



Preparation Matters

We prepare for everything important.

You wouldn't expect to win a big soccer tournament if you hadn't been practicing. You cannot expect good grades if you don't study for your exams. You wouldn't go on a trip without packing and planning. Preparation is essential for a great experience.

You are blessed to be Catholic. As Catholics we prepare for each of the Catholic Moments. We prepare for Christmas with the season of Advent. We prepare for Easter with the season of Lent. We prepare for Mass with prayer and fasting.

You have been preparing for your First Reconciliation. As that wonderful day gets closer, there are some final preparations to be made.

The Five Steps

You are preparing for your First Reconciliation. This will be your first time, but not your last time. You are blessed.

The second time you go to Reconciliation you will know what to do because you will have done it before. But because this is your first time, it makes sense to walk through exactly what will happen.

Let's take a step-by-step look at the Sacrament of Reconciliation so you can know how it works. Then we will talk about each step in detail so you will know what to expect.

First, it is natural to be a little nervous. The first time we do most things we feel nervous. It's like riding a roller coaster: The first time you are really nervous, but the more times you ride it, the less nervous you become.

There are five steps to making a great Reconciliation. Here is a quick overview.

Step 1: Examination of Conscience

This is a spiritual exercise designed to help us remember when we were and when we were not the-best-version-of-ourselves. By examining our conscience we become aware of our sins.

Step 2: Confession

Here we say sorry to God by confessing our sins to him through the priest who is God's representative.

Step 3: Penance

The priest will ask you to spend some time in prayer or to do a kind deed for somebody. This is called penance, which is a way for you to show God that you are truly sorry for your sins.

Step 4: Contrition

The Act of Contrition is a short prayer we pray promising to try not to sin again.

Step 5: Absolution

The priest will then extend his hands over your head and pray a very special and powerful prayer. Acting as God's representative, he will forgive your sins!



Step 1: We Examine Our Conscience

To help you become the-best-version-of-yourself and live a holy life, God has blessed you with a conscience, the gentle voice inside you that encourages you to do good and avoid evil. God speaks to us through our conscience.

Following our conscience makes us happy. Ignoring our conscience makes us irritable, restless, and unhappy.

God doesn't want us to be restless and unhappy, so he gives us the gift of Reconciliation. When we disobey our conscience and sin by doing things that we know we shouldn't do, God invites us to come to Reconciliation so that he can fill us with his joy again.

Before we go to Reconciliation we examine our conscience so that we know what to talk to the priest about. To examine means to look at something very carefully.

Imagine you had a beautiful big diamond and you carried it with you everywhere you went. From time to time you would probably take it out and look at it. If it was very dusty or dirty, you would clean it. If it had a scratch, you would polish it.

Your soul is that beautiful diamond. We come to Reconciliation so God can dust, clean, and polish it so that it can shine like new again.



Before you go to Reconciliation it helps to think back and remember any times that you have chosen to sin, walked down a wrong path, made a poor choice, broken one of God's commandments, not listened to your conscience, or simply not been the-best-version-of-yourself.

These questions may help you to examine your conscience:

Have I been a good friend?

Do I obey my parents?

Have I taken things that belong to other people?

Do I cheat in school or in sports?

Have I told any lies?

Do I take time to pray each day?

Have I used God's name in ways that are not appropriate?

Do I go to church each Sunday?

Am I grateful for the many gifts that God has blessed me with?

The answers to these questions will help you to prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By taking time to reflect on the questions you will be prepared to speak to the priest when you enter the Reconciliation room.

It's hard for us to remember all the times we have sinned; that's why an examination of conscience is helpful. Sitting in a quiet place and thinking through questions like these will help you to remember times when you have not been the-best-version-of-yourself.



Step 2: We Confess Our Sins

Daniel really loved cookies. One afternoon, he came home from school and his mom was baking a fresh batch of his favorite kind, chocolate chip. The whole house smelled delicious! As he walked into the kitchen his mom said, "Daniel, I know these are your favorite cookies, but I am baking this batch for the church picnic. So, you may only have one." As his mother's back was turned, Daniel quickly grabbed two cookies and ran to his room.

He gobbled down the cookies. They tasted yummy in his mouth, but they left him feeling yucky inside. He knew he had done the wrong thing. Even though he hadn't been caught, he felt terrible.

Daniel was embarrassed, but his conscience encouraged him to go and tell his mother what he had done and to say sorry. His mother gave him a big hug and said, "I am disappointed in you for doing something you knew was wrong, and as a punishment tonight you cannot watch your favorite TV show. But Daniel, I also want you to know that I am very proud of you for saying sorry and admitting that you did the wrong thing. That took a lot of courage."

When the kids in Daniel's class were preparing for their First Reconciliation they asked themselves lots of questions during the examination of conscience. He remembered when he took the extra cookie. He knew it was good that he had apologized to his mom, but he also needed to say sorry to God for stealing. He realized this was something he could confess during Reconciliation.



When you enter the Reconciliation room or confessional, you will sit in a chair across from the priest. After you make the Sign of the Cross it is time for you to confess your sins. You tell the priest about your sins. Remember Daniel from our story? This is when he would talk to the priest about the time he stole the cookie. If you get stuck or nervous, remember, the priest is there to help you.

By talking with the priest about the times that we made poor choices and the times we were not the-best-version-of-ourselves, we rediscover the person God created us to be.

The priest may make some suggestions about how you can grow and become a better person. Remember, although you are sitting with the priest, he is there to represent God. So you are really telling God.

It is also possible to receive this Sacrament behind a screen. The priest sits on the other side of the screen and listens to you as you kneel and confess your sins.

Great champions listen to their coaches so they can get better. Reconciliation is a type of spiritual coaching. Confessing our sins to God is a beautiful way to grow spiritually.



Step 3: We Perform Our Penance

If you ate two dozen donuts every day for a few months, you would become quite sick. While you were eating all those donuts you probably knew that they were not good for you, but you kept eating them anyway.

Then one day you woke up and you came to your senses. You realized that eating all those donuts was making you sick. It's good to be sorry, but it is equally important to change the way we live.

If you had been eating all those donuts and your body was sick, you would need to exercise and eat plenty of fruits and vegetables so your body could get healthy again.

Sin makes our soul sick like bad food makes our body sick. When we go to Reconciliation we say sorry for offending God and making our soul sick, but we also promise to try to live differently in the future.

Before we recite our Act of Contrition, the priest will give us a penance. Penance is a prayer or kind deed that we do to show God that we are really sorry. It is like exercise for the soul to help it get healthy again.



Step 4: We Say Sorry to God

Rachel was angry with her sister. Each time she sat down to do her homework, her sister would bother her, and today Rachel lost her temper and pushed her away. Her sister fell down and started to cry. She had just wanted Rachel to play with her. Rachel felt bad about her choice and apologized to her sister. To show her sister she was really sorry, Rachel said that after she finished her homework she would play any game her sister chose.

After you confess your sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, you will pray a prayer of contrition. What is contrition? Contrition means to be sorry. When you pray the words in the prayer of contrition, you are telling God that you are truly sorry for the sins that you have committed.

Here are two examples of an Act of Contrition:

Dear God, I am sorry for all my sins. I am sorry for the wrong things I have done. I am sorry for the good things I have failed to do. I will do better with your help. Amen.

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.



Step 5: The Priest Offers Us Absolution

After the Last Supper, Jesus knew he was going to suffer and die, but he also knew why. He was doing it for you and me, so we could be free from our sins.

Sin makes us unhappy and feels heavy. Jesus didn't want us to feel this way. He wanted us to be free from sin. He wanted us to be able to go to Reconciliation and have our sins forgiven.

After you recite the Act of Contrition the priest will stretch his hands over your head to pray this prayer of absolution:

God, the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

You will respond: **Amen.**

At the moment of absolution, as the priest extends his hands over you, Jesus is pouring his grace upon you. This is like a bucket of love pouring down upon your head and filling your heart with peace and joy. God's grace also empowers you to make better choices.

After the priest has absolved you of your sins, he will send you forth to walk with God more closely, make better choices, and become the-best-version-of-yourself.