

PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION

The evil we do to one another and the ways we fail to do good are ever present in our lives and prayer. Daily in the Lord's Prayer, the Christian asks for forgiveness and prays for deliverance from evil. Each night, we ask forgiveness for our faults and express contrition. We ask Mary to "pray for us sinners." We begin the Sunday Eucharist by praising God for a mercy that is greater than our sins. Friday has been a day traditionally set aside for fasting and deeds of charity so that we might turn our lives to the way of the Gospel. Each year, Christians keep the season of Lent: Forty Days for finding anew the strength to renounce evil, to profess Christ as our Lord, and so to live again in the grace of Baptism.

Repentance and reconciliation are thus constant and lifelong. Some moments in each person's life are marked with the sacrament that bears this name of Penance and Reconciliation. Even things as personal as sin, sorrow, and confession are brought to the community, to the Church, and to the Church's ministers. The Church comes together—even if only the penitent and the priest—so that God's pardon may be sought in the confession of sin, sorrow, deeds of penance, and the expression of God's forgiveness in words of absolution. The sacrament embraces all these moments. It springs from the Church's faith that, though sin is personal, it is not private: "Penance always entails reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are always harmed by our sins" (*Rite of Penance*, no. 5). When the Sacrament of Penance is celebrated with a number of persons present, the rite begins with the reading of Scripture and includes a homily, examination of conscience, individual confession and absolution, praise of God's mercy, and prayers of thanksgiving. When an individual comes alone for the Sacrament of Penance, the order in the following pages is observed.

Prayers for times of penance and reconciliation in the household are on page 342. These prayers, along with the prayers for Fridays and the prayers for Lent (both found in Part III: Days and Seasons) may stir in us a spirit of contrition and conversion that leads to the regular celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.

After a greeting, the priest and penitent make the sign of the cross together:

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

In these or similar words, the priest invites the penitent to have trust in God.

**May God, who has enlightened every heart,
help you to know your sins
and trust in his mercy.
R/. Amen.**

Then the priest reads from the Scripture a text that proclaims God's mercy and calls us to repentance. The penitent then makes a confession of sins. The priest gives suitable counsel and proposes an act of penance.

The penitent then expresses sorrow through one of the following prayers or in similar words. (A traditional form of the Act of Contrition may be found earlier in this Part, on page 8.)

A
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.

(continued)

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

B

Lord Jesus, Son of God,
have mercy on me, a sinner.

C

Lord Jesus,
you chose to be called the friend of sinners.
By your saving death and Resurrection
free me from my sins.
May your peace take root in my heart
and bring forth a harvest
of love, holiness, and truth.

The priest extends his hands over the penitent and speaks the words of absolution. In conclusion, the priest may say:

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
R/. His mercy endures forever.

Then the priest dismisses the penitent with these or similar words:

The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace.