

Catholic Sacraments / Reconciliation (Penance)

Many lives are blighted by sin and guilt, by the need for forgiveness and conversion. The word "penance" comes from the Latin word poenitentia which means "sorrow," or "regret." Many of us regret things we have done or fail to do, words we have said or thoughts we have harboured, things we are too embarrassed or ashamed to admit. Sometimes these hidden secrets take on much more importance than they deserve, simply because we keep them bottled up and are unable to speak about them. The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives us the opportunity to express our sorrow for things we have done wrong, to heal broken relationships, to forgive ourselves and others, and to open up the channels of communication between ourselves and God.



Confession is above all a place of healing, not a place of judgment or punishment. When we make our confession to a priest in the confidentiality of the confessional or reconciliation room, we experience healing and liberation, discovering again and again how much we are loved by God, how precious we are to Him, and how great is our dignity as His children. Once he had heard our confession, the priest says the words of absolution for our sins:

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.

What the penitent makes known to the priest remains "sealed" because the confidentiality of confession is absolute. Nothing said by the penitent in confession will ever be repeated. This is an experience of mercy and reconciliation, where we can lay down the burdens of guilt and shame that we carry with us. No matter what we think of ourselves or of God, we can still be certain that God forgives us, loves us and wants only to heal us.