

WHAT THE CHURCH SAYS ABOUT THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

CCC 1486 The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by a particular sacrament called the sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation.

CCC 1448 Beneath the changes in discipline and celebration that this sacrament has undergone over the centuries, the same fundamental structure is to be discerned. It comprises two equally essential elements: on the one hand, the acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely, contrition, confession, and satisfaction; on the other, God's action through the intervention of the Church. The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.

CCC 1456 Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance: "All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession, even if they are most secret and have been committed against the last two precepts of the Decalogue; for these sins sometimes wound the soul more grievously and are more dangerous than those which are committed openly."

When Christ's faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know."

CCC 1482 The sacrament of Penance can also take place in the framework of a communal celebration in which we prepare ourselves together for confession and give thanks together for the forgiveness received. Here, the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common. This communal celebration expresses more

clearly the ecclesial character of penance. However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesial and public action

CCC 1491 The sacrament of Penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest's absolution. The penitent's acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.

What Is It?

The Sacrament of Penance is also known as the 'Sacrament of Reconciliation' or traditionally called 'Confession'. It is the rite by which sins are confessed and forgiven. Sin is failure to recognise and love God in the way we think or act. Sin is also not just a failure to love God directly but also a failure to love one another. This is referred to as "the community sense of sin".

Absolution

In this sacrament people are forgiven their sins by the words and actions of the priest. We call this 'Absolution'. The priest represents God and the community who is affected by sin and the priest ministers forgiveness on behalf of God and the community.

Forms Of Celebration

The sacrament can be celebrated in a one-to-one encounter with a priest: this is known as 'individual confession'. Many parishes also organise 'Penitential Services' at special times; e.g. Advent, Lent and Parish Missions. In this form of celebration, which is communal, people prepare as a community and many priests hear the confessions individually and people receive absolution individually.

Penance

Penance is a sign of sorrow and a commitment to try to make amends. It is also a sign of our sincerity to change our lives. This is what is meant by conversion. When the Sacrament is a communal celebration, the penance is said as a community, once all have had the opportunity to confess. When celebrated in the traditional one-to-one form, a penance is given and the person takes on that penance privately.