

## **The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults**

*by Fr. Antony*

### **The Sacrament of Reconciliation - Part 2**

The whole purpose and effect of the sacrament is to reconcile with God. 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” (**Council of Trent 1551**). Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true “spiritual resurrection,” restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God (**CCC 1468**).

This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks the relationship between the members of the church, the 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. Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland (**CCC1469**).

“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” (**John Paul II**). Thus, the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion. This is the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament of reconciliation.

On the part of the sinner, contrition, confession and satisfaction are required. Contrition is aversion to the sins committed. The faithful are bound to confess, in kind and in number, all grave (mortal) sins committed after baptism, not previously confessed. The faithful are recommended to confess also venial sins.

The conditions necessary for making a good confession are: examination of conscience, sorrow (contrition), resolution, confession and satisfaction. The examination of conscience should be of three levels: - relations toward my God, relations toward my neighbor and relations to myself. The interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance. “Penance requires. . . the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction” (**CCC 1450**).

Confession of sins: - In the confessional, humbly present oneself to the confessor saying ‘Bless me Father for I have sinned’. Make the sign of the cross, and then mention when the last confession was. Then, sincerely make the accusation (Confession) and say ‘for

these and for all the sins of my past life, I ask pardon of God and of you.’ Listen attentively to the advice, the penance and the absolution the priests gives.

The absolution words are: - “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ 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.

R: Amen.

The priest may add: ‘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’.

R: Amen.

As the formula of absolution expresses, the Father of mercies is the source of all forgiveness. He, through the gift of the Holy Spirit and the paschal mysteries of his Son, effects the reconciliation of sinners, and it happens through the prayers and the ministry of the Church.

Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation, bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops’ collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. 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”(CCC.1461). The faculty to hear confessions is to be given in writing by a competent authority.

Due to the greatness of this ministry and the respect due to persons, the Church declares that every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins that his penitents have confessed to him. He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents’ lives. This secret, which admits of no exceptions, is called the “sacramental seal,” because what the penitent has made known to the priest remains “sealed” by the sacrament (CCC.1467, Can. 983-84).

All the faithful who have reached the age of discretion are bound faithfully to confess their sins at least once a year (Can. 989). The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church’s penitential practice (CCC.1438).