

## THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

Q. 721. What is the Sacrament of Penance?

A. Penance is a Sacrament in which the sins committed after Baptism are forgiven.

Q. 722. Has the word Penance any other meaning?

A. The word Penance has other meanings. It means also those punishments we inflict upon ourselves as a means of atoning for our past sins; it means likewise that disposition of the heart in which we detest and bewail our sins because they were offensive to God.

Q. 723. How does the institution of the Sacrament of Penance show the goodness of Our Lord?

A. The institution of the Sacrament of Penance shows the goodness of Our Lord, because having once saved us through Baptism, He might have left us to perish if we again committed sin.

Q. 724. What are the natural benefits of the Sacrament of Penance?

A. The natural benefits of the Sacrament of Penance are: It gives us in our confessor a true friend, to whom we can go in all our trials and to whom we can confide our secrets with the hope of obtaining advice and relief.

Q. 725. How does the Sacrament of Penance remit sin, and restore to the soul the friendship of God?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits sin and restores the friendship of God to the soul by means of the absolution of the priest.

Q. 726. What is Absolution?

A. Absolution is the form of prayer or words the priest pronounces over us with uplifted hand when he forgives the sins we have confessed. It is given while we are saying the Act of Contrition after receiving our Penance.

Q. 727. Does the priest ever refuse absolution to a penitent?

A. The priest must and does refuse absolution to a penitent when he thinks the penitent is not rightly disposed for the Sacrament. He sometimes postpones the absolution till the next confession, either for the good of the penitent or for the sake of better preparation -- especially when the person has been a long time from confession.

Q. 728. What should a person do when the priest has refused or postponed absolution?

A. When the priest has refused or postponed absolution, the penitent should humbly submit to his decision, follow his instructions, and endeavor to remove whatever prevented the giving of the absolution and return to the same confessor with the necessary dispositions and resolution of amendment.

Q. 729. Can the priest forgive all sins in the Sacrament of Penance?

A. The priest has the power to forgive all sins in the Sacrament of Penance, but he may not have the authority to forgive all. To forgive sins validly in the Sacrament of Penance, two things are required:  
The power to forgive sins which every priest receives at his ordination, and  
The right to use that power which must be given by the bishop, who authorizes the priest to hear confessions and pass judgment on the sins.

Q. 730. What are the sins called which the priest has no authority to absolve?

A. The sins which the priest has no authority to absolve are called reserved sins. Absolution from these sins can be obtained only from the bishop, and sometimes only from the Pope, or by his special permission. Persons having a reserved sin to confess cannot be absolved from any of their sins till the priest receives faculties or authority to absolve the reserved sin also.

Q. 731. Why is the absolution from some sins reserved to the Pope or bishop?

A. The absolution from some sins is reserved to the Pope or bishop to deter or prevent, by this special restriction, persons from committing them, either on account of the greatness of the sin itself or on account of its evil consequences.

Q. 732. Can any priest absolve a person in danger of death from reserved sins without the permission of the bishop?

A. Any priest can absolve a person in danger of death from reserved sins without the permission of the bishop, because at the hour of death the Church removes these restrictions in order to save, if possible, the soul of the dying.

Q. 733. How do you know that the priest has the power of absolving from the sins committed after Baptism?

A. I know that the priest has the power of absolving from the sins committed after Baptism, because Jesus Christ granted that power to the priests of His Church when He said: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

Q. 734. How do we know that Our Lord, while on earth, had the power to forgive sins?

A. We know that Our Lord, while on earth, had the power to forgive sins:

1. Because He was always God, and;
2. Because He frequently did forgive sins and proved their forgiveness by miracles. Since He had the power Himself, He could give it to His Apostles.

Q. 735. Was the power to forgive sins given to the apostles alone?

A. The power to forgive sins was not given to the apostles alone, because it was not given for the benefit merely of those who lived at the time of the apostles, but for all who, having grievously sinned, after Baptism, should need forgiveness. Since, therefore, Baptism will be given till the end of time, and since the danger of sinning after it always remains the power to absolve from such sins must also remain in the Church till the end of time.

Q. 736. When was the Sacrament of Penance instituted?

A. The Sacrament of Penance was instituted after the resurrection of Our Lord, when He gave to His apostles the power to forgive sins, which He had promised to them before His death.

Q. 737. Are the enemies of our religion right when they say man cannot forgive sins?

A. The enemies of our religion are right when they say man cannot forgive sins if they mean that he cannot forgive them by his own power, but they are certainly wrong if they mean that he cannot forgive them even by the power of God, for man can do anything if God gives him the power. The priest does not forgive sins by his own power as man, but by the authority he receives as the minister

of God.

Q. 738. How do the priests of the Church exercise the power of forgiving sins?

A. The priests of the Church exercise the power of forgiving sins by hearing the confession of sins, and granting pardon for them as ministers of God and in His name.

Q. 739. How does the power to forgive sins imply the obligation of going to confession?

A. The power to forgive sins implies the obligation of going to confession because as sins are usually committed secretly, the priest could never know what sins to forgive and what not to forgive, unless the sins committed were made known to him by the persons guilty of them.

Q. 740. Could God not forgive our sins if we confessed them to Himself in secret?

A. Certainly, God could forgive our sins if we confessed them to Himself in secret, but He has not promised to do so; whereas He has promised to pardon them if we confess them to His priests. Since He is free to pardon or not to pardon, He has the right to establish a Sacrament through which alone He will pardon.

Q. 741. What must we do to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily?

A. To receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily we must do five things:

1. We must examine our conscience.
2. We must have sorrow for our sins.
3. We must make a firm resolution never more to offend God.
4. We must confess our sins to the priest.
5. We must accept the penance which the priest gives us.

Q. 742. What should we pray for in preparing for confession?

A. In preparing for confession we should pray to the Holy Ghost to give us light to know our sins and to understand their guilt; for grace to detest them; for courage to confess them and for strength to keep our resolutions.

Q. 743. What faults do many commit in preparing for confession?

A. In preparing for confession many commit the faults:

1. Of giving too much time to the examination of conscience and little or none in exciting themselves to true sorrow for the sins discovered;
2. Of trying to recall every trifling circumstance, instead of thinking of the means by which they will avoid their sins for the future.

Q. 744. What, then, is the most important part of the preparation for confession?

A. The most important part of the preparation for confession is sincere sorrow for the sins committed and the firm determination to avoid them for the future.

Q. 745. What is the chief reason that our confessions do not always amend our way of living?

A. The chief reason that our confessions do not always amend our way of living is our want of real earnest preparation for them and the fact that we have not truly convinced ourselves of the need of amendment. We often confess our sins more from habit, necessity or fear than from a real desire of receiving grace and of being restored to the friendship of God.

Q. 746. What faults are to be avoided in making our confession?

A. In making our confession we are to avoid:

1. Telling useless details, the sins of others, or the name of any person;
2. Confessing sins we are not sure of having committed; exaggerating our sins or their number; multiplying the number of times a day by the number of days to get the exact number of habitual sins;
3. Giving a vague answer, such as "sometimes," when asked how often; waiting after each sin to be asked for the next;
4. Hesitating over sins through pretended modesty and thus delaying the priests and others; telling the exact words in each when we have committed several sins of the same kind, cursing, for example; and, lastly, leaving the confessional before the priest gives us a sign to go.

Q. 747. Is it wrong to go to confession out of your turn against the will of others waiting with you?

A. It is wrong to go to confession out of our turn against the will of others waiting with us, because:

1. It causes disorder, quarreling and scandalous conduct in the Church;
2. It is unjust, makes others angry and lessens their good dispositions for confession;
3. It annoys and distracts the priest by the confusion and disorder it creates. It is better to wait than go to confession in an excited and disorderly manner.

Q. 748. What should a penitent do who knows he cannot perform the penance given?

A. A penitent who knows he cannot perform the penance given should ask the priest for one that he can perform. When we forget the penance given we must ask for it again, for we cannot fulfill our duty by giving ourselves a penance. The penance must be performed at the time and in the manner the confessor directs.

Q. 749. What is the examination of conscience?

A. The examination of conscience is an earnest effort to recall to mind all the sins we have committed since our last worthy confession.

Q. 750. When is our confession worthy?

A. Our confession is worthy when we have done all that is required for a good confession, and when, through the absolution, our sins are really forgiven.

Q. 751. How can we make a good examination of conscience?

A. We can make a good examination of conscience by calling to memory the commandments of God, the precepts of the Church, the seven capital sins, and the particular duties of our state in life, to find out the sins we have committed.

Q. 752. What should we do before beginning the examination of conscience?

A. Before beginning the examination of conscience we should pray to God to give us light to know our sins and grace to detest them.