

15. Sin and Confession

By this sacrament, Jesus gives us hope in our call to holiness, by forgiving our sins and restoring us to intimacy with him.

Key terms:

Concupiscence:	The inclination of humans toward sin (CCC 405, 418).
Mortal sin:	Sin that is seriously evil and committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent, which destroys the soul's relationship with God.
Original sin:	1) The disobedience to God's command by our first parents out of pride, self-love, and lack of trust in him; 2) the cause of our fallen human nature.
Sin:	A deliberate thought, word, act, or omission against God's law.
Temptation:	The occasion of sin or something that, when given into and acted upon, becomes sin; not sinful in itself.
Venial sin:	Sin that wounds our relationship with God, but allows God's life to remain in the soul.
Contrition:	Sorrow and a decision never to commit the sin again.
Ex opere operato:	A sacrament's effects depend on the valid administration of the sacrament itself, not on who administers it.
In persona Christi:	A priest acts only by the power of Christ acting through him when the priest is celebrating the sacraments.
Penance:	1) A conversion of the heart from sin; 2) An act such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that aims to foster reconciliation with God.
Purpose of amendment:	a determination, with God's help to avoid sin and the occasions of sin.
Sacrament:	an efficacious sign of grace instituted by Christ and administered by the church that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, imparts divine life.
Indulgence:	The Church's removal of temporal punishment due to already-forgiven sins.
Form:	Ref. Session 11.
Matter:	Ref. Session 11.

SIN – A PREFERENCE FOR SELF OVER GOD THE FATHER'S GENEROUS LOVE (Sir. 15:11-20)

- Some acts are always evil, and a good intention can never make an evil act good.
- Mortal sins are gravely evil and are committed with full knowledge and full, free consent.
- Venial sin is less grave but still wounds the soul, weakens the will, and can lead to mortal sin.

EFFECTS OF SIN (Mt. 25:41 and 1Cor 6:9-10)

- It offends God's justice and, if mortal, shatters our relationship with him.
- It further weakens our will and strengthens concupiscence.
- It harms the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, and human society.
- It merits punishment, either in this world or in the next, as a natural consequence.
- Moral sin is spiritual death that merits eternal self-separation from God by a person's own choice.

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS ARE THE ROOT OF MANY SINS AND HELP ESTABLISH A HABIT OF SIN (1Jn. 2:16)

- Pride (arrogance), avarice(greed), envy (jealousy), anger (wrath), lust, gluttony, acedia (sloth)
- Opposing virtues are humility, detachment, charity, generosity, gratitude, meekness, gentleness, patience, purity, self-mastery, self-control, zeal for the good, perseverance.

OUR DEFENCES AGAINST TEMPTATION AND SIN (Jas 4:7-8)

- Prayer: seek the Holy Spirit's help and mercy and acknowledge our need of his presence in our weakness.
- Mortification: self-denial of good and desirable things to strengthen the will to resist sin.
- Frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion.
- Following Jesus, who commands us to seek holiness and desire eternal union with God (Heb. 4:14-16)

STEPS FROM TEMPTATION TO SIN (Jas. 1:13-15)

- Recognising that one is being tempted; temptation itself is not sin.
- Drawing near to what is forbidden; not removing oneself from the near occasion of sin.
- Listening to the desire; nourishing an interest in that which is sinful.
- Yielding to the attraction and falling into sin.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS

- God's mercy in the Old Testament prefigures the mercy offered in this sacrament (Lam 3:22-23).
- The Father sends his Son to redeem us and restore us to the Father's favour.
- The mercy of the Father culminates in his Son, Jesus (Jn. 8:2-11).
- Jesus tells us of the abundance of the Father's mercy (Lk. 15:11-32).
- Jesus asks his Father's forgiveness for his executioners (Lk. 23:33-34).
- Jesus empowers the apostles to forgive sins (Jn. 20:22-23).

RECONCILIATION - THE NEW CREATION

- The form of Reconciliation is the priest's prayer of reconciliation.
- The matter of Reconciliation is the audible confession, with right intention to reform, of the penitent.
- Sacramental absolution can be conferred by a priest or a bishop.
- The priest acts *in persona Christi*, so it is Christ who forgives, acting through the priest.
- A penitent's confession is perpetually confidential; the 'seal' of the sacrament of Reconciliation is absolute.

EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

- All sins are forgiven and their guilt wiped away, so that the soul returns to the grace of God.
- The penitent is reconciled to the Church, the Body of Christ, which has been wounded by any and all sinful acts.
- The penitent grows in holiness through the sanctifying grace of the sacrament; greater progress in holiness is made possible by the sacrament, especially frequent Confession, even of venial sins.
- The penitent is strengthened against concupiscence and receives help to avoid temptation and occasions of sin.
- remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins.

- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin.
- peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation.
- an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

- The penitent's examination of conscience is done diligently so that all serious sin can be confessed.
- The penitent's contrition: - sorrow and desire not to sin again.
- The penitent's firm purpose of amendment.
- Confession by the penitent: all mortal sins; confession of venial sins is optional, but vital for growth in holiness.
- Absolution by the priest is given in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Satisfaction: the penitent's fulfilment of the act of penance given by the priest.

EXPLORE!

Invite the candidates to reflect on the various ways society has become blind to sin? What do you do to prepare yourself to receive this sacrament? Discuss ways in which the candidates can examine their conscience well.

CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT

- **Greeting:** The priest welcomes the penitent warmly and greets them with kindness.
- **Sign of the Cross:** Then the penitent makes the Sign of the Cross, which the priest may also make.
- **Confession of Sins:** The priest invites the penitent to have trust in God. The penitent begins: "Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how long) since my last confession and these are my sins ..." The penitent confesses his/her sins honestly and openly. The penitent may wish to discuss the circumstances and the root causes of their sins with the priest and ask for advice and/or direction.
- **Penance:** The priest will then propose a penance as an outward sign of the penitent's desire to make amends for sins against God and others.
- **Prayer of Sorrow:** The penitent then prays an Act of Sorrow.
- **Absolution:** The priest then prays the Prayer of Absolution, to which the penitent responds: "Amen."
- **Dismissal:** The priest then dismisses the penitent, saying: "The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace." The penitent responds: "Thanks be to God."
- **Thanksgiving:** The penitent spends some time with the Lord, thanking and praising Him for the gift of his mercy. If possible, the penance that was received is discharged now. If not it is discharged as soon as possible.

Act of Sorrow:

O my God, I thank you for loving me.

I am sorry for all my sins, for not loving others and not loving you.

Help me to live like Jesus and not sin again. **Amen.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

O my God, thank you for forgiving me.
Help me to love others.
Help me to live as Jesus asked me to.
Amen.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Before a penitent receives the Sacrament of Penance, he/she should spend some time in quiet reflection, preparing themselves in mind and heart. Part of this preparation is an 'Examination of Conscience', where sins against God and against others may be identified. Some reflect upon the Ten Commandments or The Beatitudes as a prompt to examine their conscience. The following is offered as an aid:

Regarding your love for God (ask yourself):

- Do I really love God above all things, or have I made other things – money, clothes, sports, TV, music, mobile phone, video games – more important than God?
- Have I missed Sunday Mass without a legitimate excuse?
- Do I arrive late for Mass or leave early?
- Do I receive Holy Communion regularly and reverently?
- Have I forgotten to pray regularly?
- Have I shown disrespect for any religious objects, places or people?
- Have I used the words 'God' or 'Jesus' carelessly?

Regarding your love for Others (ask yourself):

- Have I been selfish or angry?
- Have I been honest in my work?
- Have I been disrespectful to others?
- Have I been unfair in my dealings/sports?
- Have I been violent towards another person?
- Have I spread gossip or lies about another person?
- Have I stopped speaking to anyone?
- Do I hold grudges and fail to forgive?
- Have I posted negative material about others on social media?
- Have I harmed animals, littered or been destructive to the environment?
- Have I spoken in an obscene way?
- Have I looked at inappropriate material?
- Have I told lies?
- Have I stolen anything or cheated another person?
- Have I misused or damaged the property of others?
- Have I been jealous of others – their looks, popularity, possessions, work?
- Have I encouraged others to do wrong in any way?

HOW OFTEN SHOULD A PERSON GO TO CONFESSION?

According to Church law, each Catholic is obligated to confess any mortal (serious) sins at least once a year. (CCC 1457) Confessing venial sins is recommended, but not obligatory.

Sin and Confession — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why did Christ institute the sacrament of Reconciliation when our sins are forgiven at Baptism?
2. Why do we need to be reconciled with the Church?
3. Why do Catholics confess their sins to a priest instead of speaking directly to God?
4. How can the sacrament of Reconciliation be an encounter with Jesus?
5. How does our penance express an interior conversion?
6. How can we avoid the ways that lead to sin?

PRAYER

Psalm 51 or Psalm 39

or

Gospel Reflection: Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A Mt. 5:1-12

Year B Mk. 6:1-6

Year C Lk. 4:21-30

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Sin and Confession

Scripture

En. 3:1-7	Satan tempts our first parents and they sin.
Ps. 51:3-5	The sinner knows his sin, except God's justice, and knows his tendency to sin.
Sir. 15:11-20	God does not tempt us, but gave us free will and the power to choose good or evil.
Sir. 23:1-4	A prayer to God the Father for help against temptation.
Wis 11:23	In his mercy, God allows repentance from sin.
Is. 1:13-20	God wants not offerings and worship from sinners, but repentance and virtue.
Lam. 3:22-23	The steadfast love and mercy of the lord never ceases.
Ex. 18:1-32	Sinners will die but the virtuous will live, and God desires repentance of those who sin.
Mt. 15:19-20	Sin comes from the evil intentions of our hearts.
Mt. 16:18-19	Jesus gives Peter the power of the keys and the authority to bind and loose.
Lk. 4:1-13	Jesus is tempted by the Devil but does not sin.
Lk. 9:23-24	Followers of Jesus must daily bear their sufferings and undertake self-denial.
Lk. 15:1-7	The shepherd seeks the lost sheep, and Heaven rejoices over the repentant sinner.
Lk. 15:11-32	The Parable of the Prodigal Son, showing the Father's merciful forgiveness.
Jn. 20:23	Jesus gives the apostles the power to forgive sins.
Rom. 3:22-25	We have all sinned and are justified by Jesus' sacrifice and God's forgiveness.
1Cor 10:13	All are subject to temptation, but God will not allow irresistible temptation.
2Cor 5:17-19	God has entrusted the work of reconciliation to humans.
2Cor 11:14-15	Satan tempts us alluringly.
Gal. 5:16-24	Our fallen nature leads us into sin, but the Holy Spirit leads us to virtue.
Eph. 6:12	Not only our fallen nature but also the Devil is the source of temptation.
Heb. 4:15	Jesus understands our weaknesses because he, too, has been tempted.
Jas 1:13-15	It is not God but our own desires that tempt us to sin, and serious sin is death.
Jas 4:4-8	We cannot be both worldly and close to God, but must resist the Devil and be pure.
1Pt. 5:8-9	Be on guard against and resist the devouring temptations of the Devil.
1Jn. 1:6-10-	If we think we have not sinned, we lie to ourselves; confession brings forgiveness.
1Jn. 2:15-17	Love of the world and our own inclination to sin removes us from loving God.
1Jn. 5:16-17	Some sins are mortal while others are not.

Catechism

385-390	The mystery of evil, the reality of sin, and the doctrine of original sin.
396-412	Original sin, its consequences, a sinful world, God does not abandon us.
538-540	Jesus is tempted in the desert by the Devil but, unlike Adam, does not sin.
1127-1128	By their very action, the sacraments accomplish what they symbolise, working by the power of Christ and not by the holiness of the minister of the sacrament.
1420-1421	The sacrament of Reconciliation is one of the sacraments of healing.
1422-1484	Reconciliation: names, why it is needed, call to conversion, forms of penance, forms and effects, the acts of penitents, who can administer, indulgences.
1849-1869	Sin: definition, kinds, gravity, conditions for mortal sin, vice, effects on society.
2846-2854	We ask God to strengthen us against temptation and free us from evil.