



Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation

A Guide for Adults at St. John Chrysostom Parish
by Christine Way Skinner, 2009

At St. John's, we offer two communal services of reconciliation each year - one in Advent and one in Lent. Individual confession is also offered on Saturday mornings or by appointment.

A communal service (Form II) includes individual confession as part of the ritual.

1. **Liturgy of the Word:** We begin by gathering together and celebrating a Liturgy of the Word centred around God's call to conversion and merciful love.
2. **Examination of Conscience:** After we have listened to God speak to us in Scripture we take time to examine our lives looking for the ways in which we are in need of conversion. Typically an examination of conscience is read out slowly and prayerfully by a Minister of the Word. It includes questions which prompt us to think about the sin in our lives.
3. **Prayer of Sorrow or Act of Contrition:** In a communal celebration, we pray the Prayer of Sorrow together prior to individual confession. There are many versions of this prayer which helps us to verbalize our sorrow before God. Sometimes we use the Confiteor:

I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have sinned through my own fault,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do;
and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin,
all the angels and saints,
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Other times we use the traditional Act of Contrition:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.

4. **Conclusion of the Rite:** The celebration of the sacrament properly concludes after everyone has individually celebrated confession. However, most of the time for practical reasons, in our communal celebrations at St. John's we conclude the service with the Lord's Prayer and the Sign of Peace prior to individual confession.
5. **Individual Confession:** We usually invite a number of different priests to assist us with confessions. We do this for two reasons. Firstly, to provide parishioners with a choice of confessors and secondly, to keep the service to a reasonable length.
 - A) People usually line up in front of the confessor, though some people remain in their seats and spend time in quiet prayer and reflection. When a person is ready to confess, they approach the priest and greet him in a friendly way. Many people find it helpful to begin by saying: "**Forgive me Father, for I have sinned,**" though this is not strictly required.
 - B) Following this, they say, "**These are my sins,**" and tell the priest your sins. It is not necessary to tell the exact number of times and circumstances for each and every sin, though it is helpful for a confessor to know if you are confessing a regular or one-time sin. It is most desirable to try to get at the root causes of one's actions. For instance, saying, "I struggle with pride and find myself lying to make myself look better," shows a deeper sense of the root of sin than simply saying, "I lied."
 - C) After someone has finished confessing their sins, he or she indicates this to the priest know by saying something like: "**For these and all my sins, I am truly sorry.**"
 - D) The priest then speaks to the person about what they have confessed and gives a penance. A penance is an action that is intended to help a person address his or her sin and become a better person. It is not a punishment for your sins.
 - E) After this the priest will speak the words of **absolution** forgiveness to you. It is important to listen to these words carefully so that you will more deeply experience God's forgiving love. In the past it was common to say the prayer of sorrow during this time. This is a very flawed idea as the words of forgiveness are meant to be heard by those confessing their sins. The words of the prayer are as follows:

God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son 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.
 - F) After this, it is appropriate to thank the priest and find a quiet place to reflect on what he said to you, to say any prayers that the priest may have asked you to say, and to thank God for being loving and forgiving.
6. **After the Sacrament:** Of course, celebrating this Sacrament of Reconciliation only makes sense if it is truly our attempt to change those patterns of behaviour which are destructive to ourselves, those we love and the community in which we live. The obvious follow up to the sacrament is to try to live more like Jesus every day.