

Community Celebrations

Penance celebrations. These are services of God's word, where the community listens with faith to the Scriptures. All reflect on what they have heard and are called to examine their way of living in the light of the gospel. Then all offer a prayer of sorrow and resolve to change their lives with the help of God's grace.

Benefits. These celebrations open our hearts to God's love and invite us to repent of our sins and to renew our lives. Christians of all Churches may be welcomed to take part.

Individual celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation may follow this penance celebration or take place at a later time.

Communal Celebration. Sometimes, with small groups, retreats, or days of recollection, and especially during the seasons of Lent and Advent, the sacrament of reconciliation may take place at a communal service celebrated with a number of priests and other ministers, and enhanced with music. In this case, after the readings and examination of conscience, all who desire celebrate the sacrament individually and then return to the community setting to complete the celebration.

General absolution. When circumstances require or permit, the Church provides a third form for the sacrament of reconciliation. This is celebrated with music and ministries within an extended service of the word. All listen with faith to God's word in the readings and in the homily and then examine their conscience in the light of Jesus' call. A litany and general prayer of confession follows. After all make a sign (such as kneeling) that they wish to be forgiven, the priest pronounces the words of absolution. The service concludes with a song of praise and a final blessing.

Any serious sins forgiven in this manner are to be mentioned in a later celebration of the individual rite.

Praying for Sinners

Jesus loved sinners – all sinners – and died to save every human person. When we pray for sinners, we are being true followers of our Lord:

Joining in his work. We join with Jesus in bringing the benefits of his cross to sinners.

Sign of our love. We show our love for sinners and are one with Jesus in reaching out to them. We must also give the example of turning away from sin in our life.

Forgiving others. When we forgive all who have hurt us in any way, we are working with Jesus to save the world and bring it back to God's kingdom.

True sorrow is always required for forgiveness of our serious sins. God forgive us only when – with the help of grace – we turn away from our sins and set out to live a new life with Christ. This conversion is a return to our baptismal promises.

Reconciliation is the preferred name for this sacrament, for it emphasizes God's action in forgiving us and restoring us to full life in the people of God. When we are reconciled, we are at peace with our Father and with God's family.

*Blessed are you, Lord God,
king of heaven and earth:
in love you have given us Jesus
to save us from sin and Satan
and to lead us back to you.*

*Strengthen us in our weakness
with the power of your Spirit,
and help us to follow your Son in love.*

*Father, we give you praise
through Christ our Lord. Amen!*

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FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

God saves us from sin
Forgiveness in the Church

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Sin in Our Lives

Our experience of sin is very real. Each of us can honestly say, “I have sinned: I am a sinner.” We see sin in our own life, in the lives of our family and friends. We don’t want to sin, and yet we do. We see its perverse power in young and old, wise and foolish, holy and unholy. Sin is a fact that we cannot escape. We ratify the sin that surrounds us in our own lives.

Society. Sin is also a very real presence in our communities. We see it in a culture that has little respect for life. We find it in the promotion of war, injustice and hatred, in arms races and power struggles between countries and groups of nations. We witness it in attempts to suppress people or keep them down because of their race, colour, language, creed, or gender. We experience it when we bend or avoid the truth; in thinking that money or power or possessions make us better; by despising others or refusing to accept them as God’s children and as our brothers and sisters.

These sins surround us, influence us, beguile us, tempt us, allure us – and too often we agree with them, we ratify them, we fail to see their evil.

Trapped! How can we escape from the slavery of sin? How can we move from darkness to light, from death to life, from hatred to love, from war to peace? The sad news is that we cannot; by ourselves, we are powerless. We need salvation, but we cannot save ourselves.

Only our loving God can save us. All we can do, with God’s help, is pray and reach out to Jesus for saving help. But, it is up to us to come to the realization that we are sinners, that we are in need of repentance – and that God wants to heal and save us.

*Lord Jesus, Son of God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.*

God’s Plan to Save Us

God loves us. Even though we are sinners, our God loves us and wants to save us from sin. God’s way to save us is Jesus, our Lord and our brother. Our Father loves all people deeply and sent the Son to become one of us. This is our good news!

Jesus saves us. In obedience to his Father, Jesus suffered and died on the cross: the sign of our forgiveness is the blood of the Lamb of God. The Father raised him, proclaiming that Jesus is Lord, king of glory. By his dying and rising, Jesus has reconciled the world to his Father.

Many ways of forgiveness: For sins that are not serious, there are many ways of forgiveness: all involve us in deeper love of God or neighbour, a hatred for sin and an effort to reform our lives and do better. These ways include prayer, kindness, forgiveness of others, almsgiving, penance, patience, acts of obedience or worship toward God.

Sacraments of reconciliation: God reconciles us through the Church, the Body of Christ, in these sacraments:

Baptism: We are freed from the power of sin and transferred to the kingdom of light. In baptism we are reconciled to God and become beloved children, God’s holy people.

Eucharist: Each time we celebrate the Lord’s supper, we share in his saving death and resurrection. We are helped to turn back to God’s ways and to renew our baptismal commitment. With Christ we will strive to die to sin, with him we will live each day for God our Father.

Reconciliation: In the sacrament of penance, God forgives our sins when we are sorry for them and ready to do better with God’s help. We renew our baptismal promises and resolve once again to keep them.

Individual Reconciliation

When an individual is ready to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation (confession) with a priest, these steps are involved:

Beforehand: Preparation includes our efforts to change our life with God’s help. We pray to the Holy Spirit for light and strength, examine our conscience in the light of the gospel of Jesus and become truly sorry for our sins. We are encouraged to read and pray over a suitable passage from Scripture in the days or in the moments before we celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

Celebration:

Welcome. The priest welcomes the penitent warmly in the name of Jesus.

God’s word is read and both listen with faith to this call to conversion.

Confession. The penitent confesses his or her sins and receives helpful advice.

Act of satisfaction (Penance). The person promises a good action or prayer to help make up for sin and to deepen the virtue of love.

Prayer of Sorrow (Act of Contrition). The penitent prays aloud to God, expressing personal sorrow and asking for forgiveness.

Absolution. The priest places his hands on or over the person’s head and grants absolution in the name of God and the Church.

Praise and thanks. The celebration ends with a brief prayer of praise to God.

Afterwards, we should spend some time in thanking God for forgiving us and restoring us to full life in Christ. Then we continue to live our baptism – dying with Christ to sin and living with him for God – with the help of the Spirit.