

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

(also known as Confession or Penance) is a Catholic sacrament of healing, instituted by Jesus Christ, through which believers receive God's mercy, forgiveness for sins committed after Baptism, and reconciliation with the Church. It requires contrition, confession of sins to a priest, and satisfaction (penance).

Key Elements and Process

- **Purpose:** To forgive sins, reconcile the sinner with God and the Church, and restore or increase sanctifying grace.

- **Essential Components:**

The sacrament consists of three main actions by the penitent: contrition (sorrow for sin), confession (telling sins to a priest), and satisfaction (performing a penance to repair damage caused by sin)

- **The Priest's Role:** Ordained priests act in the person of Christ to grant absolution, which is the formal forgiveness of sins.

- **Steps of Confession:**

1. **Preparation:** Examination of conscience.
2. **Greeting:** The sign of the cross and welcoming by the priest.
3. **Confession:** Naming sins, particularly mortal sins.
4. **Penance:** The priest assigns a prayer or action to help convert the heart.
5. **Contrition:** Expressing sorrow (often through the Act of Contrition).
6. **Absolution:** The priest speaks the words of forgiveness.
7. **Dismissal:** Departure in peace.

Forms of Penance

- **Individual Confession:** The most common form, involving a one-on-one meeting with a priest.
- **Communal Celebration:** A service with individual confession and absolution.
- **General Absolution:** Rarely used, only in cases of grave necessity.

Why Penance is a Sacrament

Penance is a sacrament because it is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. Jesus entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to the Church (John 20:23), making it the ordinary method for obtaining forgiveness for post-baptismal sins.

Examples of Assigned Penance

Penance is not just a punishment but a way to repair the harm caused by sin and to foster spiritual renewal. Examples include:

- Prayers (e.g., specific prayers, a Rosary, or reading Scripture).
- Acts of self-denial (fasting or abstinence).
- Works of charity, service to others, or restitution (fixing something broken or returning stolen goods).