

How (and Why) to Return to Confession

The Register's clip out, photocopy and pass-on guides for Advent



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Peace Of Mind

"Peace on earth!" announce the angels at Christmas. But how and where do we find that peace? Simple: confession. People sometimes wrongly think of confession as a place of judgment and guilt. We have good news: It's a place of healing and peace.

The Register challenges each reader this Advent to go to confession and recommend it to at least one other person. The guide provided here can help.

After all, as Pope Benedict XVI said: "The renewal of the Church in America and throughout the world depends on the renewal of the sacrament of penance."



1 The presence of sin can easily lead to depression and anxiety.

2 You shower to show respect for those around you. Cleansing your soul makes you better to be around, too!

Step 1 Examine your conscience ... using the Ten Commandments or an available guide.

3 Mortal sin, unconfessed, "causes exclusion from Christ's Kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices forever, with no turning back" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1861).

Step 2 You have the choice of facing the priest (if he offers the option) or speaking through a screen.

4 As they leave the confessional, people smile a smile of freedom.

Step 3 There are no special words you need to say. Greet the priest, and tell him how long it has been since your last confession. If it's been awhile, he'll help you.

5 Because love means having to say you are sorry to the one you love.

Step 4 Be concise, clear, complete and contrite. You have to confess mortal sins and give a sense of how often. Don't be embarrassed. You're not going to tell the priest anything he hasn't already heard.

6 You will grow in humility, sincerity and self-knowledge.

7 Blessed Mother Teresa went. Frequently.



8 Hoping to convert on your deathbed? That's not very likely. Most likely, you will die as you lived.

Step 5 The priest won't scold you. In fact, if you've had a tough confession, he'll show you extra care. Your penance won't be harsh.

9 It is itself a serious sin to go to Communion if you have serious sin on your soul and have not asked for forgiveness in confession.

10 Don't be scared to death of confession. Be scared of death without confession.

11 Be strong. Face your sins; deal

Step 6 Then you'll make an act of contrition. Look in a prayer book for a longer one, or simply say: "Jesus, I am truly sorry for my sins and, with your grace, I will try to sin no more."

with them and move on.

12 Make sure there are no unpleasant surprises at your particular judgment or at the Final Judgment.

13 The priest will listen to your sins and will never tell a soul on pain of losing his soul. Priests even learn to forget what they hear.

Step 7 Do your penance right away, before leaving the church, if possible.



Step 8 Christ has forgiven and forgotten your sins, and the angels and saints are having a party to celebrate.

Confession Definition

"For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent'" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1857).

Grave Matter

What constitutes "grave matter"? Some common sins, according to the bishops: missing Sunday Mass, sex outside marriage (including pornography and masturbation), serious theft, abortion, defamation of character and purposely getting drunk.

Concerns & Answers

Can't I talk to God directly, not a priest, to get forgiveness?

Not according to the Bible. Read John 20:21-23; 2 Corinthians 2:10; and 2 Corinthians 5:18.

If God knows everything we do, then how come we have to go to confession?

You may know your friend broke your iPod, but wouldn't it be aggravating if he knew you knew but still didn't say, "I'm sorry"?

Doesn't God forgive no matter what?

If we think of sin as merely breaking rules, it is hard to understand why God can't just "look the other way." But sin is real; it hurts us and makes us distant from him — and unable to enter heaven. We can only be restored if we confess.

Confession just gives people the idea that it's all right to sin as long as you're sorry later.

If a man is confessing drunkenness while he has plans with his buddies to go barhopping and get drunk again the coming weekend, he can't be forgiven. He has to have decided to stop. Confession stops sins; it doesn't start them.

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