

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

Sometimes called Confession or Penance, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a beautiful opportunity to know the merciful love of God the Father. Even though we know that all people are sinners, it can be difficult to acknowledge our own sins. Sometimes it can take great courage to bring them to the sacrament, but when we do confess them, we can experience the peace and joy that comes from God's grace. The Sacrament of Reconciliation brings us the forgiveness and healing that we need.

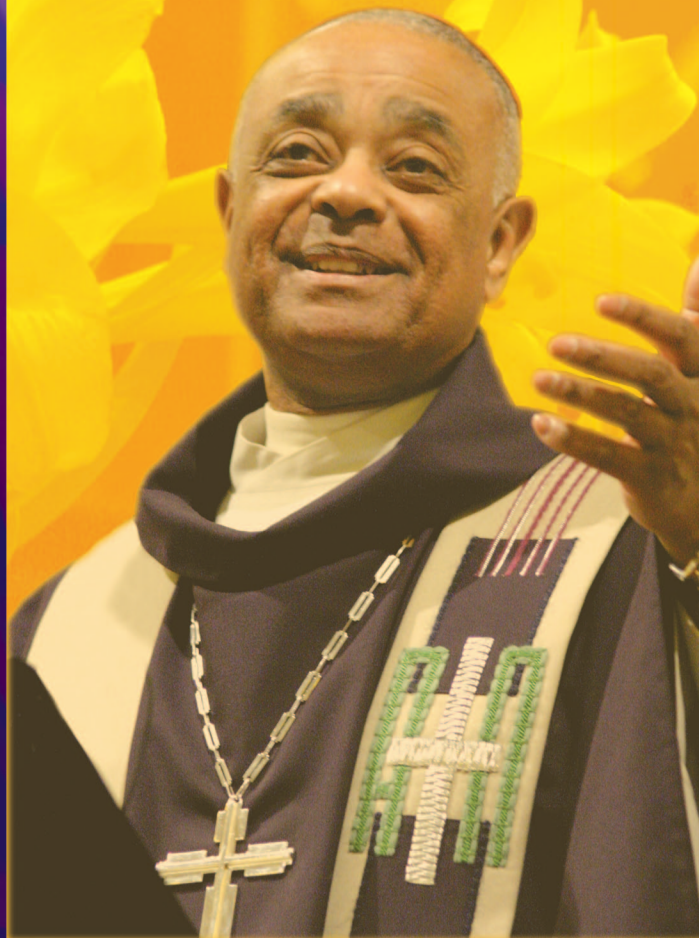
When Jesus healed the sick, He would often say, "your sins are forgiven." He came not only to heal the body, but all the more to heal the soul, by preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus established His Church in order to extend His presence on earth, and so the Church now continues Jesus' ministry of forgiving sins.

For more information, contact your local parish or:
Archdiocese of Atlanta
404-920-7335 • emhc@archatl.com



www.archatl.com/offices/chancellor

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation is also described in Paragraphs 1422-1498 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.



I Absolve you from your Sins:



**A Guide
To The Sacrament
of Reconciliation**

Archdiocese of Atlanta

Why ^{should I} confess my Sins to a Priest?

After his resurrection, Jesus said to His apostles, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (John 20: 22-23) The apostles were the first bishops, and their successors, today's bishops and priests, are diligent in carrying on that ministry of forgiving sins. It can be difficult, even embarrassing, to confess one's sins to a priest. This is because confessing our sins to another human being means taking responsibility for them, even as it helps to break the hold that sin has on us. God chooses to work through human instruments, and in this sacrament we experience the power of hearing a human voice saying, "your sins are forgiven," just as the people of Jesus' own day did.

Are there any sins that can not be forgiven?

In this life, all sins can be forgiven if we are sorry for our sins and seek God's forgiveness. The only sins that God cannot forgive are the ones that we refuse to bring to His mercy. God forgives ordinary sins in many ways. However, Saint John tells us that some sins involve such a turning away from God that they are deadly to the soul. He states that for these sins, it is not enough to pray to God. (1 John 5:16) The way that these mortal sins are ordinarily forgiven is through Confession.

Repentance for sins includes the desire and intention to turn away from sin in the future. For someone who is living in an ongoing situation of sin, (for example, sharing a marriage-like relationship with someone without a Catholic marriage) the intention to change that situation must be present before he can fruitfully receive Reconciliation.

What sins must I confess?

A Christian can confess both mortal and venial (ordinary) sins in Confession. However, he must confess all of his mortal sins to make a good confession. It is sufficient simply to state the nature of the sin (e.g. adultery) without sharing specific details. One should also confess, to the best of his knowledge, how often he has fallen into a particular sin. God is good, and so He forgives all of one's sins in Confession, even if an individual can not remember them all. However, God also desires that we be honest with Him and with ourselves, and so it would be sinful to intentionally withhold a mortal sin in Confession. In that case, none of our sins would be forgiven.

Mortal sins include acts which are seriously wrong that we commit knowingly and deliberately. Examples of serious acts include: blasphemy, sacrilege, willful absence from Sunday Mass, murder, abortion and serious acts of violence, fornication, masturbation and the use of pornography or artificial contraceptives, and serious theft or defrauding of workers. Many churches have an examination of conscience available that can help individuals consider their past faults and prepare for Confession.

What if I don't have any serious sins?

While venial sins can be forgiven in a variety of ways, nearly all of the saints made frequent use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They did this not because they had mortal sins, but because they knew that they benefited from the grace of the sacrament and the forgiveness of their venial sins. Frequent Confession also helps us to be more honest with ourselves about our failings, and can help us in our efforts to overcome them. For this reason, the Church strongly recommends the confession of everyday faults, as well. (CCC 1458)

www.archatl.com/offices/chancellor

How often should I go to Confession?

Every Christian should go to Confession when they are aware that they are in a state of serious sin. As an absolute minimum, the Church requires Christians to confess serious sins once a year. It is a good idea to talk with your confessor about how often to receive the sacrament. Most Christians will find it beneficial to receive Reconciliation every month or two. (CIC 989)

How do I go to Confession?

It is easy to go to Confession. While it is helpful to know the order of the rite, the priest can help you if you are unfamiliar with it. The important thing is that you have thought about your sins and desire God's forgiveness.

To go to Confession, simply enter the confessional. The priest will greet you. You may then indicate your state in life (teacher, mother, student, single person), and how long it has been since your last Confession. Then state your sins.

The priest will then offer advice and give a penance – some act that the penitent will do after Confession as a way of making up for his sins. He will then ask you to make an act of contrition.

An Act of Contrition

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.

After the act of contrition, the priest then prays the prayer of absolution, and God grants His forgiveness. The penitent is then dismissed, with his sins forgiven.