

Theory 4

RECONCILIATION - THE SACRAMENT OF DEEPER CONVERSION

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) calls Reconciliation “the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin” (CCC 1423).

The Church has 2 means to create a new heart in us, through God’s grace, to turn from sin and come back to God:

1. Baptism (CCC 1425, 1426)

- “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean..., and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes...” (Ez. 36:25-27)
- Baptism is the first step in the process of conversion, of turning toward God and away from sin and becoming more and more like Jesus; but this process never ends.

2. Sacrament of conversion (CCC 1423-1424)

- Conversion – Jesus’ call to “...repent, and believe in the gospel.” (CCC 1427)
- Penance – interior conversion urges expression in visible signs...and works of penance (CCC 1430)
- Confession – confession of sins and “confession” - acknowledgement and praise - of God’s mercy
- Forgiveness – by the priest’s sacramental absolution, God grants forgiveness
- Reconciliation – “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20)

St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, “there are water and tears: the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance.” (CCC 1429)

Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This second conversion is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church. The second conversion also has a *communitarian* dimension, as is clear in the Lord's call to a whole Church: "Repent!" (CCC 1428, 1429)

Regular confession keeps the conversion process going in one's life. Reconciliation makes present the call of Jesus to repent and convert, and the sacrament actually makes that process of conversion take place and keeps it going in us. **We're not only reconciled with Christ through confession but reconciled with one another in the church.**

CCC 1431 Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time [repentance] entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with the hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace.

Conversion of Heart takes two things:

1. God's grace
2. Our effort (Penance)

CCC 1432 Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God...God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced.

Ongoing conversion also requires our effort

CCC 1434-1438 Reference these paragraphs to read about the many forms of penance, that is, the actions that foster our change of heart. "...every sincere act of worship or devotion revives the spirit of conversion and repentance within us and contributes to the forgiveness of our sins."

3 effective means to instill a desire and obtain grace to perform acts of penance:

1. Daily meditation
2. Resolution
3. Examination of conscience

Why go to confession?

Only God forgives sin so why do we go to a priest to have our sins forgiven?

Jesus set it up this way. How do we know?

John 20:19-23 “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

CCC 1442 Jesus entrusted the power to forgive sins to His Apostles

- They in turn hand this sacred power on to their successors, the bishops, and priests, the bishops’ co-workers

St. Paul understood that Jesus had entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the Apostles:

2 Cor 5:18-20 “It was God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation...so we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were appealing through us...be reconciled to God.”

Scripture teaches we must go to the **priest** for the forgiveness of our sins:

James 5:14-16 “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects.”

Verse 16 says “confess your sins to one another,” but not just to anybody, **because in verse 14** James started by telling us to call for the elders. James wants us to confess our sins to the elders as indicated by the conjunction “therefore” at the beginning of verse 16.

And who are these elders? They are the priests. “Priest” is the English translation of the Greek word for “elder.” If we want to be reconciled with God:

- The ordinary means Jesus established is to go to the priest; they act on God’s behalf and with his authority.

St. Faustina shares in her *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul* 1448, Jesus says:

Write, speak of My mercy. Tell souls where they are to look for solace; that is, in the Tribunal of Mercy [the Sacrament of Reconciliation]. There the greatest miracles take place [and] are incessantly repeated. To avail oneself of this miracle, it is not necessary to go on a great pilgrimage or to carry out some external ceremony; it suffices to come with faith to the feet of My representative and to reveal to him one’s misery, and the miracle of Divine Mercy will be fully demonstrated. Were a soul like a decaying corpse so that from a human standpoint, there would be no [hope of] restoration and everything would already be lost, it is not so with God. The miracle of Divine Mercy restores that soul in full. Oh, how miserable are those who do not take advantage of the miracle of God’s mercy! You will call out in vain, but it will be too late.

CCC 1446 Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace...

But the sacrament is *not just for grave sin*: It is one of the most powerful ways to affect our ongoing conversion and transformation.

2 Essential Elements to Reconciliation

CCC 1448 There are two equally essential elements to Reconciliation:

1. “The acts of the man who undergoes conversion through the action of the Holy Spirit: namely contrition, confession [of sins], and satisfaction”
2. “God’s action through the intervention of the Church.”
 - The Church works through the bishop and his priests to forgive sins and determine the manner of satisfaction.
 - The Church “prays for the sinner and does penance with him.”
 - “Thus the sinner is healed and re-established in ecclesial communion.”

CCC 1470 In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way *the judgment* to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life.

The Acts of the Penitent: contrition, confession, satisfaction

Contrition is:

- sorrow for our sins
- detestation or abhorrence of sins committed
- firm resolution not to sin again (CCC 1451)

CCC 1454 Prepare by a daily examination of conscience

Resources for making a good examination:

- “Examination of Conscience with Virtues” in the CSMII Toolbox
- The small booklet in your Welcome folder titled “An Examination of Conscience”

Confession:

CCC 1455 The confession of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man...**takes responsibility for [his sins], and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible.**

CCC 1456 (cf 1493) One...must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers.

CCC 1457 Confess serious sins at least once a year

Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution.

CCC 1458 Confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is strongly recommended

The regular confession of our venial sins helps us

1. form our conscience
2. fight against evil tendencies
3. let ourselves be healed by Christ
4. progress in the life of the Spirit
5. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as He is merciful.

Resources for making a good confession or how to go to confession:

- The small booklet in your Welcome folder titled “An Examination of Conscience”

Satisfaction: we have a duty to repair the damage we have done by our sin

CCC 1459 Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm. Sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself...Absolution takes away sin (guilt), but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused.

Sin has a double consequence, eternal consequences and temporal consequences. The eternal consequence of sin is separation from God, this is hell. God forgives this in confession. He reconciles us to Himself.

CCC 1472 Temporal consequence. Every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to things of this world.

What are the consequences of living a life of pride, envy, anger, lust, greed, gluttony, sloth? These bad habits called vices make us vicious. These are the earthly consequences, the temporal punishment of sin.

When God forgives our sin and restores our union with Him, He removes the eternal consequences of sin (Hell), but temporal consequences of sin remain. We still carry with us the bad habits, the disordered attachments. We must be purified of these by grace and the practice of virtue. (CCC 1473)

The effects of this sacrament

CCC 1468 (cf 1496)

- Reconciliation with God
- Reception of Grace
- Reconciliation with the Church
- Remission of the Eternal consequences of sin - Hell
- Remission, at least in part, of the temporal consequences of sin
- Peace and serenity
- Spiritual consolation
- Increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle

Confession is the best preparation for death and our Particular Judgment.

The Christian who seeks to purify himself of his sin and to become holy with the help of God's grace is not alone. "The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person."
(CCC 1474)

Additional resource in Toolbox: "The Sacrament of Reconciliation"