

Be not afraid: Here's a refresher course for going to confession

As the Diocese of Rockville Centre prepares for our annual Day of Reconciliation next Monday, April 6 — during Holy Week — when priests will be continuously available to hear confessions from 3 to 9 p.m. in every parish in the diocese — TLIC offers these helpful guidelines, provided by the diocesan Office of Worship, on how to celebrate the sacrament of penance. To find a parish near you, contact the Diocese of Rockville Centre at (516) 678-5800, or visit the diocesan Web site at www.drvc.org.

To receive the sacrament of penance, a person should prepare by asking for God's help, and particularly for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that a person will know their sins and be able to confess them honestly. A person should then examine their conscience, looking particularly at their relationship with God, with other people, and at whether or not they are growing better and closer to God as their life goes on. It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to see those areas of our lives where sin has affected our relationships; it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to recognize the sin, then seek forgiveness, and to move ahead.

Examination of conscience (for adults)

Think of yourself as a person

Do you accept yourself with your good and bad points? Do you share yourself with others?

Do you realize you have been called by, loved by God in a unique way?

Do you treat others with dignity and respect? Do you use your sexuality irresponsibly or selfishly?

Do you exploit others for your own pleasure?

Think of yourself as a husband or wife

Do you strive for understanding and communication with your spouse in order to be one spirit as planned by God?

Think of yourself as a father or mother

Do you give your children yourself, your time, your abilities?

Do you correct them when they're wrong, praise them when you should, instruct them with gentleness and patience? Are you aware of your responsibility to guide them in the Faith by your words and actions?

Do you apologize and admit when you're wrong and they've been right?

Think of yourself as an adult child

Do you realize that this command to "honor your father and mother" applies to you, if you are blessed to still have your parents, as it does to your children?

Think of yourself as a neighbor

Do you realize that your neighbor is your brother and sister? Do you try to be helpful when you know there is a need? Do you respect their rights and allow them to be persons? Do you make judgments about people based upon their appearance or color? Do you harbor prejudice in your

heart?

Think of yourself as an employee, as an employer

Do you give your employer all of your time during the hours he is paying you, realizing that "stealing time" is the same as stealing?

Do you give your employer your full efforts and concentration during working hours?

Do you pay a just wage?

Think of yourself as a member of the world community of the family of God

Do you sufficiently reflect on the responsibility you have to be concerned about the other members of this family who are suffering from poverty, prejudice, unfair labor practices, unjust housing laws, and other various causes?

Do you take it as a responsibility to consider the morality involved in issues like abortion, euthanasia, denial of rights to migrant workers, corruption in political or economic structures?

Do you take it as your responsibility to be informed about current events and to listen with open minds and hearts to those holding different positions?

Think of yourself in your direct relationship with God

Do you make the effort to spend some time with Him each day even if it's just to say "good morning" or "thanks?"

Do you seek to know Him better in whatever way fits you best?

Do you allow Him to give Himself often to you in the gifts of His sacraments of Eucharist and Penance?

How to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance (for adults)

Our Catholic Church treasures the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Many parishes offer a communal celebration of penance, especially during Advent and Lent. But private reconciliation is usually available every week of the year. If you'd like to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, here's what to do:

Prepare

Prayerfully recall your sins. Some will be specific actions. Some represent a more general pattern of behavior.

Go to the priest

Visit when he's in the reconciliation room at your parish or ask for an appointment. You may either kneel anonymously behind a screen or sit in a chair where you may speak face to face.

Be welcome

You and the priest may greet each other. Make the Sign of the Cross. He may urge you to have confidence in God. You may indicate the interval since your last confession or anything else that will help. Just use common sense. Either you or the priest may read from Scripture.

Confess your sins

Some penitents begin with a formula like, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." But you don't have to. Let the priest know your sins. You may discuss the sins you confess so the priest can give you the best counsel.

Receive a penance

The priest will recommend some action after you leave to indicate to God the sincerity in your heart. Usually he suggests prayer or self-denial. If it sounds difficult, let him know.

Pray for forgiveness

The priest may invite you to say a prayer of sorrow aloud.

If you remember the Act of Contrition, you may use it. But you may also speak simply from your heart.

One form of the **Act of Contrition** is:

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.

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

Receive absolution

This is the best part. The priest proclaims absolution, and God forgives your sins.

The prayer of absolution:

God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Conclude

The priest may say, "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good." If so, answer, "His mercy endures forever." Or he may conclude informally.

Change

Go forth, and with God's help, begin to live a new life of freedom from the slavery of sin!

Copyright © 1997 Resource Publications, Inc., 160 E. Virginia St. #290, San Jose, CA 95112, 408-286-8505. Paul Turner, pastor of St. John Regis Parish in Kansas City, Mo., holds a doctorate in sacramental theology from Sant' Anselmo University in Rome. His e-mail is PaulTu@aol.com.

Examination of conscience (for children)

One of the reasons for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to help us to be aware of how we act and to change behavior that is not appropriate for a follower of Jesus. A way in which we can do this is to form the habit of reviewing our actions or behavior each day and to see how our lives are in accord with God's Word.

We need to look at how we acted with our friends, our siblings, our parents and to see how we match up with what Jesus has asked us to do. Jesus gave us some guidelines in Scripture. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus challenges us to a Christian lifestyle by listing the Beatitudes (*Matt 5:1-12*). We need to read these Beatitudes and to see how we are living in the light of the Beatitudes.

I need to ask myself how I try to live out these commands of Jesus. Perhaps a parent, teacher or a catechist can help me to form some questions that would help me to understand how these Beatitudes apply to my life now.

How to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance (for children)

At the Confessional:

1. Father greets me, I make the sign of the cross.
2. Father asks me to trust in God.
3. Father may read something from the Bible.
4. I tell Father about myself: I say "Bless me Father, for I have sinned: it has been (how long) since my last confession."
5. I confess my sins and tell what I did wrong and why.
6. Father tells me how to be better.
7. Father gives me penance. The penance may be to say prayers or to do a good deed.
8. I pray the **Act of Contrition** or another prayer of sorrow.

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

9. Father gives me absolution which is a sign of God's forgiveness. He extends his hands and blesses me. I make the sign of the cross and say "Amen."
10. Together Father and I give thanks for God's forgiveness and love.