



## What to Do if You Can't Go to Confession

As Catholics, we know that even after the washing away of our sins in Baptism and the grace that comes with it, we still stand in need of God's loving mercy and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In the unique time that we find ourselves in, it may be difficult or impossible for some of us to go to Confession. The wisdom of the Church teaches us that even when it is impossible to go to Confession, God does not abandon us or withhold his forgiveness. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that perfect contrition—contrition that arises from a love of God above all else—“remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible” (CCC 1452). If you are unable to go to confession during this time, we implore you not to wait to seek God's forgiveness in prayer.

God loves us and wants us to always be reconciled to Him. This involves an interior conversion and repentance, seeking to turn away from our sin and instead turn toward God with our whole heart. Below are some suggested steps for praying at home when unable to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

1. You may want to begin with a prayer to the Holy Spirit to guide you. Recall the immense love of God for you, that he sent His only Son to die for your sins, so that we can live a life of union with God while we still live on earth, and one day be with Him eternally in Heaven.
2. Sometimes it is hard to recognize our need for forgiveness because sin hardens the heart, making us blind to our own sin. This is why a daily examination of conscience is a beneficial spiritual practice for all. Slowly go through your day (or week, or however long it has been since your last examination of conscience) and ask God to show you times when you have sinned (consider thought, word, deed, failure to act, etc.). It may be helpful to consider each of the Ten Commandments, or the Beatitudes. Alternatively, the USCCB has provided a variety of examinations which can be found here: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience.cfm>.
3. You can then pray an act of contrition. This can be your personal prayer of contrition, or you can choose from a variety of formulations here: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/prayers/act-of-contrition.html>. The important thing is that you pray with sincerity of heart. Here is one example of an 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.*

*Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.*

4. You may wish to set for yourself some small form of penance such as praying for someone you have harmed or refraining from some small pleasure that day. This should be done with contrition and a spirit of love for God, not to be overly scrupulous or demanding for its own sake.
5. Rejoice! Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for God's mercy. Resolve to go to Confession when you are able, but feel confident in God's love and forgiveness.

## New Indulgence

The this time of particular hardship, the Holy See has seen fit to offer a “the gift of special Indulgences to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them” (*Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic*, 20.03.2020).

Requirements to gain this indulgence are as follows, that:

...with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible” (*Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special Indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic*, 20.03.2020).

The Church teaches us that indulgences are closely related to the effects of the sacrament of Reconciliation. While sacramental confession restores us to communion with God and the Church and frees us from the eternal punishment due to sin, temporal punishment remains unless remedied by prayer and penance. For example, if in a fit of anger someone punched a hole in a wall, that person could be truly sorry and be forgiven, yet the temporal effects of the sin, the hole in the wall, remain. This is also true in a spiritual way. God is always waiting to forgive us of our sin if we ask, but the act of sinning causes not only eternal punishment that can be forgiven by asking, but temporal punishment, that by God's grace we seek to be free from.

An indulgence is one way that God in His mercy has given to the Church to help the faithful to be free of temporal punishment of sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven...partial or plenary according as it removes either part of all of the temporal punishment due to sin. The faithful can gain indulgences for themselves or apply them to the dead. (CCC 1471)

Indulgences are not magical remedies and one does not gain an indulgence by simply checking off a few boxes. In His infinite love for us, God is always concerned with the state of our souls, and desires true conversion of heart above all. Therefore, it is important that in all we do we are striving for a more perfect love of God and neighbor rather than acting out of fear of punishment. However, God knows that we are imperfect, and we should trust that God blesses our sincere efforts to grow in holiness through our prayers and works of charity.