

**Q. Why do I have to confess to a person? Why can't I just tell God I'm sorry?**

A. The Catholic worldview is fundamentally sacramental; we recognize the importance of our senses to our experience of God. Our senses are the mode through which we experience all reality. Here the question is how can we best reconcile with God and be assured of God's forgiveness? If God wants us to really experience forgiveness, God will use our primary mode of experiencing reality. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation we speak our words of repentance and hear God's words of forgiveness. In this setting, the priest's role is to stand in persona Christi (in the person of Christ), allowing God to heal the divisions we've caused, and allowing us to truly experience God's tender mercy.

**Q. What if I've been away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation for a long time?**

A. Please know that you are always welcome back. While you are welcome to come to any of the standard Reconciliation times, it is often easiest to set up an appointment if you've been away for awhile.

**Q. What if I don't know what to do or say?**

A. This is not uncommon. If we received our First Reconciliation when we were young, we remember there is a standard format, but we've forgotten how to follow that format. Just tell the priest and he'll guide you through the process.

**Q. What do I do if I'm not sure God will forgive me?**

A. Forgiveness is central to the mission and message of Jesus Christ. God is able to forgive us even before we've been able to forgive ourselves. Here's a passage from Luke's Gospel that highlights this fact:

[Zechariah said, "And you, child [John the Baptist], will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:76-79).

**Q. How should I prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation?**

A. Sometimes we know what we need to confess. Other times we're unclear, or we stay on the surface without going deeper. There is a form of prayer known as an Examination of Conscience that can help us prepare to make a good Confession. You'll find several different Examinations on the USCCB website. You can also find an examination of conscience on this website.

**Q. How often should I celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation?**

A. The Church requests at least once a year (if we're aware of serious sin), but more frequently is often better. Use your best judgment. If you prepare well and go, is it a grace filled experience? If you are wrestling with something specific, then going more frequently would be helpful. Basically, if it's helping, keep up the pace. If you find yourself frustrated because you don't have much to say, then you may be going more than necessary or need to focus on preparing better. Push yourself a little because it often feels easier not to go than to go.

