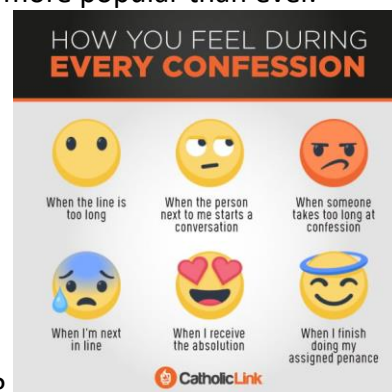


Theme: Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest?

Opening prayer: Loving Father, Abba Lord, thank you that we can come to You, time and again, seeking Your forgiveness for small and big wrongdoings. Thank You that despite displeasing You so often by the way we live You are always there to embrace us unconditionally with Your love and mercy. Teach us Father to truly be penitent each time we confess our sins and never take this great gift of reconciliation for granted. Help us too to bring others to Your fold through our loving kindness and quickness to forgive. We pray through the intercession of Mary our loving Mother Amen.

I confess! We say this in various forms so many times during the Mass. Right from the start during the penitential act to the Kyrie where we ask for God’s mercy and even during the Creed when we state our belief in the confession of sins. Yet, Confession or the Sacrament of Reconciliation – is a stumbling block for so many Catholics, many of whom no longer see its relevance in the modern world. Catholic canon law teaches that every Catholic is “obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.” In many churches special penitential services occur at least twice a year- normally during the season of Lent in preparation for Easter and Advent before Christmas.

A Pew Research Center study (2020) found that only 43 percent of American Catholics avail themselves of confession at least once a year. And from there, the numbers get grimmer. A paltry 17 percent go more than once a year, and a scant 7 percent go monthly. A 2022 poll by Catholic news Agency brought this down to 37%. Confessing our shortcomings — on social media, in the therapist’s office and elsewhere — is more popular than ever.



But seeking absolution and greater connection with God? Not so much.

Consider these revelations from the diary of St Faustina, the apostle of mercy:

Come with faith to the feet of My representative (1448).

I Myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest ... I Myself act in your soul (1602).

Make your confession before Me. The person of the priest is, for Me, only a screen. Never analyse what sort of a priest it is that I am making use of; open your soul in confession as you would to Me, and I will fill it with My light (1725).

You've probably heard various objections to Confession before... take some time to think about how you would answer the following 3 questions.

- 1) "Why isn't it enough to just confess directly to God?"
- 2) "Why do I need to confess my sins to a priest. He's human just like me. Can't I just share with a close friend?"
- 3) "I keep confessing the same sins- why go at all?"

The Catholic Stand:

1. The mandate to confess our sins is given by Jesus Himself. **Jesus didn't just commission Forgiveness through his Apostles, He gave them authority to forgive or retain sins.** Jesus asked believers to approach God for forgiveness through the apostles who were commissioned to act as his agents. After the resurrection, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:22,23). Priests alone carry out this apostolic role (Canon 965; CCC, Nos. 1461 & 1462).
2. **A Personal Encounter with Christ.** The priest is not just "another human being," but one who acts *in persona Christi*, in the person of Christ. With faith we believe that when the penitent speaks to the priest, the penitent speaks to Christ, and when the priest speaks, the priest speaks on behalf of Christ. When the priest says, "I absolve you," it is Christ who absolves (Mk 2:10).
3. **The Personal Touch.** When we confess our sins to a priest, we are able to receive individualized counsel, advice that fits our unique circumstances, and we can be given a penance that is "medicinal," specifically tailored to help us in the spiritual healing process (Canon 981).
4. **Benefits of confessing repeated sins.** Confession of an often-repeated sin is not something to be ashamed of. It is our reminder that without God and His infinite forgiveness we'd be nothing. You think this particular sin you're battling is hard to keep in check now, well imagine how much more that sin would overrun your life if you didn't confess it regularly because you were afraid of what your priest thought of you? To Mother Teresa, who lamented being "incapable," Jesus replied: "You are, I know, the most incapable, weak and sinful person, but that is precisely why I want to use you for my glory. Will you refuse?"

5. **Our sins affect the whole community.** Our sins offend not only God, but the community as well. It is not only impractical, but often also ill-advised because of scandal or grave consequences, to admit our sins to others. When we admit our sins to a priest, the priest also serves *in persona ecclesiae*, “in the person of the Church” or “in the person of the community.” Therefore, when we receive absolution, not only are we forgiven by God, but we are also forgiven by those that we have offended. The priest served as a go-between for the sinner to mediate God’s pardon and peace.
6. **Catholic Sacraments are Mediated.** The sacraments celebrate the most profound moments of our lives: birth (Baptism), the transition to adulthood (Confirmation), lifetime commitment (Marriage and Holy Orders), and sickness and end of life (Anointing). Two other sacraments strengthen us for the journey through life: Eucharist, (spiritual sustenance), and Penance, (the forgiveness of sins). We need to be fed at least weekly, and because we sin so often, we need to be forgiven regularly. The sacraments are not self-administered. Rather, the priest is the mediator, the link between God and the people, a rich channel of God’s grace.
7. **We need confession.** When we go to confession, it’s not because God needs us to confess; it’s because we need to experience His unconditional love and mercy. Confession paves the way to healing and transformation- it allows for a great uplifting of the burdens we carry through sin. It is a spiritual and psychological release towards starting anew.

Closing prayer: Holy and mighty Lord, your mercy is beyond our understanding. You created us and in You alone do we find salvation. Thank you for the gift of Your priests who bridge that great divide each time we turn in confession to find renewed oneness with You. Give us Lord hearts that constantly reach out for Your forgiveness through the working of Your Holy Spirit. Continue to bless and teach us how to witness better to our Faith and stand firmly as one family professing the forgiveness of sins. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

References and useful links:

- The catholicspirit.com
- Catholiclink.org
- <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/how-to-defend-the-sacrament-of-confession> 2008, Rev. Michael A. Van Sloun
- [book: The faith explained \(3rd edition\) Leo J Trese](#)
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- <https://aleteia.org/cp1/2020/11/05/is-it-normal-to-always-confess-the-same-sins/>
- Links on confession- making a good one-<https://catholic-link.org/8-encouraging-and-beautiful-experiences-of-confession-that-will-inspire-you-to-visit-the-sacrament/>