

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION IS A SACRAMENT OF HEALING. When I go to confession, it is in order to be healed, **to heal my soul, to heal my heart and to be healed of some wrongdoing.**

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation flows directly from the Paschal Mystery. In fact, on the evening of Easter the Lord appeared to the disciples, who were locked in the Upper Room, and after addressing them with the greeting, "Peace be with you!", he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven" (Jn 20:21-23). This passage reveals to us the most profound dynamic contained in this Sacrament.

First, the fact that **the forgiveness of our sins is not something we can give ourselves.** I cannot say: 'I forgive my sins'. Forgiveness is asked for, is asked of another. **In Confession we ask for forgiveness from Jesus.** Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift, **it is a gift of the Holy Spirit who fills us with the wellspring of mercy and of grace that flows unceasingly from the open heart of the Crucified and Risen Christ.**

Secondly, it reminds us that we can truly be at peace only if we allow ourselves to be reconciled, in the Lord Jesus, with the Father and with the brethren. And we have all felt this in our hearts, when we have gone to confession with a soul weighed down and with a little sadness; and **when we receive Jesus' forgiveness we feel at peace, with that peace of soul which is so beautiful, and which only Jesus can give, only him....**

The Christian community is where the Spirit is made present, who renews hearts in the love of God and makes all of the brethren one thing in Christ Jesus. That is why **it is not enough to ask the Lord for forgiveness in one's own mind and heart,** but why instead it is necessary humbly and trustingly to confess one's sins to a minister of the Church.

In the celebration of this Sacrament, **the priest represents not only God but also the whole community,** who sees itself in the weakness of each of its members, who listens and is moved by his repentance, and who is reconciled with him, **which cheers him up and accompanies him on the path of conversion and human and Christian growth.**

One might say: 'I confess only to God'. Yes, you can say to God 'Forgive me,' and say your sins, but **our sins are also committed against the brethren, and against the Church. That is why it is necessary to ask pardon of the Church, and of the brethren in the person of the priest.**

'But Father, I am ashamed ...'. **Shame is also good, it is healthy to feel a little shame,** because being ashamed is salutary. In my country when a person feels no shame, we say that he is "shameless". But shame too does good, **because it makes us more humble, and the priest receives this confession with love and tenderness and forgives us on God's behalf.**



Also from a human point of view, in order to unburden oneself, it is good to talk with a brother and tell the priest these things which are weighing so much on my heart. And one feels that one is unburdening oneself before God, with the Church, with his brother.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF CONFESSION!

When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then **when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession!**

I would like to ask you — but don't say it aloud, everyone respond in his heart: When was the last time you made your confession? Everyone think about it: ... Two days, two weeks, two years, twenty years, forty years...?

Everyone count, everyone say, **'When was the last time I went to confession?'** And **if much time has passed, do not lose another day.** Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests, **Jesus receives you, he receives you with so much love.**

BE COURAGEOUS AND GO TO CONFESSION!

Dear friends, **celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation means being enfolded in a warm embrace: it is the embrace of the Father's infinite mercy...** I am telling you:

EACH TIME WE GO TO CONFESSION, GOD EMBRACES US. GOD REJOICES!

Let us go forward on this road.

May God bless you!

Pope Francis

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Given in Saint Peter's Square, Wednesday 19 February 2014.

For the complete text of Pope Francis's words, go to the Vatican's own website:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/audiences/2014/documents

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION



1. First and foremost, I remember that the Lord loves me and is infinitely merciful, and that the Sacrament is above all **'a personal meeting with Christ the Good Shepherd'**, as Pope Francis so often reminds us.
2. I **pray for the light of the Holy Spirit** to see what sins I have committed since my last Confession, and I ask for his grace to be truly sorry.
3. When I am ready, I **approach the priest who will welcome me**. I remember that the priest is there to assist me and that if I am unsure of anything at any time I can ask his help.
4. I begin by making the **Sign of the Cross**, saying: ***'In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'***.
5. I tell the priest how long it is since I last went to Confession. Then, simply and honestly, I tell him the sins I can remember. When I have finished, I say: ***'I am sorry for these and all my sins'***.
6. I listen to any **words of encouragement and advice** the priest may give.
7. The priest will then suggest **an act of penance** for me to do either **a prayer, some form of self-denial, or a service for my neighbour**. Doing this act of penance helps me make amends for what I have done; it strengthens me.
8. I then say a **Prayer of Sorrow** also called **an Act of Contrition**. This might be either *'O my God because you are so good I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and by the help of your grace I will not sin again'*; or quite simply *'Lord Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me, a sinner'*.
9. The priest says **the Prayer of Absolution** through which I receive **the Lord's forgiveness**. At the end of this prayer, I say **"Amen"**, knowing that all my sins are now forgiven. They are gone. For ever.
10. The priest will perhaps then say a **Prayer of praise**. When I leave, I thank God for the gift of his love and mercy, and I do the penance given by the priest as soon as possible.

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2014 YEAR FOR RECONCILIATION



Pope Francis

"DO NOT BE AFRAID OF CONFESSION!"

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"WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU MADE YOUR CONFESSION?"

IF MUCH TIME HAS PASSED, DO NOT LOSE ANOTHER DAY:

JESUS RECEIVES YOU, HE RECEIVES YOU WITH SO MUCH LOVE!"

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Pope Francis has given us some wonderful words of encouragement on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, in his General Audience of February 19th, 2014.

In this leaflet, you will find Pope Francis' own words, together with a simple guide on how to approach this great and beautiful Sacrament.

May the Holy Father's words be a source of encouragement for us all.

+ Mark Bishop of Shrewsbury