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## The Sacrament of Penance

The Sacrament of Penance, commonly called Confession or Reconciliation, is one of the seven Sacraments recognized by the Catholic Church. Catholics believe that all of the sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ himself. With the Sacrament of Penance, that institution occurred on Easter Sunday, when Christ first appeared to the apostles after his Resurrection. Breathing on them, he said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained” (John 20:22-23).

### What is the purpose of penance?

When we sin, we deprive ourselves of God’s grace. And by doing so, we make it even easier to sin even more. The only way out of this downward cycle is to acknowledge our sins, to repent of them, and to ask God’s forgiveness. Then, in the Sacrament of Penance, grace can be restored to our souls, and we can better resist sin.

### What is required?

Three things are required of a penitent in order to receive the sacrament worthily:

- We must be contrite—or, in other words, sorry for our sins.
- We must confess those sins fully, in kind and in frequency.
- We must be willing to do penance and make amends for our sins.

### How Often Should I Go to Confession?

While we are only required to go to Confession when we are aware that they have committed a mortal sin, the Church urges us to take advantage of the Sacrament often. A good rule of thumb is to go once per month.

The Church especially urges the faithful to receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently during Lent, to help them in their spiritual preparation for Easter.



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### **Why Is Confession Necessary?**

Non-Catholics, and even many Catholics, often ask whether they can confess their sins directly to God, and whether God can forgive them without going through a priest. On the most basic level, of course, the answer is yes, and Catholics should make frequent acts of contrition, which are prayers in which we tell God that we are sorry for our sins and ask for His forgiveness.

But the question misses the point of the Sacrament of Penance. The Sacrament, by its very nature, confers graces that help us to live a life with Christ, which is why the Church requires us to receive it at least once per year. Moreover, it was instituted by Christ as the proper form for the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, we should not only be willing to receive the sacrament, but we should embrace it as a gift from a loving God.

### **What are some other benefits of the Sacrament of Penance?**

- Conscience is purified
- The Will is strengthened
- Gives us peace (In mind, heart, and soul)
- Self-knowledge is increased
- Self-control is reinforced
- Bad habits are corrected
- We become more sinless
- Lessens our feelings of guilt
- We conform more to Jesus Christ
- Become more submissive to the Holy Spirit