

The Sacrament of Penance

Q. 205. What is the sacrament of Penance?

The sacrament of Penance brings to the Christian God’s merciful forgiveness for any sins committed after Baptism, and it brings the sinner consolation and peace. St. John writes: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

As God’s Son, Jesus had the power of forgiving sins, and He gave His Apostles this power when He appeared to them on the evening of the day of His Resurrection (cf. John 20:19-23). This power to forgive sins has been handed down through the years to the priests of the Church of our day.

The sacrament of Penance has the form of a criminal trial in a court room before a judge. That is, because of our sins, we must appear before our judge, Jesus Christ, who speaks and acts through his officially ordained representative, the priest. In this “trial”, the sinner is the defendant, the prosecuting attorney who accuses the defendant of his sins, and the attorney for the defense who admits the sinners guilt but pleads for mercy.

Through his priest, Jesus gives a double sentence, a sentence of both life and death. He grants forgiveness and life to the sinner if the sinner is truly sorry for his sins, sincere in his request for forgiveness and reconciliation, firm in his resolve to avoid his sins in the future as best he can, and willing to make practical plans to grow in strength, to resist temptation, to make reparation for his sins, and to grow in holiness.

Jesus also sentences the “old self” to death in order to set the sinner free from his or her weaknesses and tendencies to sin—the seven capital sins. Death to the old self takes place through prayer, meditation, and contemplation, the life of asceticism*, and the patient carrying of one’s daily crosses in union with Christ’s Passion and death.

As a condition for forgiveness, the priest confessor imposes a penance—some prayer or good work—on the sinner, both as a way of making reparation for one’s sins and as a practical help to get started or make progress in the process of putting one’s old self to death.

The penitent must not allow shame, fear, or embarrassment to prevent him from confessing his sins, especially since the priest is strictly bound by the sacramental seal of silence. Through this seal, the priest may never, under any

*Asceticism—The constant effort to grow in union with Christ through the imitation of Christ, the development of virtue and self discipline, the practice of self-denial, mortification and penance, the struggle to overcome temptation and sin, reparation for sin, and the daily carrying of one’s cross in a spirit of union with Christ.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr: John Vianney and Fr: Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

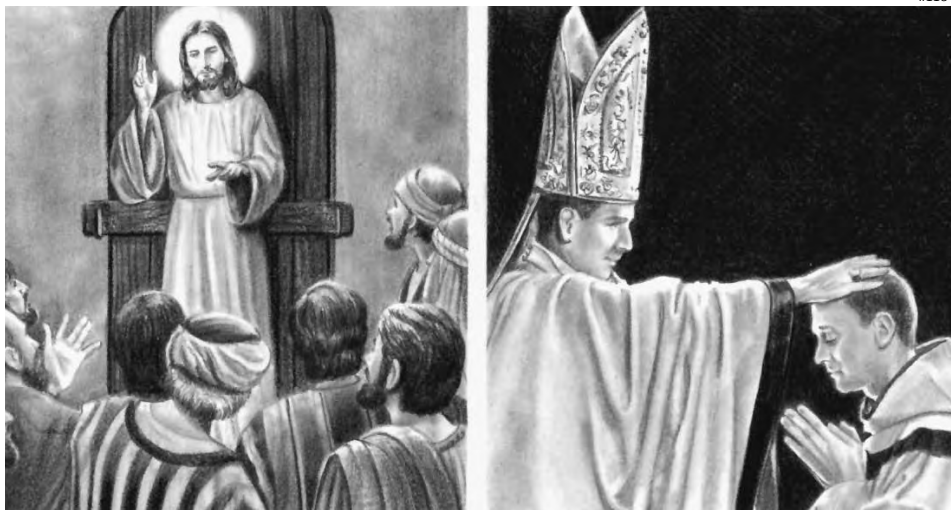
circumstances, even under threat of torture and death, reveal or discuss the sinner's identity and sin to or with anyone without the sinner's express permission. This seal is totally sacred and indissoluble and binds the priest under pain of very grave sin and very severe ecclesiastical penalties. Also, the priest confessor may not use his knowledge of the penitent's sins in any way other than to pray for him and offer sacrifices in reparation for his sins.

Sacred Scripture

And when he saw their faith he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home." And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. *Luke 5:20-25*

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." *John 20:19-23.*

#H6-7



Catechism of the Catholic Church

1424 It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. In a profound sense it is also a "confession" — acknowledgment and praise — of the holiness of God and of his mercy toward sinful man.

It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent "pardon and peace."⁷¹

It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles: "Be reconciled to God."⁷² He who lives by God's merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord's call: "Go; first be reconciled to your brother."⁷³

2490 The secret of the sacrament of reconciliation is sacred, and cannot be violated under any pretext. “The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason.”⁷¹

Vatican Council II

The apostles were endowed by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming upon them (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:4; John 20:22-23), and, by the imposition of hands (cf. 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6-7), they passed on to their auxiliaries the gift of the Spirit, which is transmitted down to our day through episcopal consecration.* *The Church*, 21

#C17-23



Summary Prayer

Lord, You desired to keep from us Your indignation and so did not spare Jesus Christ, Who was wounded for our sins. We are Your prodigal children, but by confessing our sins in the sacrament of Penance, we come back to You. Embrace us, that we may rejoice in Your mercy, together with Christ Your beloved Son. Grant that we may do penance, find forgiveness, and so share in the fruits of Christ's redeeming death. You love Your people even when they stray. Grant us a complete change of heart, so that we may follow You with greater fidelity.

Lord Jesus Christ, set Your Passion, Your Cross, and Your death between Your judgment and our souls, now and at the hour of our death. In Your goodness, grant mercy and grace to the living and forgiveness to sinners.

By Your Cross, O Christ, You have trodden upon and overthrown the ancient enemy of the human race. Grant full pardon and bring fresh salvation to those who are numbered among Your faithful people, especially through the sacrament of Penance. To You we give all honor and glory. Amen.

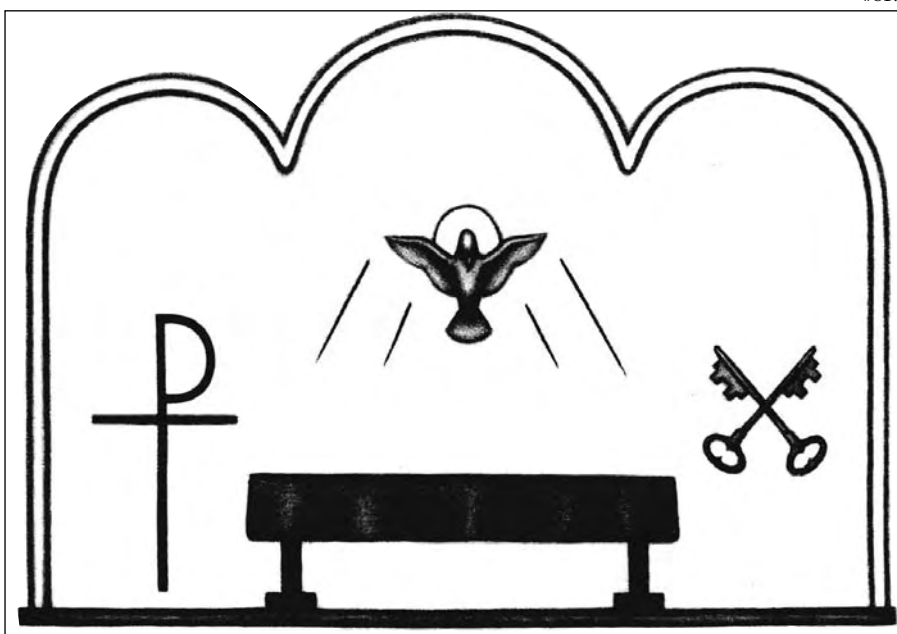
*Episcopal consecration is the consecration or ordination of bishops by means of the fullness of the sacrament of Orders.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. Cite a Scripture passage which shows Jesus instituting the sacrament of Penance. What does this sacrament bring to us?
2. Recall the last time you went to confession. How did it help you mentally and emotionally? How do you prepare yourself for a fruitful reception of the sacrament of Penance?
3. Pray the Summary Prayer after question 205, and express your gratitude to Jesus for making His merciful forgiveness visible through the sacrament of Penance.

Catechism by Diagram

#C17-7



Institution of the Sacrament of Penance. The sacrament of Penance was instituted in the Upper Room in Jerusalem when Jesus (monogram), on the evening of the day of His Resurrection, breathed on the Apostles (table of the Last Supper) and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit (dove). If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23). The Apostles and their successors received power (keys) from Christ to forgive sins.

Q. 206. How does the sacrament of Penance help us?

The sacrament of Penance helps us: (1) to obtain forgiveness from God after we have made a sincere confession, shown true sorrow, and are resolved not to sin again; (2) to be reconciled with the Church, which is wounded by our sins; and (3) to strive for holiness of life and overcome habits of sin.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

1. The sacrament of Penance helps us to obtain forgiveness from God after we have made a sincere confession, shown true sorrow, and are resolved not to sin again.

In the Creed we say: “We believe in the forgiveness of sins.” God gave us the sacrament of Penance as the means to obtain His forgiveness for our mortal sins. We should be truly sorry for them, confess them to a priest, and receive absolution from the priest. Absolution refers to the words of forgiveness spoken by the priest in confession. These words are a sign of assurance of God’s forgiveness. After absolution, we must perform the penance given us by the confessor, saying the prayers or doing the good deeds assigned.

The Church also encourages us to use the sacrament of Penance frequently for obtaining grace and the forgiveness of our venial sins.

2. The sacrament of Penance helps us to be reconciled with the Church, which is wounded by our sins.

By doing penance we show our repentance in action and make our relationship with God and our fellow men more firm, since we have damaged these unions by sin.

3. The sacrament of Penance helps us to strive for holiness of life and overcome habits of sin.

Through each sacrament, the Holy Spirit makes our souls more pleasing to God because of the graces He gives us. The sacrament of Penance brings to each individual special helps toward spiritual growth. Through the sacrament, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, forgives us our sins and sends His Holy Spirit once more to our souls with new grace and new strength to help us lead the Christian life and grow spiritually.

The purpose of the sacrament of Penance is to make visible and present God’s mercy and forgiveness.

The sacrament of Penance also reminds us of the great love God has for us. His love should inspire us to a greater love for Him. This sacrament will increase in us the love of God each time we receive it with humility and devotion.

This sacrament also increases our hope. We realize that, even though we are sinners, we can obtain from God the help we need to reach heaven. Moreover, faith is strengthened in the sacrament because, like any other sacrament, Penance demands the exercise of faith.

Sacred Scripture

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death, and keep them alive in famine. *Psalm 33:18-19*

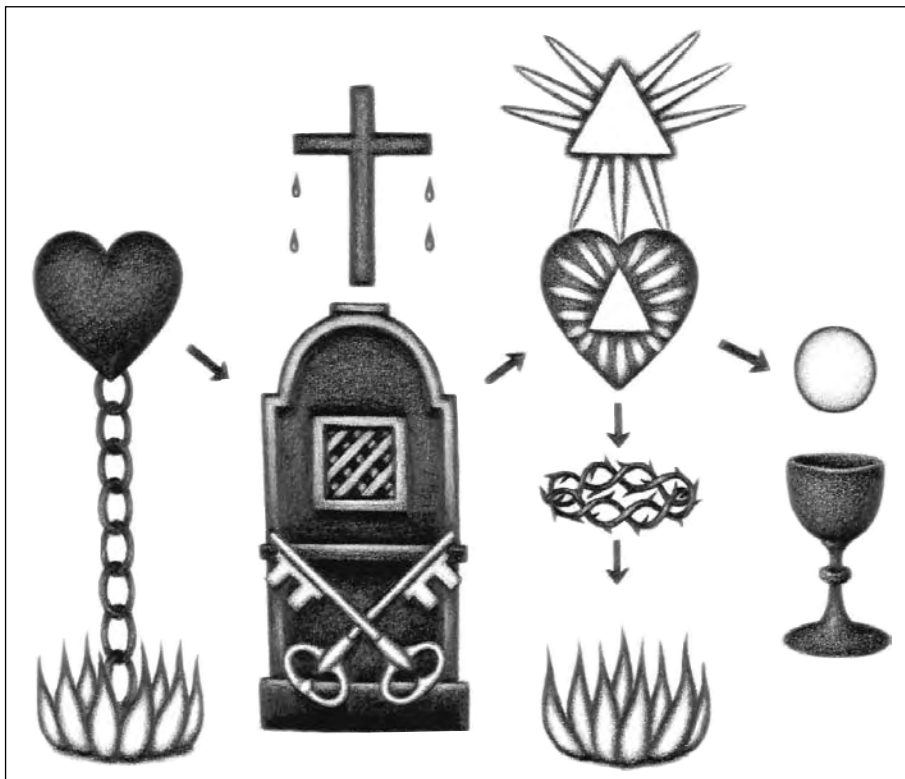
To those who repent he grants a return, and he encourages those whose endurance is failing... How great is the mercy of the Lord, and his forgiveness for those who turn to him! *Sirach 17:24, 29*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1470 In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way *the judgment* to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin.¹ In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and “does not come into judgment.”²

Catechism by Diagram

#C17-11



Benefits of the Sacrament of Penance. In the sacrament of Penance, or Reconciliation (confessional), Christ forgives (keys) mortal sin (black heart), restores the divine life of the soul (triangle in heart) in even greater abundance, and removes the sentence of hell (chain, fire) from those who have been guilty of serious sin. Christ also forgives all venial sins which we confess with contrition. He removes all or part of the temporal punishment due for sin, depending on the depth of the sorrow we have for our sins and the strength of our purpose of amendment. Jesus also gives us a pledge of the actual graces we will need to atone for past sins and to avoid sin in the future, and at the same time, He helps us to grow in divine love for God and our neighbor (rays). We also pay our debt of temporal punishment through the sufferings of Purgatory (fire), unless we discharge the debt before we die by works of penance (thorns) and indulgences. We receive all these benefits through the merits of Jesus Christ on the Cross (blood). Through the sacrament of Penance, we are better prepared to receive the Holy Eucharist (host, chalice).

Splendor of Truth

Christ came not to condemn but to forgive, to show mercy (cf. Mt 9:13)...No human sin can erase the mercy of God, or prevent him from unleashing all his triumphant power, if we only call upon him. Indeed, sin itself makes even more radiant the love of the Father who, in order

to ransom a slave, sacrificed his Son: his mercy towards us is Redemption. This mercy reaches its fullness in the gift of the Spirit who bestows new life and demands that it be lived. No matter how many and great the obstacles put in his way by human frailty and sin, the Spirit, who renews the face of the earth (cf. Ps 104:30), makes possible the miracle of the perfect accomplishment of the good. (*section 118*)

Vatican Council II

Parish priests must bear it constantly in mind how much the sacrament of penance contributes to the development of the Christian life and should therefore be readily available for the hearing of the confessions of the faithful. *Bishops, 30*

Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example and by prayer labors for their conversion. *The Church, 11*

#C17-22



Summary Prayer

Father, teach us to live good lives, encourage us with Your support and bring us to eternal life. Through the sacrament of Penance, free us from the sins that enslave us. May our acts of penance bring us Your forgiveness, open our hearts to Your love, and prepare us for Your coming after death.

Lord, You reward virtue and forgive the repentant sinner. Grant us Your forgiveness as we come before You confessing our guilt in the sacrament of Penance. May the power of this sacrament wash away our sins, renew our lives and bring us to salvation. May we never misuse Your healing gifts, especially by neglect, but always find in them a source of life and salvation. In the sacrament of Reconciliation, forgive our sins and guide our wayward hearts. Make us worthy to attain the gift of heaven after having been faithful in Your service. Help us to remain faithful to a holy way of life and guide us to the inheritance You have promised. Help us to grow in holiness and to advance the salvation of the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord, to Whom with You and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. How does the sacrament of Penance help us to grow spiritually and to lead a good Christian life?
2. Make a thorough examination of conscience and list any of your sinful habits. Resolve to make a serious effort to overcome these bad habits with the help of God's grace. (Do not show your list to anyone else, except to a priest in confession or to your spiritual director.)
3. Try to go to confession at least once a month. Thank Jesus for the graces that He gives you in this sacrament to help you overcome your faults and weaknesses.



#C17-2

Q. 207. If a Catholic has committed a mortal sin, is it necessary for him to go to confession?

Yes, when a Catholic has committed a serious or mortal sin, sacramental confession is the ordinary way to reconcile the sinner with Christ and His Church.

Confession is, for the Catholic, the sacramental way of obtaining pardon for sin and of submitting his offenses to the mercy and forgiving grace of God.

In this sacrament Jesus forgives our sins, no matter how terrible they are, as long as we repent and are sorry for them and are resolved, even though we are weak, not to commit the sins again. We trust in the help of God's grace to do so.

Repentance is a change of heart in which the sinner, helped by God's grace, turns back to his Father in heaven and accepts His loving forgiveness. Our Lord never

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

refuses His merciful love to the person of humble and contrite heart. God continues to speak to man even though he keeps on refusing Him.

Our Christian life on earth is a spiritual warfare. Therefore we are subject to temptations and sins. But our Lord Jesus has given us, through His Church, the sacrament of Penance, the sacrament of forgiveness, so that we may obtain pardon and peace from God and be reconciled with the Church.

The sign of the sacrament of Penance consists of the sinner's act of repentance by word or gesture, his confession of sins, his willingness to make reparation (penance), and the priest's words of absolution, "I absolve you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Sacred Scripture

He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. *Proverbs 28:13*

Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?... Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? *Ezekiel 18:30-31; 33:11*

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish. *Luke 13:5*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1457 According to the Church's command, "after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year."¹ Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession.² Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.³

Splendor of Truth

And if redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ's redemptive act, but to man's will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act. God's command is of course proportioned to man's capabilities; but to the capabilities of the man to whom the Holy Spirit has been given; of the man who, though he has fallen into sin, can always obtain pardon and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. (*section 108*)

Vatican Council II

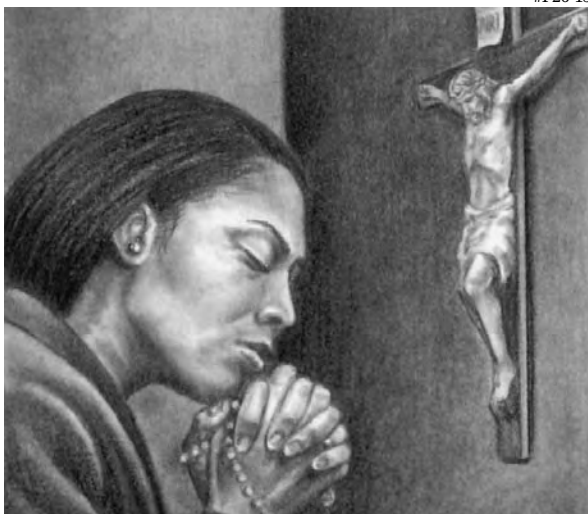
"By Baptism priests introduce men into the People of God; by the sacrament of Penance they reconcile sinners with God and the Church." *Priests, 5*

Summary Prayer

Father in heaven, the light of Your truth bestows sight to the darkness of sinful eyes. May repentance bring us the blessing of Your forgiveness and the gift of Your light. Direct our hearts to better things; turn to us with mercy for we have sinned against You. Grant this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise

1. What must we do in order to obtain forgiveness for our sins?
2. Do you have a serious sin which you have not confessed? If so, go to confession as soon as possible, repent sincerely, and trust in God's mercy and forgiveness.
3. Resolve to avoid at all costs the situations, persons, places, and things that lead you to commit serious sin. Humbly ask our Lord for the grace to free you from the bondage of serious sin.



#P26-13

Q. 208. What does perfect sorrow for sin do for a person?

Perfect sorrow or contrition for mortal sin restores a person to the state of grace even prior to receiving the sacrament of Penance, providing he is sincerely sorry for offending God and intends to go to confession as soon as possible.

We have perfect sorrow for our sins when we are truly sorry for them because they have offended our loving Father in heaven, when we hate the sins committed, and when we have a firm intention not to commit them again. Our primary motivation is contrition for having offended our God, Who is infinitely good, and not merely for fear of divine punishment. Our sorrow is sincere when it comes from the heart.

The virtue of perfect contrition is based on our love for God and the realization of His goodness. This realization should grow each time we say an act of contrition or go to confession.

Mortal sin is the greatest of all evils: it offends God seriously, keeps us out of heaven, and condemns us forever to hell. By perfect contrition we can be restored to grace, but the obligation to confess mortal sins to a priest remains.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

The remedy for sin is Jesus Christ, Who came into the world to save His people from their sins. By sharing in Jesus' death and Resurrection through the sacraments and by faithfully performing the duties of our state in life, we can triumph over sin and death. St. Paul says, "Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:8-9).

Sacred Scripture

And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept. *Mark 14:72*

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. *2 Corinthians 7:10*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1452 When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition 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.¹

Splendor of Truth

One is familiar with cases in which an act which is grave by reason of its matter does not constitute a mortal sin because of a lack of full awareness or deliberate consent on the part of the person performing it. Even so, "care will have to be taken not to reduce mortal sin to an act of 'fundamental option'—as is commonly said today—against God," seen either as an explicit and formal rejection of God and neighbor or as an implicit and unconscious rejection of love. "For mortal sin exists also when a person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason, chooses something gravely disordered." (*section 70*)

Vatican Council II

Catechesis, as well as pointing out the social consequences of sin, must impress on the minds of the faithful the distinctive character of penance as a detestation of sin because it is an offense against God. *Sacred Liturgy, 109*

#E5-13



Papal Document

The full taking away and, as it is called, reparation of sins requires two things. Firstly, friendship with God must be restored. Amends must be made for offending his wisdom and goodness. This is done by a sincere conversion of mind. Secondly, all the personal and social values, as well as those that are universal, which sin has lessened or destroyed must be fully made good. This is done in two ways. The first is by freely making reparation, which involves punishment. The second is by accepting the punishments God's just and most holy wisdom had appointed. From this the holiness and splendor of his glory shine out through the world. The very facts that punishment for sin exists and that it is so severe make it possible for us to understand how foolish and malicious sin is and how harmful its consequences are. *Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences, 3 [Pope Paul VI, 1967]*

Catechism by Diagram

#C17-25



Perfect Contrition. Only by true sorrow (tears) for sin can we shatter the slavery (chains) which binds us (heart) to evil and eternal punishment (fire). True sorrow comes from acknowledging that our sins have offended the good God (triangle) and have caused Jesus' sufferings (cross, thorns). Only through His Blood are our sins washed away, because He made atonement for them. Through His Cross, He also merited grace (rays) for us, that we might avoid sin and thus become holy. By perfect contrition, we can be restored to grace.

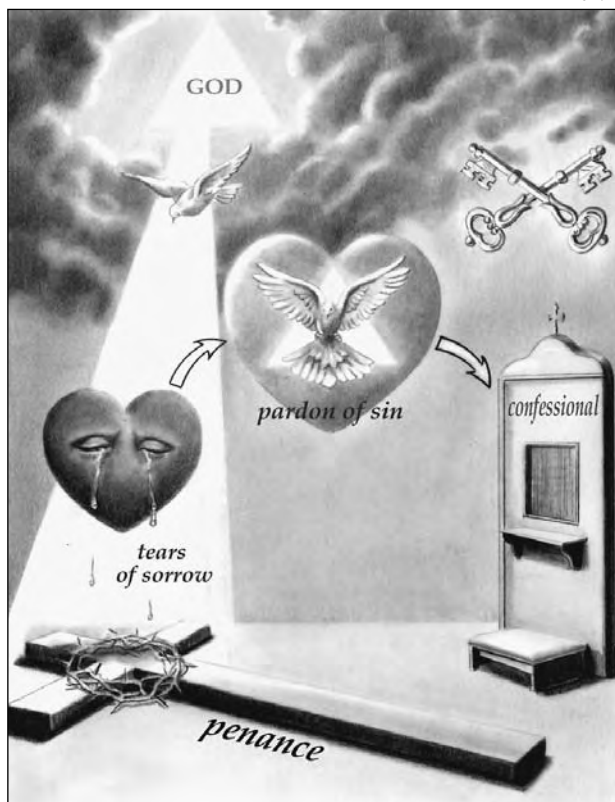
Summary Prayer

Father, He Who knew no sin was made sin for us, to save us and to restore us to Your friendship. Look upon our contrite hearts and afflicted spirits

and heal our troubled consciences, so that, in the joy and strength of the Holy Spirit, we may proclaim Your praise and glory before all the nations. We confess, Lord, that we have sinned. Wash us clean by Your gift of salvation. Blot out our sins by the power of the Cross and keep our lives from the assaults of the devil, by the grace of Your Holy Spirit. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our only Lord and Savior. Amen.

Catechism by Diagram

#C17-26



Effects of Perfect Contrition. The sacrament of Penance is, for the Catholic, the sacramental way of obtaining pardon for sins and submitting our offenses to the mercy and forgiving grace of God. If one has fallen into serious sin (darkened heart), sacramental confession is the ordinary way, established by the Church, to reconcile the sinner to Christ and to His Church, because the power to forgive sins was given to the Apostles and their successors (keys). It is also true that a sinner can be restored to grace by perfect sorrow, or perfect contrition (tears). We must continue to make atonement for our sins by penance, prayer, and good works.

Q. 209. What does the Church desire concerning confession?

The Church desires that every Catholic, from the “the age of discretion” (about seven years old), should be instructed on how to receive and best profit from the regular use of the sacrament of Penance.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

The Church encourages the faithful to confess their sins to a priest with a contrite heart in the sacrament of Penance. She makes it very clear that she wishes the faithful to frequently use the sacraments to help them grow in the Christian life. After the Holy Eucharist, Penance is the sacrament that can be received the most frequently. It prepares us to receive the Holy Eucharist more worthily.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1446 Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as “the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.”⁷¹

Vatican Council II

Parish priests must bear it constantly in mind how much the sacrament of penance contributes to the development of the Christian life and should therefore be readily available for the hearing of the confessions of the faithful. *Bishops*, 30

And on behalf of the faithful who are moved to sorrow or are stricken with sickness they [priests] exercise in an eminent degree a ministry of reconciliation and comfort, whilst they carry the needs and supplications of the faithful to God the Father (cf. Heb. 5:1-4). *The Church*, 28

In the spirit of Christ the pastor, they [priests] instruct them [the faithful] to submit their sins to the Church with a contrite heart in the sacrament of Penance, so that they may be daily more and more converted to the Lord, remembering his words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mt. 4:17).” *Priests*, 5

Summary Prayer

Jesus, we believe that You have the power to forgive sins because You are not only God’s appointed representative, but God Himself. The power to forgive resides in You, in all its fullness. Through Your generous love, You designated that it remain on earth in the person of Peter, his fellow Apostles, and their successors until the end of time. You gave this power to them after Your Resurrection when You said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:22-23). The priests of Your Church continue to exercise forgiveness in Your Name.

We thank You for giving such power to priests and for confirming their power in advance by the cure of the paralytic (Mk. 2:1-12). The power thus conferred is truly divine—divine in its operation, inasmuch as it was to remit many sins, save many souls, allay despair, and impart much comfort, peace, and joy.

Jesus, we thank You for the inestimable benefit of the sacrament of Penance. Through its frequent use, You give us our spiritual life, firm confidence in God, peace of conscience, strength to resist temptation, ease to perform good works, and lasting joy.

In this sacrament, we receive the price of Your Precious Blood and of Your five sacred wounds. We thank You for all the graces we have ever received

in the sacrament of Reconciliation, by which You have rendered spiritual resurrection possible for us. Help us to make use of this sacrament with confidence, joy, and peace. Amen.

#C17-16



Q. 210. What do we gain by confessing venial sins?

When we confess our venial sins, not only does God pardon them, but we receive an increase of grace and charity which allows for a better disposition for receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and helps us to perfect the Christian life.

The abundance of the fruit which we gain from Holy Communion depends upon the degree of our love, since the special fruit of Holy Communion is an increase of sanctifying grace and the virtue of charity. A person who is habitually guilty of deliberate venial sin or who receives our Lord carelessly or thoughtlessly, receives the same benefits which the sacrament gives to all those who receive, but because of his poor disposition, does not allow these graces to blossom and grow in his soul.

In such souls our Lord does not find the willingness to allow Him to act freely in them. Their union with Christ cannot be perfected because of their vanity, self-love, sensuality, and lack of charity. To receive the most fruit from Holy Communion, we must strive to be free of obstacles to God's grace. The grace we receive from the sacrament of Penance helps us to overcome these obstacles.

Though we are a community of believers, we are also a sinful people. God has called us to greatness, but, aware of our sinfulness, we look to Him for understanding and mercy. In the sacrament of Penance, we humbly appeal for mercy and for the graces we need to live the Christian life according to God's will. Our Lord gives us the grace we need to love others sincerely and to promote peace and common respect among God's people.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

Sacred Scripture

Q. 210. Ps 24:3-4, 25:8-9; Heb 12:1-4.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Q. 210. Paragraph 1458.

Sacred Scripture

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. *Hebrews 3:12-13*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

1458 Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.¹ Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us form our conscience, fight against evil tendencies, let ourselves be healed by Christ and progress in the life of the Spirit. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father’s mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful.² “Whoever confesses his sins.... is already working with God. God indicts your sins; if you also indict them, you are joined with God. Man and sinner are, so to speak, two realities: when you hear “man” — this is what God has made; when you hear “sinner” — this is what man himself has made. Destroy what you have made, so that God may save what he has made.... When you begin to abhor what you have made, it is then that your good works are beginning, since you are accusing yourself of your evil works. The beginning of good works is the confession of evil works. You do the truth and come to the light.”³



Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. How does confession of your venial sins help you to grow in holiness?
2. Do you strive to overcome not only mortal but also deliberate venial sin? Think about the venial sins that you commit most often. What corresponding good actions and virtues will you practice to overcome them?
3. Pray for the conversion of sinners. Ask God to lead your family members, relatives, friends, and neighbors to the sacrament of Penance.

Chapter Summary Prayer

Our Father in heaven, touch our hearts so that we will seek Your friendship more often and will make amends for our sins against Your wisdom and goodness. Guide all those who are estranged from You by sin, that they may come back to You and remain always in Your love. Lead back to Your friendship and truth all who have gone astray; teach us how to help them.

Heavenly Father, through the grace of the sacrament of Penance, help us to strip off our sinful selves and be clothed with Christ Your Son, the new Adam. Help us to leave sin behind and to rejoice in professing Your Name. God of mercy and compassion, cleanse our hearts of all faults, fill our minds with wisdom, and open our lips that we may always sing Your praises. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Family Wisdom Library: Chapter 60

See Appendix A for more references.

Q. 205. What is the sacrament of Penance?

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 11;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 27-34;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 2;
Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Vatican II, sect. 72, 74.*

Q. 206. How does the sacrament of Penance help us?

*The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People, John Paul II, sect. 16-17;
Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 11;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 29, 31.*

Q. 207. If a Catholic has committed a mortal sin, is it necessary for him to go to confession?

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 11;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 31;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 20;
Splendor of Truth, John Paul II, sect. 104, 105.*

Q. 208. What does perfect sorrow for sin do for a person?

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 11;
On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 42, 45, 48;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 31;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 20;
Splendor of Truth, John Paul II, sect. 104.*

Q. 209. What does the Church desire concerning confession?

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 11;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 26, 28, 31-33;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 20.*

Q. 210. What do we gain by confessing venial sins?

*Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), Vatican II, sect. 11;
On Reconciliation and Penance, John Paul II, sect. 31;
Redeemer of Man, John Paul II, sect. 20.*



Thought Provokers

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

- Q. 205: What is the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit referred to by our Lord in Matthew 12:22-32?
- Q. 206: In the sacrament of Penance, does the priest forgive the penitent?
- Q. 207: Protestants in general do not believe that a person should confess their sins in the presence of a priest. Is there any passage of Scripture that indicates that the Catholic teaching in this matter is correct?
- Q. 208: If a Catholic has committed a mortal sin, may an act of perfect contrition replace the need for receiving the sacrament of Penance?
- Q. 209: What is scrupulosity?
- Q. 210: When should a child first receive the sacrament of Penance?