

Let's suppose you do have a list: "Well, Father I've just cursed a few times, missed Mass on a Holy Day, took a few things from work and hit the kids a bit hard". What God wants to change is our hearts, so tell him why we've done these things. "... because I get angry easily .... because I find it hard to get to Mass after a day's work. I suppose I did that because I'm a bit greedy ...." This is an examination of conscience, where we don't just look at acts, but also our attitudes, feelings and problems.

The priest may then give you some spiritual advice and hopefully encouragement. He will then ask you to say a penance, usually a prayer, in thanksgiving for the mercy God gives. Then comes your Act of Contrition (a prayer of sorrow for having sinned and an expressed intention not to sin again). It is then that the priest grants absolution.

The Sacrament of reconciliation is an opportunity to be relieved of the burden of sin, to seek help or advice if needed, but most of all that Jesus came to give us: Redemption.

When we leave the confessional it is a good time for use to say the penance that the priest has given use. The penance will normally be in the form of some well know prayer. There may also be a practical element to the penance as well.

There are many forms of the Act of Contrition ans we can ask for forgiveness in our own words,however the most common prayer in use is as follows

" Oh my God because you are so good I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and with the help of your grace I will try not to sin again Amen. "

This will be the act of contrition used by most children preparing for the sacrament and it would be good if you could help children in your family learn this

## The Sacrament of Confession (Reconciliation or Penance)



Do we talk about sin too much?

Is this Sacrament necessary?

Is there any way that we could make it more meaningful?

Is "open confession" a good idea?

**SIN! DOES IT MATTER?**

There is often a lot of humour associated with the sacrament of confession. Many Catholic comedians will have jokes about coming to confession. But that can sometimes stop us looking at the reality of sin and evil and the need to admit that all of us make mistakes. It is sometimes easier just to laugh it off or put it to the back of our minds.

There is no harm in poking a bit of fun at ourselves, so long as we don't forget that there is a serious side. Those who will take sin seriously are those who suffer the effects: victims of violence, robbery, the hungry, those unjustly imprisoned, the lonely, war widows or just us when our feelings are hurt by an unkind remark. The sin could be my greed, cowardice or perhaps apathy. Sin does matter. It hurts other people and it hurts each one of us too. By sinning we make ourselves less like God in whose image we are made. So what do we do about it?

### **DO WE NEED TO GO TO "CONFESSION"?**



That's a very good question. Why can't we just tell God we're sorry without a priest knowing all our sins? Well, we do. At the start of every Mass we examine our conscience and seek forgiveness. So God's mercy is not exclusively given in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (a better term than "confession"). But let's remind ourselves what a Sacrament is. God became

man as a SIGN of his love; but Jesus was more than a sign. As he travelled, he brought about that love and healing and forgiveness. People saw, heard and felt God's love as never before. The Sacraments are about making real the love, mercy and healing of God through signs. We need them.

Imagine you have had a row with a close friend. It was very serious. Your character has been ruined by him/her. It takes a long time but your friend eventually plucks up the courage and begs for forgiveness. You may have forgiven him already, but until he hears you say "O.K I forgive you" and sees your smile or feels your embrace, the guilt will remain. So too, it's only when your friend realises the wrong he has done and can bring himself to utter those words of sorrow that he can really enjoy being reconciled. A nod of approval is not enough. Signs of word and action are also needed.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is God's invitation to hear (and in "open confession" to see) that He loves and forgives us. Many people don't like going. But then many don't like having to admit they are wrong and seeking forgiveness from someone they've hurt. It is part of marking the experience of being forgiven by God a real one. It is a celebration of being reconciled with God.

### **IF I REFUSE TO GO WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME?**

Nothing. Nothing will happen to you. Jesus (the Sacrament) invited people to be forgiven and loved by him. Doubtless there were those who wouldn't come, for whatever reason. That didn't mean that God no longer loved or forgave them. Of course he did. It just meant that they missed out enormously on knowing that love "first hand". The Sacraments are meant to be our "first hand" experience of God's love. In the Sacrament of reconciliation, we are invited to encounter God in his forgiveness.

### **IS THAT IT?**

No, there is just one more thing. Because our sins harm the community, it is also necessary to be reconciled with them too. Each time one of us sins, it makes us, the body, less like Christ, e.g. I punch someone and people will say: "Huh, calls himself a Catholic". My sin has let the community down too. The priest is representative of the community and so as well as being reconciled with God we are reconciled with the Church too.

### **HOW DO WE GO?**

Some people prefer to go to the Sacrament "anonymously", that is behind a screen. This is perfectly acceptable and has been common practice for many years. However, there is now also the opportunity to go "face to face". The advantage of this open confession is that you feel you are talking to someone. With the "grill" it's a bit like ordering your food at the Drive-In McDonalds by talking to a machine.

The Sacrament begins with the sign of the cross. We tell the priest how long it is since our last confession to help him. If it's two weeks he knows you are more or less at ease; if it's 20 years he knows to handle with care. Then we tell our sins trying to avoid giving a list.