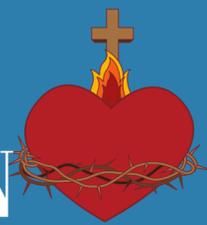




THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE/RECONCILIATION



WHAT IS THE NAME OF THIS SACRAMENT?

It is called the sacrament of Penance, the sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament of Forgiveness, the sacrament of Confession, and the sacrament of Conversion.

WHY IS THERE A SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AFTER BAPTISM?

Since the new life of grace received in Baptism does not abolish the weakness of human nature nor the inclination to sin (that is, concupiscence), Christ instituted this sacrament for the conversion of the baptized who have been separated from him by sin.

WHEN DID HE INSTITUTE THIS SACRAMENT?

The risen Lord instituted this sacrament on the evening of Easter when he showed himself to his apostles and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23).

DO THE BAPTIZED HAVE NEED OF CONVERSION?

The call of Christ to conversion continues to resound in the lives of the baptized. Conversion is a continuing obligation for the whole Church. She is holy but includes sinners in her midst.

WHAT IS INTERIOR PENANCE?

It is the movement of a "contrite heart" (Psalm 51:19) drawn by divine grace to respond to the merciful love of God. This entails sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed, a firm purpose not to sin again in the future, and trust in the help of God. It is nourished by hope in divine mercy.

WHAT FORMS DOES PENANCE TAKE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

Penance can be expressed in many and various ways but above all in fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. These and many other forms of penance can be practiced in the daily life of a Christian, particularly during the time of Lent and on the penitential day of Friday.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION?

The essential elements are two: the acts of the penitent who comes to repentance through the action of the Holy Spirit, and the absolution of the priest who in the name of Christ grants forgiveness and determines the ways of making satisfaction.

WHAT ARE THE ACTS OF THE PENITENT?

They are: a careful examination of conscience; contrition (or repentance), which is perfect when it's motivated by love of God and imperfect if it rests on other motives and which includes the determination not to sin again; confession, which consists in the telling of one's sins to the priest; and satisfaction or the carrying out of certain acts of penance which the confessor imposes upon the penitent to repair the damage caused by sin.

WHY CAN VENIAL SINS ALSO BE THE OBJECT OF SACRAMENTAL CONFESSION?

The confession of venial sins is strongly recommended by the Church, even if this is not strictly necessary, because it helps us to form a correct conscience and to fight against evil tendencies. It allows us to be healed by Christ and to progress in the life of the Spirit.

WHEN IS A PERSON OBLIGED TO CONFESS MORTAL SINS?

Each of the faithful who has reached the age of discretion is bound to confess his or her mortal sins at least once a year and always before receiving Holy Communion.

WHO IS THE MINISTER OF THIS SACRAMENT?

Christ has entrusted the ministry of Reconciliation to his apostles, to the bishops who are their successors and to the priests who are the collaborators of the bishops, all of whom become thereby instruments of the mercy and justice of God. They exercise their power of forgiving sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

IS A CONFESSOR BOUND TO SECRECY?

Given the delicacy and greatness of this ministry and the respect due to people, every confessor, without any exception and under very severe penalties, is bound to maintain “the sacramental seal,” which means absolute secrecy about the sins revealed to him in confession.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THIS SACRAMENT?

The effects of the sacrament of Penance are: reconciliation with God and therefore the forgiveness of sins; reconciliation with the Church; recovery, if it has been lost, of the state of grace; remission of the eternal punishment merited by mortal sins, and remission, at least in part, of the temporal punishment which is the consequence of sin; peace, serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; and an increase of spiritual strength for the struggle of Christian living.