



Sacraments 27/35: Essentials of the Rite of Confession

What is essentially needed for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is: the penitent's sorrow for sin, the naming and admitting out loud of these sins, the priest's absolution, and the penance. Shame and guilt have many meanings, too many today in our modern culture that are all negative. Yet we should feel shame and guilt because of our sin. We need not fall into despair, but accept that we have sinned and are in need of forgiveness. Coming into the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the penitent brings with them sorrow, guilt, and shame for the sins they have committed. If they are not actually sorry for what they have done, the priest cannot absolve it. If they have no intention of stopping any ongoing sin, the priest also cannot grant absolution. This sorrow in the heart of the penitent is the Matter of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Form is Contrition, Absolution, and Penance. The most fearful part for all of us is the saying out loud of our sins. It is embarrassing and leaves many with anxiety over what they priest may say or how he may react. This naming is essential because we need to accept what we have done wrong and declare that we have done wrong. Bringing the darkness of sin into the light of Christ is what results in the healing. Just naming the top few sins is not enough for validity. We must say aloud all mortal sin that we are aware of. After some advice or reassurance of God's love, the priest then pronounces absolution.

Prayer of Absolution:

God, the Father of mercies,
 through the death and resurrection of his Son
 has reconciled the world to himself
 and sent the Holy Spirit among us
 for the forgiveness of sins;
 through the ministry of the Church
 may God give you pardon and peace,
 and I absolve you from your sins
 in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
 and of the Holy Spirit.

After you leave the place of Confession, you should complete your penance as soon as possible. Penance is never a punishment. We are formed improperly to believe that God's punishment takes the forms of Dante's *Inferno*, where the punishment is perfectly fit to the crime. There is no amount or form of penance we can ever do to make up for our sins. That was made up for by Jesus on the Cross. Our penance is a way of joining ourselves to Christ on the Cross. The habit of sin needs to be overcome through the habit of virtue, so penance is the first few steps towards union with Christ and a life of prayer and virtue.

Who can perform? By virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, only Priests and Bishops and celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Tri-Partite Theology of the Sacrament of Reconciliation