

How confession works now

“Zacheus, make haste and come down.”

In short. Confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament, and by the priest’s absolution God grants the penitent pardon and peace.¹ Every priest who hears confessions is bound to absolute secrecy, a seal that admits of no exceptions.²

Key points

- Only God forgives sins, and Jesus gives this power to men to exercise in his name.³
- The celebration ordinarily has a greeting, the word of God, confession, a penance, absolution and thanksgiving.⁴
- Contrition means sorrow for sin with the resolution not to sin again.⁵
- The sacramental seal admits of no exceptions.²

Try this, this week

1. **Read Luke 19:1–10.** Notice who moves first.
2. **Use our examination of conscience** the day before, slowly.
3. **Learn the Act of Contrition**, or bring it on paper. That is allowed.
4. **Go at a quiet time**, or call the parish to ask for an appointment.

“And when Jesus was come to the place, looking up, he saw him and said to him: Zacheus, make haste and come down: for this day I must abide in thy house. And he made haste and came down and received him with joy.”

Luke 19:5–6, Douay–Rheims

Watch out: what this does not mean

- Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused, which is one reason for the penance.⁷
- Confession of venial sins is not strictly necessary, but the Church strongly recommends it.⁸

Common questions

What if I cannot remember all my sins?

The Church says that when the faithful strive to confess all the sins that they can remember, they undoubtedly place all of them before the divine mercy for pardon.⁶

Will the priest tell anyone?

Every priest who hears confessions is bound under very severe penalties to keep absolute secrecy regarding the sins confessed to him.² He can make no use of knowledge that confession gives him about penitents’ lives.²

Remember: Say it has been a long time. The priest will help.

Sources

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| 1. CCC 1424 | 5. CCC 1451 |
| 2. CCC 1467 | 6. CCC 1456 |
| 3. CCC 1441 | 7. CCC 1459 |
| 4. CCC 1480 | 8. CCC 1458 |

Quotation above: Luke 19:5–6, Douay–Rheims. Catechism: official text on vatican.va.

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