

A GENTLE GUIDE TO CONFESSION

You can begin again.

For a Catholic returning after an absence, or anyone who needs help taking the next step.

Begin with a conversation

Find a Catholic parish and confirm its confession times. If you need time, accessibility arrangements, or help in your language, ask for an appointment. You can say: Father, I have been away for a long time. Please help me make a good confession. If you are not Catholic or have never been baptized, tell him; he can guide your next step.

Prepare honestly, without turning against yourself

Ask the Holy Spirit for light. Review your freely chosen actions, words, and omissions in the light of the Ten Commandments. Consider your love of God, your responsibilities, and how you have treated others. Harm done to you is not your sin. Illness, grief, and unwanted thoughts are not, by themselves, personal sins. If you are uncertain about responsibility, ask the priest rather than deciding everything alone.

Bring sorrow and a willingness to change

Contrition means sorrow for sin and a real intention to turn from it with God's help. It is not a prediction that you will never struggle again. Ask for the grace to stop excusing what is wrong and to accept help. If repentance feels difficult, say that honestly to the priest. [1]

Keep your preparation private

Brief notes may help you remember, but no one using this kit should collect them. You do not need to tell your family, a prayer group, or a website what you intend to confess. If fear keeps circling after careful preparation, ask one trusted confessor for guidance.

A prayer before you go

Jesus, give me an honest heart. Help me repent of my sins, receive your mercy, and repair what I can. Lead me to a priest who will help me return. Amen.

Original prayer for preparation, not the formula of absolution.

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With the priest. Then into life.

1 Let him help you begin

Make the Sign of the Cross with the priest. Tell him roughly how long it has been since your last confession, and mention if you need help. Plain words are enough. You may bring this guide.

2 Confess what you remember

After a careful examination, confess all remembered mortal sins not yet confessed, naming the kind of sin and how often as honestly as you can. If you do not know a number, say so. Do not knowingly hide a serious sin. You may also confess venial sins. Ask for help if unsure. [2]

3 Receive guidance and the sacrament

Listen to his counsel and the penance he gives you. He will invite an Act of Contrition; ask him to help with the words if needed. The priest ministers sacramental absolution to the repentant penitent. This booklet, a recording, or a group prayer does not absolve sins. Confession is protected by the sacramental seal. [3]

4 Take the next faithful step

Complete your penance. Begin any prudent repair or restitution, and ask for guidance where another person's safety or boundaries are involved. Return to Mass. If you are conscious of mortal sin, normally receive sacramental absolution before Holy Communion; ask the priest about your circumstances. Let the mercy you receive become patience, service, and care. [1]

A simple plan to keep

Parish / priest _____

Phone / appointment _____

One person who can help me get there _____

Primary Catholic sources

[1] Catechism 1451, 1457, 1459: repentance, Communion, repair

https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P4D.HTM

[2] Code of Canon Law, canons 987 and 988

https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann959-997_en.html

[3] Catechism 1461 to 1467: the priest and the sacramental seal

https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P4E.HTM