

Chapter 1 : CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: The Sacrament of Penance

*The Future of the Sacrament of Penance [Frank O'Loughlin] on calendrierdelascience.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Calls for a change in attitude toward, and a renewal in, understanding the use of the sacrament of penance.*

In a profound sense it is also a "confession" - acknowledgment and praise - of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man. This call is an essential part of the proclamation of the kingdom: Also, Baptism is the principal place for the first and fundamental conversion. It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism¹⁷ that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, "there are water and tears: Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* affliction of spirit and *compunctio cordis* repentance of heart. God must give man a new heart. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced: But this same Spirit who brings sin to light is also the Consoler who gives the human heart grace for repentance and conversion. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, fasting, prayer, and almsgiving,³¹ which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: Daily conversion and penance find their source and nourishment in the Eucharist, for in it is made present the sacrifice of Christ which has reconciled us with God. Through the Eucharist those who live from the life of Christ are fed and strengthened. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life - pure worthy, and joyful - of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. But he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry which he charged with the "ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God. The sacrament of forgiveness Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace. During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. To this "order of penitents" which concerned only certain grave sins , one was only rarely admitted and in certain regions only once in a lifetime. During the seventh century Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the "private" practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day. It comprises two equally essential elements: The Church, who through the bishop and his priests forgives sins in the name of Jesus Christ and determines the manner of satisfaction, also prays for the sinner and does penance with him. Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion. He effects the reconciliation of sinners through the Passover of his Son and the gift of his Spirit, through the prayer and ministry of the Church: God, the Father of mercies, through the death and the 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. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again. Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible. Such a stirring of conscience can initiate an interior process which, under the prompting of grace, will be brought to completion by sacramental absolution. By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance. The passages best suited to this can be found in the Ten Commandments, the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible. But those who fail to do so and knowingly withhold some, place nothing before the divine goodness for remission through the mediation of the priest, "for if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made. When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm e. Simple justice requires as much. But sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor. Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. This satisfaction is also called "penance. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him. We who can do nothing ourselves, as if just by ourselves, can do all things with the cooperation of "him who strengthens" us. Thus man has nothing of which to boast, but all our boasting is in Christ. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Since ancient times the bishop, visible head of a particular Church, has thus rightfully been considered to be the one who principally has the power and ministry of reconciliation: In danger of death any priest, even if deprived of faculties for hearing confessions, can absolve from every sin and excommunication. The minister of this sacrament should unite himself to the intention and charity of Christ. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation "is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members. The forgiven penitent is reconciled with himself in his inmost being, where he regains his innermost truth. He is reconciled with his brethren whom he has in some way offended and wounded. He is reconciled with the Church. He is reconciled with all creation. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin. What is an indulgence? Grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life, the privation of which is called the "eternal punishment" of sin. On the other hand every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death in the state called Purgatory. This purification frees one from what is called the "temporal punishment" of sin. These two punishments must not be conceived of as a kind of vengeance inflicted by God from without, but as following from the very nature of sin. A conversion which proceeds from a fervent charity can attain the complete purification of the sinner in such a way that no punishment would remain. While patiently bearing sufferings and trials of all kinds and, when the day comes, serenely facing death, the Christian must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace. He should strive by works of mercy and charity, as well as by prayer

and the various practices of penance, to put off completely the "old man" and to put on the "new man. Thus recourse to the communion of saints lets the contrite sinner be more promptly and efficaciously purified of the punishments for sin. They were offered so that the whole of mankind could be set free from sin and attain communion with the Father. In Christ, the Redeemer himself, the satisfactions and merits of his Redemption exist and find their efficacy. They are truly immense, unfathomable, and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission in the unity of the Mystical Body. Thus the Church does not want simply to come to the aid of these Christians, but also to spur them to works of devotion, penance, and charity. The elements of the celebration are ordinarily these: Here, the personal confession of sins and individual absolution are inserted into a liturgy of the word of God with readings and a homily, an examination of conscience conducted in common, a communal request for forgiveness, the Our Father and a thanksgiving in common. This communal celebration expresses more clearly the ecclesial character of penance. However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesial and public action. Grave necessity can also exist when, given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors to hear individual confessions properly in a reasonable time, so that the penitents through no fault of their own would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In this case, for the absolution to be valid the faithful must have the intention of individually confessing their grave sins in the time required. Christ is at work in each of the sacraments. He personally addresses every sinner: Personal confession is thus the form most expressive of reconciliation with God and with the Church. One must ask for this precious gift for oneself and for others. If repentance arises from love of charity for God, it is called "perfect" contrition; if it is founded on other motives, it is called "imperfect. The confession of venial faults, without being necessary in itself, is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.

Chapter 2 : The Priest and the Sacrament of Penance

There is no doubt that Jesus called his first disciples, and he calls us, to conversion. Yet the sacrament of penance has fallen on hard times over recent decades.

This list has been prepared in order to try to respond to the most common of them. Please do not hesitate to bring those questions to the priests in your parish or to seek solutions in the many excellent resources on the Internet. It is our hope that those who have questions about the Sacrament of Penance may find this FAQ useful in helping to overcome whatever hesitations they may have in coming to receive the sacrament. It is also hoped that Catholics who frequently receive this sacrament may find this list a means for greater appreciation of what they already esteem. Click on each question to see the answers. Click again to hide them.

Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest? He told his apostles that just as God the Father had sent him “and God the Father sent him to save us from our sins” so he was sending them. He told them that whatever sins they forgive are forgiven and whatever sins they retain are retained Jn Since the apostles were unable to read minds, the only way that they would know which to forgive and which to retain is if people told them their sins. Jesus thus established the essential structure of the sacrament of confession. Just as he uses priests to give us his Body and Blood at Mass so he uses them to give us His mercy in Penance. Was the Sacrament of Penance always the way it is now? During the first centuries the reconciliation of Christians who had committed particularly grave sins after their Baptism for example, idolatry, murder, or adultery was tied to a very rigorous discipline, according to which penitents had to do public penance for their sins, often for years, before receiving reconciliation. From that time on, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. Why do people vary in calling it the Sacrament of Penance, Confession or Reconciliation? The names emphasize different aspects of the sacrament. Confession refers to the act by which we tell our sins to the priest. Reconciliation refers to the goal of the celebration by which the sinner is reconciled to God and the Church see CCC The ritual for the sacrament is called the Rite of Penance, but is fitting to refer to it with any of these titles. The sacrament consists of three actions on the part of the penitent: It is also important to examine for sins of omission. How do I grow in contrition? There are two types of contrition: We should ask God to help us achieve that perfect contrition in which we are sorry for having wounded the God who loves us and whom we should love in return. How does our sorrow translate into penance? When we are truly sorry for our sins, we regret having ever done them. That leads naturally to our trying to remedy the damage caused by sin and to having a firm purpose of amendment to avoid that and other types of sins in the future. A good confession is humble, sincere and complete. What is sin and what sins need to be confessed in the Sacrament of Penance? The Church says that all grave or mortal sins must be confessed as soon as possible CIC What is a mortal sin? A mortal sin involves an action whose object is grave matter that is committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent. Grave matter is generally understood to be something that violates the Ten Commandments. Deliberate consent means a consent sufficiently intentional to be a personal choice CCC What are the consequences of a mortal sin? This is why it is so important for mortal sins to be confessed to a priest as soon as possible. What is a venial sin and what are its consequences? Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not set us in direct opposition to the will and friendship of God; it does not break the covenant with God. What did Jesus say and do about sin? Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world Jn 1: He healed the sins of the paralyzed man and of the woman caught in adultery Mk 2: He taught us how to be brutal toward sin, instructing us in the Sermon on the Mount us that it would be better to rip out our eyes or cut off our hands if they were leading us to sin than to do nothing and lose our bodies and souls forever in Hell Mt 5: He taught us to pray to the Father to forgive us our sins and to bring us to forgive the relatively smaller debts of those who sin against us Mt 6: Confession of our venial sins shows our hatred of all sin because even venial sins are against the love of God and neighbor. No, you should stay at home and wait for your

canonization papers to arrive! If I forget to confess a mortal sin, is my confession still valid and my sins forgiven? The person should, however, mention that forgotten sin in the next confession to receive advice and a proper penance. If this is a routine occurrence, it is probably an indication that one is either confessing too infrequently or not fully aware of the true horror that is a mortal sin, because one should not forget mortal sins easily. How often do I need to confess? The Church recommends that Catholics receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently. What are the effects of the sacrament? The Sacrament of Penance is a spiritual resurrection bringing us to life again after we were dead through mortal sin. It reconciles us with God in loving friendship and restores us to his grace. It is normally followed by peace, joy, serenity and spiritual consolation. The sacrament also reconciles us with the Church, repairing or restoring the damage our sins have done to our communion with others. The sinner also auspiciously anticipates the judgment that will come at the end of his life, choosing the path of life over the path of death.

CCC Can a priest reveal what he has heard to others? A priest can never reveal the sins a person has confessed. If a priest were to violate the seal of confession he would be automatically excommunicated.

CIC Over the centuries several priests have died and many have been imprisoned because they refused, even under threat of torture and execution, to break the inviolable seal of confession. This is one of the most beautiful aspects of the sacrament and of the priesthood: What if I feel nervous about going to the sacrament? Remember, first, that in the sacrament you are fundamentally talking to God through the priest. Moreover, know that you will not say anything that the priest has not heard before. Do not be afraid. How do I prepare? What do I say? Second, try to prepare with the help of a good examination of conscience sheet, but the priest will know that you cannot remember your sins with the precision of someone who came the previous week. Third, get the largest sins off of your shoulders first. Confession is not meant to be a memory test. It is good when Catholics have memorized one of the many beautiful acts of contrition, which sum up all of the sentiments and resolutions a Catholic should have in coming to confession. Most churches have traditional confessionals or reconciliation rooms with the option to confess either face-to-face or kneeling behind an opaque screen. In Church law, both the priest and the penitent have the right to opt for the screen if for whatever reason they find that more comfortable. What if I prefer to go to confession to priests at nearby parishes or at Catholic shrines or chapels where confessions are available each day? The most important thing is that you go! You can go to any Catholic priest in good standing with the faculties to hear confessions. You may find over time, however, that you will be helped more in your struggle against sin by a good confessor who has gotten to know you than by confessing to various priests, none of whom really know you. Can I confess my sins over the telephone or via the internet? You can confess your sins in any number of ways – many have confessed to bartenders and hairdressers over the centuries – but you cannot receive sacramental absolution via the internet or on the phone. Can I be forgiven of the terrible sin of abortion? The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong, but do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you would prefer to confess to a priest who has experience ministering to women who have abortions, please contact Project Rachel. Priests must be given faculties explicitly by their bishop to absolve the sin of abortion. The Project Rachel website contains testimonials from dozens of women who have found reconciliation and healing through Project Rachel and some very moving comments about the Sacrament. Project Rachel also offers an extensive retreat program, including retreats during Lent. Do I have to go to Confession before receiving Holy Communion like everyone did years ago when I was a child? The same principal applies to all of us. If one has not committed any serious sins since his or her last good confession, then it is not necessary to confess before receiving the Holy Eucharist. If you are civilly divorced but have not remarried or were validly married in the Church after receiving a declaration of nullity for your first marriage, then, yes, you may receive the Sacrament. If you have remarried outside of the Church or have entered into a cohabitating relationship, then those predicaments must be addressed before you can receive absolution. Pope John Paul II addressed this situation in

Chapter 3 : Catechism of the Catholic Church - The sacrament of penance and reconciliation

The sacrament of penance has fallen on hard times in recent decades. There is a much diminished use of the sacrament, and frequent reports of dissatisfaction with the experience of it on the part of both penitents and confessors.

Reconciliation also known as Confession or Penance is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ in His love and mercy to offer sinners forgiveness for offenses committed against God. At the same time sinners reconcile with the Church who is also wounded by our sins. Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people and God. We express our sorrow in a meaningful way Contrition , receive the forgiveness of Christ and His Church Absolution , make reparation for what we have done and resolve to do better in the future Penance. The forgiveness of sins involves four parts: There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin. Before Confession The Sacrament of Reconciliation does require preparation. We should begin with prayer, placing ourselves in the presence of God who is loving and merciful; reflecting on Jesus who is the healer who reaches out in love; and seek the help of the Holy Spirit in examining our lives. To make an examination of Conscience: Begin with prayer Review your life with the help of some questions see examples Tell God how truly sorry you are for your sins Make a firm resolution not to sin again Rite of Reconciliation 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. Reconciliation may be face-to-face or anonymous, with a screen between you and the priest. Choose the option that is the most comfortable for you. The priest gives you a blessing or greeting. He may share a brief Scripture passage. Make the Sign of the Cross and say: Confess all of your sins to the priest. The priest will help you to make a good confession. If you are unsure about how to confess or you feel uneasy, just ask him to help you. Answer his questions without hiding anything out of fear or shame. Place your trust in God, a merciful Father who wants to forgive you. Following your confession of sins, say: Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins. You have received the forgiveness of Christ! What should you do when you leave? Remember the words you recited in the Act of Contrition: These works help to join us with Christ, who alone died for us. We can do this through prayer , spiritual reading, fasting and the reception of the Sacraments. PDF brochure for downloading:

Chapter 4 : ~The Council of Trent - Session 14~

The future of the sacrament of penance. [Frank O'Loughlin] -- There is no doubt that Jesus called his first disciples, and he calls us, to conversion. Yet the sacrament of conversion - the sacrament of penance - has fallen on hard times over decades.

Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance. The sacred and holy, oecumenical and general Synod of Trent, -lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same Legate and Nuncios of the holy Apostolic See presiding therein, --although, in the decree concerning Justification, there has been, through a certain kind of necessity, on account of the affinity of the subjects, much discourse introduced touching the sacrament of Penance; nevertheless, so great, in these our days, is the multitude of various errors relative to this sacrament, that it will be of no small public utility to have given thereof a more exact and full definition, wherein, all errors having been, under the protection of the Holy Ghost, pointed out and extirpated, Catholic truth may be made clear and resplendent; which Catholic truth this holy Synod now sets before all Christians to be perpetually retained. On the necessity, and on the institution of the Sacrament of Penance. If such, in all the regenerate, were their gratitude towards God, as that they constantly preserved the justice received in baptism by His bounty and grace; there would not have been need for another sacrament, besides that of baptism itself, to be instituted for the remission of sins. But because God, rich in mercy, knows our frame, g He hath bestowed a remedy of life even on those who may, after baptism, have delivered themselves up to the servitude of sin and the power of the devil, --the sacrament to wit of Penance, by which the benefit of the death of Christ is applied to those who have fallen after baptism. Penitence was in deed at all times necessary, in order to attain to grace and justice, for all men who had defiled themselves by any mortal sin, even for those who begged to be washed by the sacrament of Baptism ; that so, their perverseness renounced and amended, they might, with a hatred of sin and a godly sorrow of mind, detest so great an offence of God. Wherefore the prophet says; Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin. But the Lord then principally instituted the sacrament of penance, when, being raised from the dead, He breathed upon His disciples, saying Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. And the Catholic Church with great reason repudiated and condemned as heretics, the Novatians, who of old obstinately denied that power of forgiving. Wherefore, this holy Synod, approving of and receiving as most true this meaning of those words of our Lord, condemns the fanciful interpretations of those who, in opposition to the institution of this sacrament, falsely wrest those words to the power of preaching the word of God, and of announcing the Gospel of Christ. On the difference between the Sacrament of Penance and that of Baptism. For the rest, this sacrament is clearly seen to be different from baptism in many respects: For, what have I, saith the apostle, to do to judge them that are without? Furthermore, one is the fruit of baptism, and another that of penance. For, by baptism putting on Christ, n we are made therein entirely a new creature, obtaining a full and entire remission of all sins: On the parts, and on the fruit of this Sacrament. But the acts of the penitent himself, to wit, contrition, confession and satisfaction, are as it were the matter p of this sacrament. But the thing signified q indeed and the effect of this sacrament, as far as regards its force and efficacy, is reconciliation with God, which sometimes, in persons who are pious and who receive this sacrament with devotion, is wont to be followed by peace and serenity of conscience, with exceeding consolation of spirit. The holy Synod, whilst delivering these things touching the parts and the effect of this sacrament, condemns at the same time the opinions of those who contend, that, the terrors which agitate the conscience, and faith, are the parts of penance. Contrition, which holds the first place amongst the aforesaid acts of the penitent, is a sorrow of mind, and a detestation for sin committed, with the purpose of not sinning for the future. Wherefore the holy Synod declares, that this contrition contains not only a cessation from sin, and the purpose and the beginning of a new life, but also a hatred of the old, H agreeably to that saying; Cast away from you all your iniquities, wherein you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. The Synod teaches moreover, that, although it sometimes happen that this contrition is perfect through charity, and reconciles man with God before this sacrament be actually received, the said

reconciliation, nevertheless, is not to be ascribed to that contrition, independently of the desire of the sacrament which is included therein. And as to that imperfect contrition, which is called attrition, because that it is commonly conceived either from the consideration of the turpitude of sin, or from the fear of hell and of punishment, It declares that if, with the hope of pardon, it exclude the wish to sin, y it not only does not make a man a hypocrite, and a greater sinner, but that it is even a gift of God, and an impulse of the Holy Ghost, --who does not indeed as yet dwell in the penitent, but only moves him, --whereby the penitent being assisted prepares a way for himself unto justice. And although this attrition cannot of itself, without the sacrament of penance, conduct the sinner to justification, yet does it dispose him to obtain the grace of God in the sacrament of Penance. For, smitten profitably with this fear, the Ninivites, at the preaching of Jonas, did fearful penance and obtained mercy from the Lord. Wherefore falsely do some calumniate Catholic writers, as if they had maintained that the sacrament of Penance confers grace without any good motion on the part of those who receive it: From the institution of the sacrament of Penance as already explained, the universal Church has always understood, that the entire confession of sins was also instituted by the Lord, and is of divine right necessary for all who have fallen after baptism; because that our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to heaven, left priests His own vicars, as presidents and judges, unto whom all the mortal crimes, into which the faithful of Christ may have fallen, should be carried, z in order that, in accordance with the power of the keys, they may pronounce the sentence of forgiveness or retention of sins. Whence it is gathered that all the mortal sins, of which, after a diligent examination of themselves, they are conscious, must needs be by penitents enumerated in confession, even though those sins be most hidden, and committed only against the two last precepts of the decalogue,--sins which sometimes wound the soul more grievously, and are more dangerous, than those which are committed outwardly. For venial sins, whereby we are not excluded from the grace of God, and into which we fall more frequently, although they be rightly and profitably, and without any presumption declared in confession, as the custom of pious persons demonstrates, yet may they be omitted without guilt, and be expiated by many other remedies. But, whereas all mortal sins, even those of thought, render men children of wrath, b and enemies of God, it is necessary to seek also for the pardon of them all from God, with an open and modest confession. Wherefore, while the faithful of Christ are careful to confess all the sins which occur to their memory, they without doubt lay them all bare before the mercy of God to be pardoned: We gather furthermore, that those circumstances which change the species of the sin are also to be explained in confession, because that, without them, the sins themselves are neither entirely set forth by the penitents, nor are they known clearly to the judges; and it cannot be that they can estimate rightly the grievousness of the crimes, and impose on the penitents, the punishment which ought to be inflicted, on account of them. Whence it is unreasonable to teach, that these circumstances have been invented by idle men; or, that one circumstance only is to be confessed, to wit, that one has sinned against a brother. But it is also impious to assert, that confession, enjoined to be made in this manner, is impossible, or to call it a slaughter-house of consciences: For the rest, as to the manner of confessing secretly to a priest alone, although Christ has not forbidden that a person may,--in punishment of his sins, and for his own humiliation, as well for an example to others as for the edification of the Church that has been scandalized,--confess his sins publicly, nevertheless this is not commanded by a divine precept; neither would it very prudent e to enjoin by any human law, that sins, especially such as are secret, should be made known by a public confession. Wherefore, whereas the secret sacramental confession, which was in use from the beginning in holy Church, and is still also in use, has always been commended by the most holy and the most ancient Fathers with a great and unanimous consent, the vain calumny of those is manifestly refuted, who are not ashamed to teach, that confession is alien from the divine command, and is a human invention, and that it took its rise from the Fathers assembled in the Council of Lateran: Whence, throughout the whole Church, the salutary custom is, to the great benefit of the souls of the faithful, now observed, of confessing at that most sacred and most acceptable time of Lent,--a custom which this holy Synod most highly approves of and embraces, as pious and worthy of being retained. On the ministry of this Sacrament, and on Absolution. But, as regards the minister of this sacrament, the holy Synod declares all these doctrines to be false, and utterly alien from the truth of the Gospel, which perniciously extend the ministry of the keys to any others soever besides bishops and priests;

imagining, contrary to the institution of this sacrament, that those words of our Lord, Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven, and, Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained, were in such wise addressed to all the faithful of Christ indifferently and indiscriminately, as that every one has the power of forgiving sins,—public sins to wit by rebuke, provided he that is rebuked shall acquiesce, and secret sins by a voluntary confession made to any individual whatsoever. It also teaches, that even priests, who are in mortal sin, exercise, through the virtue of the Holy Ghost which was bestowed in ordination, the office of forgiving sins, as the ministers of Christ; and that their sentiment is erroneous who contend that this power exists not in bad priests. For neither would faith without penance bestow any remission of sins; nor would he be otherwise than most careless of his own salvation, who, knowing that a priest but absolved him in jest, should not care fully seek for another who would act in earnest. On the Reservation of Cases. Wherefore, since the nature and order of a judgment require this, that sentence be passed only on those subject to that judicature, it has ever been firmly held in the Church of God, and this Synod ratifies it as a thing most true, that the absolution, which a priest pronounces upon one over whom he has not either an ordinary or a delegated jurisdiction, ought to be of no weight whatever. And it hath seemed to our most holy Fathers to be of great importance to the discipline of the Christian people, that certain more atrocious and more heinous crimes should be absolved, not by all priests, but only by the highest priests: Neither is it to be doubted,—seeing that all things, that are from God, are well ordered—but that this same may be lawfully done by all bishops, each in his own diocese, unto edification, however, not unto destruction, in virtue of the authority, above that of other inferior priests, delivered to them over their subjects, especially as regards those crimes to which the censure of excommunication is annexed. Nevertheless, for fear lest any may perish on this account, it has always been very piously observed in the said Church of God, that there be no reservation at the point of death, and that therefore all priests may absolve all penitents whatsoever from every kind of sins and censures whatever: On the necessity and on the fruit of Satisfaction. Finally, as regards satisfaction,—which as it is, of all the parts of penance, that which has been at all times recommended to the Christian people by our Fathers, so is it the one especially which in our age is, under the loftiest pretext of piety, impugned by those who have an appearance of godliness, but have denied the power thereof, —the holy Synod declares, that it is wholly false, and alien from the word of God, that the guilt is never forgiven by the Lord, without the whole punishment also being therewith pardoned. For clear and illustrious examples are found in the sacred writings, whereby, besides by divine tradition, this error is refuted in the plainest manner possible. And truly the nature of divine justice seems to demand, that they, who through ignorance have sinned before baptism, be received into grace in one manner; and in another those who, after having been freed from the servitude of sin and of the devil, and after having received the gift of the Holy Ghost, have not feared, knowingly to violate the temple of God, and to grieve the Holy Spirit. Neither indeed was there ever in the Church of God any way accounted surer to turn aside the impending chastisement of the Lord, than that men should, with true sorrow of mind, practise these works of penitence. Add to these things, that, whilst we thus, by making satisfaction, suffer for our sins, we are made conformable to Jesus Christ, who satisfied for our sins, from whom all our sufficiency is; p having also thereby a most sure pledge, that if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him. For we who can do nothing of ourselves, as of ourselves, can do all things, He cooperating, who strengthens us. Thus, man has not wherein to glory, but all our glorying is in Christ: But let them have in view, that the satisfaction, which they impose, be not only for the preservation of a new life and a medicine of infirmity, s but also for the avenging and punishing of past sins. For the ancient Fathers likewise both believe and teach, that the keys of the priests were given, not to loose only, but also to bind. But not therefore did they imagine that the sacrament of Penance is a tribunal of wrath or of punishments; even as no Catholic ever thought, by this kind of satisfactions on our parts, the efficacy of the merit and of the satisfaction of our Lord Jesus Christ is either obscured, or in any way lessened: On Works of Satisfaction. The Synod teaches furthermore, that so great is the liberality of the divine munificence, that we are able through Jesus Christ to make satisfaction to God the Father, not only by punishments voluntarily undertaken of ourselves for the punishment of sin, or by those imposed at the discretion of the priest according

to the measure of our delinquency, but also, which is a very great proof of love, by the temporal scourges inflicted of God, and borne patiently by us. First, therefore, as regards its institution, It declares and teaches, that our most gracious Redeemer,--who would have his servants at all times provided with salutary remedies against all the weapons of all their enemies,--as, in the other sacraments, He prepared the greatest aids, whereby, during life, Christians may preserve themselves whole from every more grievous spiritual evil, so did He guard the close of life, by the sacrament of Extreme Unction, as with a most firm defence. For though our adversary seeks and seizes opportunities, all our life long, to be able in any way to devour our souls; yet is there no time wherein he strains more vehemently all the powers of his craft to ruin us utterly, and, if he can possibly, to make us fall even from trust in the mercy of God, than when he perceives the end of our life to be at hand. On the Institution of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. Now, this sacred unction of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord, as truly and properly a sacrament of the new law, insinuated indeed in Mark, but recommended and promulgated to the faithful by James the Apostle, and brother of the Lord. Is any man, he saith, sick among you? Let him bring in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: For the Church has understood the matter thereof to be oil blessed by a bishop. On the Effect of this Sacrament. Moreover the thing signified and the effect of this sacrament are explained in those words; And the prayer of faith shall save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up, and if he be in sins they shall be forgiven him. For the thing here signified is the grace of the Holy Ghost; whose anointing cleanses away sins, if there be any still to be expiated, as also the remains of sins; and raises up and strengthens the soul of the sick person, by exciting in him a great confidence in the divine mercy; whereby the sick being supported, bears more easily the inconveniences and pains of his sickness; and more readily resists the temptations of the devil who lies in wait for his heel; and at times obtains bodily health, when expedient for the welfare of the soul. On the Minister of this Sacrament, and on the time when it ought to be administered. And now as to prescribing who ought to receive, and who to administer this sacrament, this also was not obscurely delivered in the words above cited. For it is there also shown, that the proper ministers of this sacrament are the Presbyters of the Church; by which name are to be understood, in that place, not the elders by age, or the foremost in dignity amongst the people, but, either bishops, or priests by bishops rightly ordained by the imposition of the hands of the priesthood. And if the sick should, after having received this unction, recover, they may again be aided by the succour of this sacrament, when they fall into another like danger of death. Wherefore, they are on no account to be hearkened to, who, against so manifest and clear a sentence of the apostle James, teach, either that this unction is a human figment or is a rite received from the Fathers which neither has a command from God, nor a promise of grace: Neither assuredly does the Roman Church, the mother and mistress of all other churches, observe aught in administering this unction,--as regards those things which constitute the substance of this sacrament,--but what blessed James has prescribed. Nor indeed can there be contempt of so great a sacrament without a heinous sin, and an injury to the Holy Ghost himself. These are the things which this holy oecumenical Synod professes and teaches and proposes to all the faithful of Christ, to be believed and held, touching the sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction. And it delivers the following canons to be inviolably preserved; and condemns and anathematizes those who assert what is contrary thereto. Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven; and whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained; and by virtue of which words every one is able to absolve from sins, to wit, from public sins by reproof only, provided he who is reprov'd yield thereto, and from secret sins by a voluntary confession; let him be anathema. It is the office of bishops to admonish their subjects, especially those appointed to the cure of souls, of their duty. Whereas it is properly the office of bishops to reprove the vices of all who are subject to them, this will have to be principally their care,--that clerics, especially those appointed to the cure of souls, be blameless; and that they do not, with their connivance, lead a disorderly life: And with what freedom shall priests be able to correct laymen, when they have to answer silently to themselves, that they have committed the very things which they reprove? Wherefore, bishops shall charge their clergy, of whatsoever rank they be, that they be a guide to the people of God committed to them, in conduct, conversation, and doctrine; being mindful of that which is written, Be

holy for I also am holy. And, agreeably to the admonition of the apostle; Let them not give offence to any man, that their ministry be not blamed; but in all things let them exhibit themselves as the ministers of God, lest that saying of the prophet be fulfilled in them, The priests of God defile the sanctuaries, and despise the law. But, in order that the said bishops may be able to execute this with greater freedom, and may not be hindered therein under any pretext whatever, the same sacred and holy, oecumenical and general Synod of Trent, the same legate and nuncios of the Apostolic See presiding therein, has thought fit that these canons following be established and decreed. If any, being prohibited, or interdicted, or suspended, advance to orders, they shall be punished. Whereas it is more beseeming and safe for one that is subject, by rendering due obedience to those set over him, to serve in an inferior ministry, than, to the scandal of those set over him, to aspire to the dignity of a more exalted degree; to him, unto whom the ascent to sacred orders shall have been interdicted by his own prelate, from whatsoever cause, be it even on account of some secret crime, or in what manner soever, even extra-judicially; and to him who shall have been suspended from his own orders, or ecclesiastical degrees and dignities; no license, conceded against the will of that said prelate, for causing himself to be promoted, nor any restoration to former orders, degrees, dignities and honours, shall be of any avail. The contravener shall be ipso jure suspended during a year from the exercise of pontifical functions; and the person so promoted shall in like manner be suspended from the exercise of the orders so received, for as long as to his own prelate shall seem fit. The bishop may suspend his clerics, who have been improperly promoted by another, if he find them incompetent. The bishop may suspend, for the time that shall seem to him fit, from the exercise of the orders received, and may interdict from ministering at the altar, or from exercising the functions of any order, any of his clerics, especially those who are in sacred orders, who have been, without his previous examination and commendatory letters, promoted by any authority whatsoever; even though they shall have been approved of as competent by him who has ordained them, but whom he himself shall find but little fit and able to celebrate the divine offices, or to administer the sacraments of the Church. No cleric shall be exempt from the correction of the bishop, even out of the time of visitation. The jurisdiction of Conservators is confined within certain limits. In civil causes also, if he be the plaintiff, it shall nowise be lawful for him to bring up any one for judgment before his own judges conservatory. And if, in those causes wherein he shall be the defendant, it shall happen that the conservator chosen by him shall be declared by the plaintiff to be one suspected by him, or if any dispute shall have arisen between the judges themselves, the conservator to wit and the ordinary, concerning competency of jurisdiction, the cause shall not be proceeded with, until by arbitrators, chosen in legal form, a decision shall have been come to relative to the said suspicion, or competency of jurisdiction. Neither shall any one enjoy the benefit of such letters longer than for five years. It shall also not be lawful for conservatory judges to have any fixed tribunal. As to causes which relate to wages and to destitute persons, the decree of this holy Synod thereupon shall remain in its full force. But general universities, colleges of doctors or scholars, places belonging to Regulars, as also hospitals wherein hospitality is actually exercised, and persons belonging to the said universities, colleges, places, and hospitals are not to be deemed included in this present canon, but are to be considered, and are, wholly exempted. A penalty is decreed against clerics, who, being in sacred Orders, or holding benefices, do not wear a dress beseeming their Order. Voluntary homicides are never to be ordained:

Chapter 5 : The Future of the Sacrament of Penance - Logos Bible Software

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The Priest and the Sacrament of Penance Fr. The subject of the present conference is the priest and the sacrament of penance. It is remarkable how much publicity the sacrament of Penance is getting these days. A whole stadium filled with people is assembled, and in an elaborate ceremony are given general absolution. In other cases, several thousand people are brought together in response to massive publicity to be given general absolution before Christmas. The newspapers give these spectacles large coverage, and the media make heroes of reconciliation of the bishops who sponsor these, quote, "rallies of mercy. At the same time, reports from one diocese after another are generally the same the people are just not coming to Confession the way they used to. I remember one Saturday evening during the announced Confession time making my holy hour and saying my office in a large parish church. During the hour and half that a priest sat in the confessional waiting for penitents. I was the only penitent who went to confession. He was lucky I went. Again, what has happened? What are we to make of all of this? In order to cover as much ground as possible in the short time at our disposal, let me ask a few questions and then try to give an answer. Why has there been such a lessening of the use of the sacrament among the Catholic people? What does the Church expect of her priests so they might be what they should be administrators of this sacrament? I want to make sure before we turn on the feeling that we know what the faith is. There are no less than fifteen such definitions and they would all be useful to be recalled these days. Let me read just four of these fifteen definitions that are especially pertinent to our reflection. Each of these is in the form of a canon, which means a solemn declaration closing with a condemnation for heresy of anyone who denies this article of the Catholic faith. If anyone says that in the Catholic Church penance is not truly and properly a sacrament instituted by Christ our Lord to reconcile faithful with God as often as they fall into sin after baptism, let him be anathema. On confessing secretly to the priest alone is foreign to the command of Christ and is of human origin, let him be anathema. If anyone says to obtain remission in the sacrament of Penance it is not necessary according to divine law to confess each and every mortal sin when remembered after proper and diligent examination even secret ones. And sins against the last two commandments, the ninth and tenth and both circumstances which changes the species of the sin but says that such confession is only useful for instructing and consoling the penitent and that it was formally observed only for imposing the canonical penance or if anyone says of anyone who make an effort to confess all their sins wish to leave nothing to the forgiveness of the divine mercy or finally that it is not permissible to confess venial sins, let him be anathema. But how sadly how many, including those in great influence in the Church, have forgotten this teaching. Why the Drop in Confessions? We now ask, why the drop in Confession? In the light of the forgoing, it follows that hearing confessions places a heavy demand on the generosity of a priest. To tell not just one sin, but all of them and, if they are grave, with all their attending circumstances, this takes time. And on the part of the priest it takes a lot of patience. If he is to give the penitent the opportunity to do what Christ, speaking through the Church commands them to do, they have no option. The priest must be convinced that it is worth the effort. This, in my humble estimation, is the hub of the problem. Is it worth the effort? One reason why shortly before Christmas, a mother called me up from another state. They had moved to this other state from New York. I had become the regular confessor of her little children whose first confessions I heard. The boy wanted to go to confession, it was quite a trip. All I can tell you I considered it worth it! Borrowing from the Protestants, who abolished auricular Confession the practice of giving indiscriminate general absolution came into prominence. We return to our question. Why the drop in confessions? In my judgment, mainly for two reasons. First because of the prevalence of so many strange ideas that have penetrated the priestly mind. And priests can be brainwashed like anybody else about auricular Confession not being of divine origin, but an ecclesiastical invention. As one pastor, a good man, when after asking me about this, I told him and he began to argue. Are you sure that Christ wants individual

confessions to be made to an individual priest? Secondly, because these ideas have combined with the natural lethargy of a priest. So these ideas combined with the natural lethargy of a priest to spend, sometimes hours, in the confessional. These ideas became a convenient excuse for not doing what only faith and a deep faith even makes intelligible, let alone inspires the willingness to put into what sometimes must be heroic practice, as only a priest understands. Saint John Vianney, the Cure of Ars, was canonized, one of the reasons for his canonization and later declaration as patron of parish priests, so the Church said, was that he spent so much time sometimes sixteen hours a day in the confessional, hearing the confessions of the thousands of people who came to him. I am asking the question the third time - why the drop in confessions? What the Church Expects of Her Priests We finally ask, what does the Church expect of her priests relative to this great sacrament? Pertinent to the sacrament of Penance, the Church has said a great deal, speaking now through centuries of wisdom through general councils, through papal declarations, through the teaching of her saints and through the practice of the great priests of Catholic history. What do we find in this library of instruction about the priests and the sacrament of Reconciliation? We find especially these things if a priest is to preach the dignity and importance of the sacrament of Penance to the faithful he must himself use this sacrament. This, by the way in giving retreat to priests, is one of my peaks of my retreat. Fathers, everyone, no exceptions, must go to Confession. I am especially happy to make this statement when there is a bishop in their midst. In the Society of Jesus, her priests are expected to go to Confession at least once a week. Pope Pius XI went to Confession every day. Second if a priest is to appreciate the greatness of this sacrament, he must prayerfully reflect on what it means. He is no mere counselor; he is surely not a therapist. He is a representative of Christ and the more he looks at himself in his own sinfulness, the more he is staggered by the disproportion between his own incapacity and what the people who confess their sins need. He must then see with the eyes of faith that he is only an instrument, though a necessary one, in the hands and through the lips of the Master. This is that power which, as St. This does not debase the merciful gift; but makes it, rather, appear greater; since beyond the weak creature is seen more clearly the hand of God through whose power is wrought this wonder *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii*, Priests must meditate on what God has entrusted into their hands. Otherwise, as so many have allowed, they will not appreciate what they have, and to the tragic detriment of thousands of souls, will not exercise this power of pardon. First of all, to repeat an article of faith, the absolution of the priest is valid no matter what his moral condition. This, too, is an article of faith. For that also, thank God. But having said that, we also know that God uses as the instrument of His grace those most effectively who are most closely united with Him. He has, as we are told by the infallible Church, three roles. One to absolve, another to instruct and a third to heal. His power of absolution is absolute, provided the penitent does his or her part and the priest seriously intends to absolve the sins by the power of the keys committed to the Church, they are removed. But when it comes to instructing, and how we need council and advice, when it comes to healing, and how we need consolation and encouragement, other things being equal, the Church keeps telling her priests: But that sentence is a sacramental sentence. And the Christ who speaks through His priests will teach the penitent and will heal the weak and feeble soul as only Jesus can. And He can because He is God but the instrument must be totally resigned and conformed to the divine will. Needless to say, we should, may I suggest daily, say even a short prayer of thanks to God, asking Him to bless the priests that over the years have exercised in our regard this blessed sacrament of Reconciliation. Because it is, I may almost say, especially in this sacrament of peace, that the Prince of Peace continues to inspire peace in the hearts of a troubled, worried and anxious world. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 6 : Saint Gerard Majella Parish, : Penance

Penance is also called "the SACRAMENT of CONVERSION" because it makes Jesus' call to conversion present through the sacrament. Another name for PENANCE is "The SACRAMENT of CONFESSION" because it involves the personal disclosure of sins to a priest.

A controversy first resulted over Montanism, whose main supporter was Tertullian. There were arguments between Novatian and Pope Cornelius, and between St. Cyprian and Pope Stephen I. Special canons were issued by regional, local Church councils on how to deal with the public penance. Because of that it is called canonical penance. Acts of ancient councils of this period show that no one who belonged to the order of penitents had access to Eucharistic communion until the bishop reconciled him with the community of the Church. Canon 29 of the Council of Epaone in Gaul says, that from among penitents only apostates had to leave Sunday assembly together with catechumens, before the Eucharistic part commenced. Other penitents were present until the end but were denied communion in the table of the Lord. Bishops gathered in that council were convinced that it was useful for the salvation of the faithful when the diocesan bishop prescribed penance to a sinner as many times as he or she would fall into sin canon 8. The practice of so-called tariff penance was brought to continental Europe from the British Isles by Hiberno-Scottish and Anglo-Saxon monks. It had no knowledge of the institution of a public penance in the community of the church which could not be repeated, and which involved canonical obligations. Celtic penitential practices consisted of confession, acceptance of satisfaction fixed by the priest, and finally in reconciliation. They date back to 6th century. Penitential books native to the islands provided precisely determined penances for all offences, small and great. That kind of penance is called tariff penance. Note the veiled crucifix, indicating that it is Passiontide. Beginnings of practising the sacrament of penance in the form of individual confession as we know it now, i. The words of the Lord, "Receive the holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" John However, private confession was still used for private sins. For example, it would not have been unusual for someone to receive a year penance [25] for committing the sin of abortion, which the Catholic Church considers to be a grave or mortal sin. During the Counter-Reformation of the 16th century, confession became less of a public declaration of loyalty to the Church and more of a private affair. Since the Council of Trent, compulsory annual confession was required only of those conscious of mortal sin. It was a change in emphasis from reconciliation with the Church to reconciliation directly with God; and from emphasis on social sins of hostility to private sins, called the "secret sins of the heart". The provision of a fixed grille is required by the Code of Canon Law. This further distinguished the role of penance from forms of psychotherapy. Quoting the Epistle to the Romans 8: Catholics believe that no priest, however pious or learned, has of himself the power to forgive sins apart from God. However, through the absolution that the priest imparts God grants forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with the Church. A local ordinary may grant any priest, either permanently or for a limited time, the faculty to hear confessions, but is obliged to make sure by an examination or some other adequate means that the priest has the knowledge and character to do so. If the priest belongs to a religious institute, he is not to exercise this faculty without the at least presumed permission of his religious superior. The Pope, as the supreme earthly Catholic judge, and all cardinals have the right to hear confessions of any Catholic anywhere in the world by virtue of canon law. A Catholic of one rite may have a confessor of another rite in communion with Rome. Major superiors, rectors of seminaries and heads of houses of formation, and heads of novitiates should not ordinarily be the ones to hear the confessions of those they supervise unless the person freely requests it of them they may not make use of any information learned in confession when they are disciplining their charges because of the seal of confession. He acts in persona Christi. In the Roman Rite, celebration of the sacrament may begin with a greeting or blessing by the priest, who invites the penitent to have trust in God. It has been state a time since my last confession," or using more informal language. The mention of time is to establish whether there is a habit of serious sin that may not be repented. It may be omitted if there are no mortal sins. Mortal sins must be confessed within at most a year and always before receiving Holy Communion, while confession of venial sins also is recommended. The

priest imparts absolution. Since the Council of Trent, the essential words of absolution have been: Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace. May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the saints, whatever good you do and suffering you endure, heal your sins, help you to grow in holiness, and reward you with eternal life. The older form stressed: The Catholic Church teaches that the individual and integral confession and absolution as opposed to collective absolution is the only ordinary way in which a person conscious of mortal sins committed after baptism can be reconciled with God and the Church. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church have insisted on this point in order to avoid confusion, as both confidential processes have distinct roles in church life. The rite presents the sacrament in three different ritual forms: The Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents "is similar to the way most Roman Catholics remember "confession"; however, provision is made for the reading of sacred Scripture, and the penitent is given the option of speaking to the priest face-to-face or remaining anonymous usually behind a grille. The priest gives a suitable penance and may offer advice. The priest pronounces absolution the formula of absolution was revised and extended and the rite concludes with a short thanksgiving. Private confession and reconciliation follow and a final thanksgiving, blessing and dismissal. Paul VI said in that he hoped this communal rite would "become the normal way of celebration," since all sacrament are meant to be celebrated in community. The Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution "is similar to the second, except that the penitents do not make an actual confession, but only manifest contrition general confession. The prayer of absolution is given collectively or "generally" to all those gathered to celebrate the sacrament general absolution. The penitents are obliged to actually confess each grave sin in their next confession. This rite has been discouraged for widespread use by the Vatican in many countries recently. Frequency of reception[edit] A modern confessional in a Latin Catholic Church. The penitent may kneel on the kneeler or sit in a chair not shown , facing the priest. Frequent confession Canon of the Code of Canon Law states: There is never a strict obligation to confess venial sins, or to go to Confession if one has no mortal sins to confess. The sacrament of Penance is also known as the sacrament of peace. Because of what he considered misinformation about this sacrament, John Paul II recommended this practice and warned that those who discourage frequent reception of the sacrament "are lying. Ignatius of Loyola , patron of spiritual exercises in the Church. Ignatius called this examen the most essential spiritual practice for Jesuits.

Chapter 7 : You are being redirected

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation (commonly called Penance, Reconciliation, or Confession) is one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church (called sacred mysteries in the Eastern Catholic Churches), in which the faithful obtain absolution for the sins committed against God and neighbour and are reconciled with the community of the Church.

It is called a "sacrament" not simply a function or ceremony, because it is an outward sign instituted by Christ to impart grace to the soul. As an outward sign it comprises the actions of the penitent in presenting himself to the priest and accusing himself of his sins, and the actions of the priest in pronouncing absolution and imposing satisfaction. This whole procedure is usually called, from one of its parts, "confession", and it is said to take place in the "tribunal of penance", because it is a judicial process in which the penitent is at once the accuser, the person accused, and the witness, while the priest pronounces judgment and sentence. The grace conferred is deliverance from the guilt of sin and, in the case of mortal sin, from its eternal punishment; hence also reconciliation with God, justification. By way of further explanation it is needful to correct certain erroneous views regarding this sacrament which not only misrepresent the actual practice of the Church but also lead to a false interpretation of theological statement and historical evidence. From what has been said it should be clear: Man indeed is free to obey or disobey, but once he has sinned, he must seek pardon not on conditions of his own choosing but on those which God has determined, and these for the Christian are embodied in the Sacrament of Penance. No Catholic believes that a priest, simply as an individual man, however pious or learned, has power to forgive sins. This power belongs to God alone; but He can and does exercise it through the ministration of men. Since He has seen fit to exercise it by means of this sacrament, it cannot be said that the Church or the priest interferes between the soul and God; on the contrary, penance is the removal of the one obstacle that keeps the soul away from God. Without sincere sorrow and purpose of amendment, confession avails nothing, the pronouncement of absolution is of no effect, and the guilt of the sinner is greater than before. While this sacrament as a dispensation of Divine mercy facilitates the pardoning of sin, it by no means renders sin less hateful or its consequences less dreadful to the Christian mind; much less does it imply permission to commit sin in the future. In paying ordinary debts, as e. Strangely enough, the opposite charge is often heard, viz. But this view, in the first place, overlooks the fact that Christ, though merciful, is also just and exacting. Both these accusations, of too great leniency and too great severity, proceed as a rule from those who have no experience with the sacrament and only the vaguest ideas of what the Church teaches or of the power to forgive sins which the Church received from Christ. Teaching of the Church The Council of Trent declares: As a means of regaining grace and justice, penance was at all times necessary for those who had defiled their souls with any mortal sin. Before the coming of Christ, penance was not a sacrament, nor is it since His coming a sacrament for those who are not baptized. But the Lord then principally instituted the Sacrament of Penance, when, being raised from the dead, he breathed upon His disciples saying: By which action so signal and words so clear the consent of all the Fathers has ever understood that the power of forgiving and retaining sins was communicated to the Apostles and to their lawful successors, for the reconciling of the faithful who have fallen after Baptism. Why doth this man speak thus? Who can forgive sins but God only? Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, take up thy bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, I say to thee: Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thy house" Mark 2: Christ wrought a miracle to show that He had power to forgive sins and that this power could be exerted not only in heaven but also on earth. This power, moreover, He transmitted to Peter and the other Apostles. To Peter He says: And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: Later He says to all the Apostles: As to the meaning of these texts, it should be noted: In healing the palsied man Christ declared that "the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins"; here He promises that what these men, the Apostles, bind or loose on earth, God in heaven will likewise bind or loose. But as the Council of Trent declares, Christ principally instituted the Sacrament of Penance after His Resurrection, a miracle greater than that of healing the sick.

When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. While the sense of these words is quite obvious, the following points are to be considered: He prefaces this grant of power by declaring that the mission of the Apostles is similar to that which He had received from the Father and which He had fulfilled: Now it is beyond doubt that He came into the world to destroy sin and that on various occasions He explicitly forgave sin Matthew 9: Christ not only declared that sins were forgiven, but really and actually forgave them; hence, the Apostles are empowered not merely to announce to the sinner that his sins are forgiven but to grant him forgivenessâ€”"whose sins you shall forgive". If their power were limited to the declaration " God pardons you", they would need a special revelation in each case to make the declaration valid. The exercise of this power in either form forgiving or retaining is not restricted: Christ simply says "whose sins ". It is therefore clear from the words of Christ that the Apostles had power to forgive sins. Christ foresaw that even those who received faith and baptism , whether during the lifetime of the Apostles or later, would fall into sin and therefore would need forgiveness in order to be saved. He must, then, have intended that the power to forgive should be transmitted from the Apostles to their successors and be used as long as there would be sinners in the Church , and that means to the end of time. It is true that in baptism also sins are forgiven, but this does not warrant the view that the power to forgive is simply the power to baptize. In the first place, as appears from the texts cited above, the power to forgive is also the power to retain; its exercise involves a judicial action. But no such action is implied in the commission to baptize Matthew Furthermore, baptism , because it is a new birth, cannot be repeated, whereas the power to forgive sins penance is to be used as often as the sinner may need it. Hence the condemnation, by the same Council, of any one "who, confounding the sacraments , should say that baptism itself is the Sacrament of Penance, as though these two sacraments were not distinct and as though penance were not rightly called the second plank after shipwreck" Sess. These pronouncements were directed against the Protestant teaching which held that penance was merely a sort of repeated baptism ; and as baptism effected no real forgiveness of sin but only an external covering over of sin through faith alone, the same, it was alleged, must be the case with penance. This, then, as a sacrament is superfluous; absolution is only a declaration that sin is forgiven through faith , and satisfaction is needless because Christ has satisfied once for all men. This was the first sweeping and radical denial of the Sacrament of Penance. Some of the earlier sects had claimed that only priests in the state of grace could validly absolve , but they had not denied the existence of the power to forgive. During all the preceding centuries, Catholic belief in this power had been so clear and strong that in order to set it aside Protestantism was obliged to strike at the very constitution of the Church and reject the whole content of Tradition. Belief and practice of the early Church Among the modernistic propositions condemned by Pius X in the Decree "Lamentabili sane" 3 July, are the following: Moreover, even after penance came to be recognized as an institution of the Church , it was not called by the name of sacrament , because it was regarded as an odious sacrament. It is therefore Catholic doctrine that the Church from the earliest times believed in the power to forgive sins as granted by Christ to the Apostles. Such a belief in fact was clearly inculcated by the words with which Christ granted the power, and it would have been inexplicable to the early Christians if any one who professed faith in Christ had questioned the existence of that power in the Church. But if, contrariwise, we suppose that no such belief existed from the beginning, we encounter a still greater difficulty: But no such record is found; even those who sought to limit the power itself presupposed its existence , and their very attempt at limitation put them in opposition to the prevalent Catholic belief. Turning now to evidence of a positive sort, we have to note that the statements of any Father or orthodox ecclesiastical writer regarding penance present not merely his own personal view, but the commonly accepted belief ; and furthermore that the belief which they record was no novelty at the time , but was the traditional doctrine handed down by the regular teaching of the Church and embodied in her practice. In other words, each witness speaks for a past that reaches back to the beginning, even when he does not expressly appeal to tradition. Greater wrong could not be done than what they do in seeking to rescind His commands and fling back the office He bestowed. The Church obeys Him in both respects, by binding sin and by loosing it; for the Lord willed that for both the power should be equal" On Penance I. Again he teaches that this power was to be a function of the priesthood. The power to forgive extends to all sins: Against the same heretics St. Pacian, Bishop of Barcelona d. In the

East during the same period we have the testimony of St. Cyril of Alexandria d. Wherefore, he concludes, "it were manifest folly to condemn so great a power without which we can neither obtain heaven nor come to the fulfillment of the promises. Not only when they the priests regenerate us baptism , but also after our new birth, they can forgive us our sins " On the Priesthood III. These extracts show that the Fathers recognized in penance a power and a utility quite distinct from that of baptism. Repeatedly they compare in figurative language the two means of obtaining pardon; or regarding baptism as spiritual birth, they describe penance as the remedy for the ills of the soul contracted after that birth. But a more important fact is that both in the West and in the East, the Fathers constantly appeal to the words of Christ and given them the same interpretation that was given eleven centuries later by the Council of Trent. In this respect they simply echoed the teachings of the earlier Fathers who had defended Catholic doctrine against the heretics of the third and second centuries. Cyprian in his "De lapsis" A. The heretic Novatian , on the contrary, asserted that "it is unlawful to admit apostates to the communion of the Church ; their forgiveness must be left with God who alone can grant it" Socrates , Church History V. The distinction between sins that could be forgiven and others that could not, originated in the latter half of the second century as the doctrine of the Montanists , and especially of Tertullian. While still a Catholic , Tertullian wrote A. For these, however, he allows only one forgiveness: In the vestibule He has stationed a second repentance for opening to such as knock; but now once for all, because now for the second time; but never more, because the last time it had been in vain. However, if any do incur the debt of a second repentance, his spirit is not to be forthwith cut down and undermined by despair. Let it be irksome to sin again, but let it not be irksome to repent again; let it be irksome to imperil oneself again, but let no one be ashamed to be set free again. Repeated sickness must have repeated medicine" On Penance 7. Tertullian does not deny that the Church can forgive sins ; he warns sinners against relapse, yet exhorts them to repent in case they should fall. His attitude at the time was not surprising, since in the early days the sins above mentioned were severely dealt with; this was done for disciplinary reasons, not because the Church lacked power to forgive. In the minds , however, of some people the idea was developing that not only the exercise of the power but the power itself was limited. Against this false notion Pope Callistus published his "peremptory edict" in which he declares: In this work he rejects without scruple what he had taught as a Catholic: In place of it he sets up the distinction between lighter sins which the bishop could forgive and more grievous sins which God alone could forgive. Though in an earlier treatise, "Scorpiace" chapter 10 , he had said that "the Lord left here to Peter and through him to the Church the keys of heaven" he now denies that the power granted to Peter had been transmitted to the Church , i. Yet he claims this power for the "spirituals" pneumatici , although these, for prudential reasons, do not make use of it. To the arguments of the "Psychici", as he termed the Catholics , he replies: This I, even more than you, acknowledge and adjudge. I who in the new prophets have the Paraclete saying: Thus Tertullian , by the accusation which he makes against the pope and by the restriction which he places upon the exercise of the power of forgiving sin , bears witness to the existence of that power in the Church which he had abandoned.

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