

What happens in the sacrament of Reconciliation?

Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament for all members of the Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. This sacrament – also called the sacrament of conversion, confession, or penance – confers God’s forgiveness of sins committed after the person’s Baptism. This sacrament reconciles us with God joining us with Him in an intimate friendship. It also reconciles us with the Church as sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion.

What should I do to properly prepare and celebrate this sacrament?

The proper reception of this sacrament begins with an **examination of conscience**. You simply ask yourself about your conduct in the light of the Ten Commandments, the moral teachings of the Gospels and the Church.

The first place among the elements of this sacrament’s celebration is your **contrition**. Contrition is the person’s sorrow and detestation for the sins committed, together with the **resolution** not to commit sins again.

Next, you must **confess to a priest** all the unconfessed grave sins you remember after having carefully examined your conscience. All mortal sins, even the most secret, of which you are conscious, must be confessed. The confession of venial faults, although unnecessary, is strongly recommended by the Church.

This sacrament’s celebration concludes with the **penance** that the priest imposes. Such penance helps us be united to Christ, who alone expiated for our sins once and for all. Please make sure you do your penance as soon as possible, usually right after confession.

How often do I need to receive this sacrament?

Catholics are required to receive this sacrament at least once a year or every time you commit a mortal sin. Please remember that receiving Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin is also a mortal sin (sacrilege).

Can a priest reveal what he heard during confession?

The sacramental seal is inviolable. It is absolutely forbidden for a priest to reveal what he learned during confession in any way in words or in any manner and for any reason. A confessor who directly violates the sacramental seal incurs an excommunication. A confessor is also prohibited completely from using knowledge acquired from confession to the detriment of the penitent.

I forgot to confess a mortal sin. What do I do now?

You are required to confess all mortal sins. However, if you simply forgot to confess a mortal sin, there is no need to worry about the validity of the absolution. The absolution is valid and you will be able to receive Holy Communion. On the occasion of your next confession, make sure you confess the mortal sin that you forgot. But if you intentionally omitted to confess a mortal sin, the absolution is invalid! In this instance you have to receive this sacrament again.

Practical tips and observations:

- Dedicate a few extra minutes to a detailed and careful examination of conscience. Using a prayer book containing the examination is a big help.
- While confessing mortal sins please be as specific and brief in words as possible. Also give the number of times you committed the particular sin.
- If you didn’t hear well or couldn’t understand your penance, ask the priest right away.
- The time spent in the confessional doesn’t reflect someone’s “sinfulness”. Please don’t judge the person ahead of you according to this criterion.