



FATHER FOR A DAY

If you were a priest assigning penances, what would you suggest for the following sins?

- ◆ lying to one's parents
- ◆ cheating
- ◆ intoxication
- ◆ making fun of minority groups
- ◆ missing Mass
- ◆ using another person for sexual gratification
- ◆ failing to share one's resources with the poor

demands a daily struggle with temptation and the tendency to sin.

Following the steps of Jesus, who recommended frequent acts of penance—including traditional works like praying, fasting, and almsgiving—the Church commends the frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Penance as a tremendous aid in the conversion process. Our obligation as Catholics, however, is minimally to confess any mortal sins of which we are aware at least once a year (CCC, 2042).

Calling this sacrament *Confession* emphasizes one aspect of the sacrament—the “telling,” or confession, of our sins. Owning up to our sins is a true sign that we are sorry for them. By confessing our sinfulness, we are also “confessing” our faith in God’s mercy. Confession is good for the soul. In turn, the priest, as Christ’s and the Church’s official representative, assures repentant sinners that our merciful Father does indeed forgive us and welcomes us back into the community, especially if our sins have separated us from God and fellow believers.

Naming this sacrament *Reconciliation* shows that sin alienates us from God, from others, and from self. All sin harms relationships. Turning from sin, and being truly sorry for one’s sins, leads to the

reconciliation that helps to mend relationships. Through this sacrament, and the words of *absolution* recited by the priest, sinners are assured of God’s mercy and forgiveness. God and sinner are reconciled, brought together again because of God’s love. So, too, are the sinner and the Church reconciled. Sin harms not just the individual, but the whole community. Through reconciliation, the community is healed.

When British author G. K. Chesterton was asked why he became Catholic, he responded, “To have my sins forgiven.” Catholics are privileged to have this sacrament of healing as a special means to experience the Lord’s forgiveness. Through this sacrament, the priest, who represents Christ and the Christian community, reassures us of God’s saving love.

Through the centuries, Christian seekers have found this sacrament and regular reception of Holy Communion to be two powerful ways to grow in holiness. The sacramental graces of Reconciliation help us face ourselves honestly, peacefully, and joyfully. They help us root sin out of our lives and strengthen us for a life of conversion . . . and *moral* living.

absolution

The statement by which a priest, speaking as the official minister of Christ’s Church, declares forgiveness of sins to a repentant sinner in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The formula of absolution reads: “I absolve you from your sins; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

RESOURCES

Internet Resources

Catholic Encyclopedia on “Sin”

www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm

Catholic Information Center on the Internet, “News and Literature”

Search this site for links to various Catholic periodicals and diocesan newspapers online.

www.catholic.net/RCC/Periodicals/mags.html

Gula, Richard, S.S. “Understanding Sin Today.”

Excellent overview article from the *Catholic Update* series.

www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac0197.asp

“Sin and Its Effects”

www.ewtn.com/library/SCRIPTUR/REPAR.TXT

The Seven Deadly Sins

www.whitestonejournal.com/seven_deadly_sins/

Thomas Aquinas on the Seven Deadly Sins

www.newadvent.org/summa/208404.htm