVE IS KIND.

Am I growing kindness, or at times do I hurt other people?

LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS

Do I become jealous when I see what other people have that I do not have? Am I grateful for the things I do have?

LOVE IS NOT POMPOUS, IS NOT INFLATED, IT IS NOT RUDE.

Have I been rude in my dealings with others?

LOVE DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN INTERESTS

Am I self-centered, always wanting more, rarely concerned with the needs of others?

LOVE IS NOT QUICK TEMPERED

Do I have a problem with my temper? Do I lose my temper a lot? What causes me to lose my temper?

LOVE DOES NOT BROOD OVER INJURY, IT DOES NOT REJOICE OVER WRONGDOING, BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH.

Do I have trouble holding grudges against people who have injured me? Do I get pleasure from doing things that I know are wrong?

LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS.

When I have doubts am I tempted to just give up my faith, or am I open to searching to know the TRUTH that Jesus teaches? Does Jesus see me as a faithful follower?

LOVE NEVER FAILS.

But I have failed to love and I need to go to Confessions, ask for forgiveness, and start again with God.

CELEBRATING A GOOD CONFESSION

This is accomplished by coming to a priest to confess one's sins. The priest stands in the person of Jesus and speaks in Jesus' name. You say, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been _____ (length of time) since my last Confession. I would like to ask the Lord's forgiveness for the following sins:" (*State your sins*)

End your Confession by saying, "And for all my sins I am truly sorry."

PENANCE (Satisfaction)

The priest will speak with you about your Confession and may or may not ask you questions. Then he will assign a PENANCE, which is an activity that you are asked to perform in satisfaction of your sins, and to draw you closer to God. He will ask you if you are in agreement that the PENANCE assigned is something you are willing to do.

PRAYER OF THE PENITENT (Act of Contrition)

The priest will ask you to pray a prayer expressing both sorrow for your sins and a "firm purpose of amendment" which is your desire to change your life. You may use the Prayer found to the right, or an Act of Contrition that you learned earlier in life, or compose your own.

ABSOLUTION

In the name of Jesus, and acting in His person, the priest absolves (washes away) all of your sins. The Priest praises God and dismisses you: *The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.* At this point you can leave the place of Confession and go to complete your penance. A nice exit would perhaps include, "Thank you, Father".



Prayer of the Penitent 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.