

Holy Trinity Catholic Church
RCIA Class Transcript
The Sacrament of Penance
Lecturer: Father Francis Peffley
Date: January 25, 2005

The topic tonight is going to be on Confession, the Sacrament of Penance.

Before we do that, we didn't have enough time, two weeks ago, when we went through the teaching about the Mass, so I'd like to spend a couple of minutes just going over what's called the *Liturgical Year*, and how the year is divided up, not only into different seasons, but different *Liturgical Seasons*.

For the Catholic Church, New Year's Day is the first Sunday in *Advent*. There are different colors. We talked about that, during *Ordinary Time*, the color is green, where the priest wears green vestments. During the *Easter* and *Christmas* seasons, the priest wears white or gold. During *Advent* and *Lent*, he wears purple. During certain Holy Days, he wears red. The rest of the time, he does wear green, for the Ordinary Times of the year.

Our New Year's Day, for the Church, is not January 1st, but usually the First Sunday in Advent. Let's say it happens to fall on December 1st. Advent is four weeks. If you've ever seen the *Advent Wreath*, which has the four candles, you have the three purple candles, and one rose-colored, or pink candle. The rose-colored candle is the Third Sunday in Advent. It means joy, because you're getting so close to Christmas. The purple is a color for expectation, royalty, and doing some penance for our sins. It's a joyful expectation for the coming of Christ. Advent is this season here.

The Christmas season runs from Christmas Day, all the way through the Feast Day of the Baptism of the Lord. One of our problems, I think, in the Church today, is that people start celebrating Christmas way too early, and they get rid of Christmas right after it's over. Have you ever driven down the street on December 27th or 28th? All the Christmas trees are gone. They're all out on the street, for the trash man to pick them up. You should try to keep your Christmas trees up until the Feast Day of the Baptism of the Lord. The Christmas Season not only goes through January 6th, which is the Epiphany, with the Wise Men or the Three Kings, but it goes all the way through the Sunday after that, which is the Baptism of the Lord. That's when we go back to Ordinary Time. If you drove by the rectory, I think I was the only person in Kingsbrooke that still had all my lights up until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Everybody else takes them down so early.

Our society starts celebrating Christmas right around Thanksgiving. When you go shopping, all the Christmas music is on. We've really lost the Season of Advent, which should be a season of preparation and joy. Try to keep Advent as a time of

preparation, by reading Scriptures, and going to Church, or reading the Bible, and praying. Then, celebrate Christmas for three weeks – keep that season alive.

Next, we go to this green period, which is called Ordinary Time. There are 34 weeks in Ordinary Time. The color, of course, is green, which is a sign of Spring, a sign of hope, a sign of growing. This is a time for us to grow in our faith, during the ordinary part of the year. This would run all the way up until *Lent*.

Then, we have the 40 days of Lent, which usually begins in the middle of February. It depends on when Easter is. It runs up until Easter. During this time, we have these 40 days of prayer, penance, fasting, and preparing for the three most important days of the year for us Catholics and Christians: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter. Those are in red here, because they are the three most important days. For example, we wear red vestments on Palm Sunday, when we read the Passion. We wear red vestments on Good Friday. We wear gold on Easter.

Next, we come to the Easter season. What's interesting is that Lent is 40 days, but the Easter season is 50 days. Just as you do penance, and give up certain things (candy, sweets, meat, or television), there are many sacrifices you can make during Lent. We should make sacrifices during Lent. Don't forget that during Easter, the Church gives us an even longer period to rejoice and to celebrate. I know many families, even if they've given up, let's say, chocolate, or cakes, or dessert during Lent, then they have the desserts every night during the 50 days. The Church wants you to celebrate and rejoice. It's 40 days of preparation, prayer, and fasting, but it's 50 days of rejoicing, and enjoying the Resurrection of the Lord. That goes from Easter, through Ascension Thursday, and then nine more days takes us to Pentecost.

Then, we go back to this Ordinary Time, from about the eleventh week, all the way to the thirty-fourth week. That culminates in the Feast Day of Christ the King, which is the end of the Liturgical Year, which is always around November 30th. We start over again with Advent, in December. Every year, the Church has this beautiful flow of times of fasting, and times of feasting, times of preparation, and penance for us, and also times of rejoicing.

Every Sunday is considered like a miniature Easter, a miniature Day of the Resurrection. That's why we don't do Penance on Sunday. We rejoice, and have a relaxing time on Sunday. Every Friday should be like a miniature Good Friday. We should always make some sacrifice every Friday. For example, during Lent, we give up eating meat on Fridays, as a sacrifice. During the rest of the year, we still are supposed to do some sacrifice on every Friday. It could be giving up a dessert, chocolate, alcohol, or whatever you want to do. Every Catholic and every Christian should do some little act of Penance out of love for God on every Friday of the year. I know many Catholics that don't eat meat on any Fridays throughout the year, and that's their sacrifice. If you do choose to eat meat on a

Friday, during the normal part of the year, you should make some other sacrifice. In Lent, we always give up meat every Friday. During the rest of the year, if you do eat meat on Fridays, you do need to make some other sacrifice – perhaps giving up dessert, or having water instead of soda, or soda instead of beer, or wine instead of hard liquor. It's up to you to make that decision of what you want to do. Make some sacrifice on every Friday during the year. It reminds you of the great sacrifice of what Jesus did for you on Good Friday. He showed us how much He loved us by dying on the Cross for us, so we should do something to show that we love Him.

We'll get into our topic tonight, because it is one of our most important topics of the year. This is called the *Sacrament of Penance*. Remember what a sacrament is: a sacrament is a visible sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace. That's very important, that sacraments are things that you see, but they give grace, and they're all founded by Christ. We're going to talk tonight of when Christ gave us the Sacrament of Penance.

The word "penance" comes from the Latin word to mean "repent," or "to make up for our sins." This sacrament has a number of different names. It's also called the:

- *Sacrament of Confession* - That reminds us of the actual confessing of our sins.
- *Rite of Reconciliation* – Reconciliation describes the whole process of having sins, having them forgiven, and being reconciled, not only to God (primarily), but also to one another, and to the Church.
- *Sacrament of Love*
- *Sacrament of Forgiveness*
- *Sacrament of God's Mercy* - Mercy is when God's Love tempers His Justice.
- *Sacrament of Healing* – We are freed from our sins.

This sacrament is the second best reason to become Catholic. The first is the Eucharist, to:

- Be able to receive Christ in the Most Blessed Sacrament.
- Receive Jesus in Holy Communion: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.
- Receive the same Lord that was laid in the manger, and who carried the Cross, and who died on the Cross, and who rose from the Dead.

That's the greatest reason for becoming Catholic, but the second greatest reason is to have your sins forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance, which is such a great sacrament. You walk out of there with a huge weight off your shoulders, and incredible peace of mind and peace of heart, that comes from making a good Confession, and having your sins forgiven by Christ.

All the sacraments are encounters with Christ. In this sacrament, we encounter His Mercy and Love, that we receive from the Good Shepherd, who is Christ. So,

it's one of the seven sacraments that Christ established. We know it's the sacrament that probably is most misunderstood, I think, by people outside the Church. We'll go into exactly what we do in this sacrament.

We know that Baptism takes away Original Sin, or, if we've never been baptized, it takes away all of the sins of our whole life. What sacrament takes away sins committed after baptism? It's the Sacrament of Confession. Confession washes away any sins we've committed after baptism. You can only be baptized once. That's always been a teaching of all Christian religions. What do you do, if after you've been baptized, you commit a sin? How do you have that forgiven? Yes, we should pray to God, if you don't have this sacrament yet. If you're not Catholic, for those who do not have the sacrament, they pray to God, and make an Act of Perfect Contrition. (We'll talk about that in a little while). God can forgive, and does forgive, that person those sins. That would be the extraordinary way that God forgives sins. The ordinary way is He wants us to be absolved in the Sacrament of Confession, which He Himself established.

In the sacraments, it is Christ who performs the sacrament. When a priest or minister baptizes, what does he say? "I baptize you." Who is the "I?" It's Christ. Christ is the One who baptizes. He uses the priest as His instrument, but Christ is the One who baptizes. In the Eucharist, the priest doesn't say, "This is the Body of Christ; this is the Blood of Christ." He says, "This is My Body." It's first-person. All the sacraments are first-person. In Confession, the priest doesn't say, "I hope Jesus forgives you of your sins." The priest says, "I absolve you from your sins." The word "absolve" means "to wash away." That's what happens in the sacrament; all your sins are washed away by Christ, who uses the priest as His instrument. Just as He used the priest, or the minister, in the pouring of water, and in the washing away of sins in Baptism; again He uses a priest in this Sacrament of Confession. The priest is God's instrument, and Christ says those words to us. That's such a great thing about this sacrament, is that you actually hear Jesus telling you that you're forgiven; where Christ says, "I absolve you from your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of Holy Spirit." You actually hear and receive God's forgiveness in your life. What a wonderful weight is taken off people's shoulders; what a great healing comes about when those words are said.

I think those are some of the most beautiful words. I remember there was a story once, where the angels were told by God to go out and gather all the most beautiful words they'd ever heard. The angels went down; they went throughout the world and gathered up the words like where a husband would tell his wife, "I love you," or where a child would hear from his dad, "I'm proud of you." Those were all beautiful words, but one angel brought back these words, "I absolve you from your sins, in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." God said, "Yes." Those are the most beautiful words on Earth, when you hear those words, and know that your sins are washed away.

Baptism washes away our sins initially. Confession absolves us of sins after Baptism. The great thing about that is that we don't have to keep getting wet with water every single time we go to Confession. We only get baptized once, but when we go to Confession, it's like getting rebaptized, without having to get wet again. What a great sacrament this is.

We have to remember in this sacrament, that it's Christ who forgives sins. God alone is the only One who can forgive sins. We know that Christ could forgive sins, since He was the Son of God. Realize, when you go to Confession, you're actually talking to Christ, who is present in the ordained priest. Remember, only a Catholic priest, who's been ordained by a Bishop, who's been ordained by a previous Bishop, back to those Twelve Apostles, has the power to be God's instrument in the forgiveness of sins in this sacrament. Only the priest has the power to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, and to absolve sins in Confession.

The priest really becomes the instrument of God. Some people say, "Well, we talk directly to God, and you Catholics go to a priest." We talk directly to God through the priest. It's like talking to somebody on the telephone. When you're on the phone, you are talking to the person on the other line, but you're using the phone as the instrument. That's what the priest is. You're talking directly to God, directly to Christ, but the priest is the instrument. I'm talking directly to you, but this microphone helps. It does not get in the way between us; it actually helps. It's the same thing with the telephone – the telephone helps you to talk directly to the person on the other end. Confession enables us to talk directly to Christ on the other end.

Why go to Confession to a priest? Why not just go to your room and ask God to directly forgive you? You should go to your room every night. You should kneel down by your bedside and say an *Act of Contrition* or an *Act of Sorrow*. You should, throughout the day, ask God to forgive you of your sins. That's very important. In Confession, these sins not only are forgiven, but they're absolved. They're washed away. They're gone completely. They're going to be many reasons why we go to Confession.

Let's take a look at the Bible for a couple of minutes to show you where in the Bible this sacrament is found. Often times, people have questions about that. They say, "Where is this in the Bible? Where does the Bible say we should go to Confession to a priest?"

I'm going to start with Mark, Chapter 2. You can look it up in your Bible sometime. In Mark, Chapter 2, there was a paralytic, and his four friends tried to get him to meet the Lord. There were so many people outside the house that they couldn't get in. How did they get in? Through the roof. They climbed up the back, went up a ladder, and started tearing off the roof of this house. They lowered their friend on the stretcher right in front of the Lord.

The Lord was amazed, and He said, "Seeing their faith, not the faith of the paralyzed man," (they saw the faith of the four friends), "He then turned to the paralyzed man and said, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'" That really upset the Scribes and Pharisees, because they said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They didn't realize at that time that Jesus was the Son of God. As the Son of God, He could forgive sins. Christ said, "Your sins are forgiven." He forgave this paralyzed man's sins. The Pharisees objected. Christ then worked a miracle. He healed the body to prove He could heal the soul. He said, "Which is easier to say, 'My son, your sins are forgiven,' or, 'Stand up, take up your mat, and walk.'" Then He said, "So that you may realize that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins. He said to the paralyzed man, 'Stand up and walk.'" Immediately, the man was cured. He stood up, picked up his mat, and walked out. Christ healed the body to show He had power to heal the soul. That was His miracle where he showed that He had power to forgive sins, as well as heal the body. He said, "The Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins."

Then we move to John, Chapter 20, Verse 20. The good thing about this chapter is that it's easy to remember – 20/20 vision. If you want to see Confession in the Bible, go to John 20:20. This is where it's the night of the Resurrection. The Lord appeared to the Apostles in the Upper Room. This was the first sacrament the Lord instituted after He rose from the Dead. The doors were locked. The Lord walked through the locked doors, which He could do in His glorified Body. He said to the Apostles, "Peace be with you." Christ had to forgive their sins – their sins of disbelief, and the fact they had all deserted Him in the Agony in the Garden, and at the Cross all had left Him. Then He said, "Jesus breathed on them." He gave them the Holy Spirit. He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them. Whose sins you retain are retained." That's where the sacrament is found in the Bible – John, Chapter 20, Verse 20. The Lord gave them power to forgive sins. He said, "As the Father has sent Me, so now I send you."

How did the Father send Christ? He sent Him with authority – the authority to forgive sins. We see that He gave this authority to the Apostles, when He ordained them priests, and gave them the power to absolve sins, and to take away sins.

The reason why people have to go to Confession to a priest is because the priest has to be able to determine whether or not to absolve or retain those sins. The only way a priest would know is if the person spoke, and said the confession out loud. Christ could read souls; He could read hearts. When Jesus saw a person, He could tell in their heart whether or not they were sorry for their sins.

Obviously, we priests can't – that's why the person goes to Confession, and then the priest gives the absolution after the person makes the Confession.

We also have a passage in Corinthians, where St. Paul says that, “God has given us the Ministry of Reconciliation.” That’s one of the works of the Apostles, was to reconcile and to absolve sins. We know after the Apostles received this power from Christ; they passed it on to others – to Timothy, Titus, and others, in the Laying on of Hands. This is the ordination. This is when Paul, or the other Apostles, would ordain other men to the priesthood. They would pray over them, and lay hands on their head; and they would pass on the Holy Spirit that they had received from Christ. St. Paul even refers to this, when he talked to Timothy about, “Remember how when I prayed over you, and laid hands on you, and gave you the power to do these certain things?” That’s in the Scriptures.

This is where the sacrament is found in the Bible. We know that Christ is God. He can forgive sins. We see that when He cured the paralyzed man. He then gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins, in John, Chapter 20, Verse 20. The Apostles, in turn, ordained others to the priesthood: other Bishops, other priests. We see this in Acts of the Apostles, and in other ways. The passage where St. Paul says that Christ has given us the Ministry of Reconciliation is Second Corinthians, Chapter 5, in case you want to look up that passage.

One of the benefits and advantages of going to Confession is that we actually hear Christ saying those words to us. That is very beneficial, not only spiritually, but also emotionally, and psychologically, to hear that we’re forgiven, to have that certainty. Also, when we go to Confession, we get advice, and suggestions from the priest, who might give us some good spiritual direction. When we go to Confession, we get a special grace to overcome these sins in the future. Confession strengthens our will, and gives us the power to overcome sin. There’s also some good accountability when we go to Confession, especially if we go to the same spiritual director or confessor more than once.

One of the great things about Confession is that it helps us grow in the virtue of humility. The one thing about humility is that it overcomes the worst sin, which of course, is pride. Pride was the sin of Lucifer, the sin of the Devil. It was the sin of our first parents Adam and Eve. Pride is the root of all sin. When we go to Confession, and we humble ourselves, and we confess our sins to God’s representative (to the priest), it’s an act of humility which helps us to overcome the chief obstacle to our salvation, which is pride. When we go to Confession, we’re given a *penance* to say, some prayers to say, which helps to make up for our sins.

We also mentioned that every time we sin, we do offend God up in Heaven. We also offend one another. Often times our sins not only hurt God, but they hurt one another, for example, if somebody steals something, or somebody gossips about somebody, or somebody commits adultery on their spouse. These things not only offend God, but they hurt one another. So Confession, since you’re confessing your sins to God, reconciles you with God; but since you’re confessing your sins

to God's representative who's a man, you're also being reconciled to your fellow man, and to the Church. There is that dimension as well.

In Confession, you get good advice, good counsel, and good direction. When we go to Confession, and have to face our sins, we grow in self-knowledge. It helps us to uproot bad habits, like using God's Name in vain, or gossiping, or impatience - even the small sins. It purifies the conscience; it helps to keep your conscience on the right track.

There are five steps to making a good Confession. The first one is to *Examine Your Conscience*. That means you look over the list of the Ten Commandments. I think all of you have that list in your handouts tonight: "The Guide to Confession." First of all, you should pray to the Holy Spirit, and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you, and to enlighten your mind. Then you read over the Ten Commandments, or the handouts, or the booklets that will help you make a good confession.

Second, you want to *Have Contrition*. Contrition is "sorrow for our sins." Contrition comes from the Latin word "with sorrow." That's an essential ingredient to have our sins forgiven - we have to be sorry for them.

Third, we would then *Confess our Sins*, which is the actual telling of our sins to Christ and His representative.

Fourth is what's called a *Firm Purpose of Amendment*. "Amendment" means we are going to do our best to avoid those sins in the future, a firm purpose of amendment not to fall into the same sins again. A person could say, "Well, why should I go to Confession? I know I'm just going to commit a sin again." It's like saying, "I'm not going to take a shower, just because I know I'm going to get dirty again." We should go to Confession. As long as there's a serious effort to avoid those sins in the future, it's a good Confession. Let's say somebody is living with their girlfriend or their boyfriend, and they go to Confession - if not willing to separate or to move out, then it's not a genuine or sincere Confession; because if they just want to go back the same night and commit those same sins again, then the Confession was worthless or useless. That person has to have a firm purpose of amendment, that they're really going to try to avoid those sins in the future. It doesn't require them to be absolutely perfect or anything like that. All I'm saying is that you have to try, and you have to have a firm purpose of amendment. Let's say the case of boyfriend or girlfriend living together, you have to at least say yes, you're going to move out, or sleep in separate rooms between now and the wedding. That would be a purpose of amendment. A person could go to Confession, and say, "Yes, we are going to make that, to get rid of that sin in our life."

Then comes number five, *Doing the Penance*. "Penance" means "to help make up for our sins", "to do satisfaction", "to repair the damage of the sin." A good

analogy would be if I took a hammer and a nail, and drove the nail into this pulpit, you could say the nail would be the sin. Confession gets rid of the nail. The sin is gone, but still the soul has been damaged or wounded. There's still a hole in there that needs to be repaired. The penance that the priest gives you when he says, "Say five Our Fathers and five Hail Mary's," or, "Read a chapter of the Bible," or, "Do some other forms of prayer," help to fill up that hole, that damaged wound in the soul. That's why we do penance.

Again, the definition of this sacrament is "the sacrament by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven by Christ through the absolution of the priest." That's the best definition. To receive this sacrament, you do have to be baptized. The effects of the sacrament are that if a person is in mortal sin, if they've committed a serious sin, once they have confessed those mortal sins, those sins are absolved, washed away, forgiven, and that *Sanctifying Grace* is restored to the soul. Do you remember what Sanctifying Grace is? Sanctifying Grace is the presence of God within the soul. It's the in-dwelling of the Blessed Trinity, which we receive in Baptism. If we commit a mortal sin, or a serious sin, we lose God's grace within the soul. To repent, go to Confession, have those sins absolved, and then we're back in God's grace, in the state of grace. That's why I say one of my hobbies is "raising the dead" – every Saturday, I spend time "raising the dead". When people come to Confession, they might walk in there with mortal sins on their soul. They go to Confession. God uses me and every priest to absolve those sins, and the person is forgiven, and they're spiritually "risen from the dead." It's a wonderful sacrament, to be able to do that, to be God's instrument. Next to saying Mass, that's the most important thing a priest does, is absolve sins, and give people God's grace back in their soul.

Confession also increases Sanctifying Grace in the soul, for those who already possess it. You can grow in grace. You grow in holiness by going to Confession. Plus, it also gives *Actual Graces*, which are special strength that comes from God.

A person can start going to this Confession once they've reached the age of reason, which is age seven or eight. Up until then, a child doesn't go to Confession. At that point, they start to understand right from wrong, even though, when they're younger, they know it's wrong to hit their brother or sister; but the conscience really begins to develop at age seven or eight. That's when Confession is usually done for the kids, right before First Communion.

A very good scriptural passage that you should read, that will help you understand the sacrament, is the Prodigal Son. The word "prodigal" means "wasteful," because he wasted his father's inheritance. When we commit a mortal sin, in a sense, we are wasting our inheritance. We're giving that up, and that's what the Prodigal Son did. He had a loving father. He said, "I want all my inheritance now." He left, went off to a foreign country, spent everything on dissolute living, wound up hungry and starving, and working among pigs. He

came to his senses. He said, "I will rise and return to my father." So, he got up; he went to his father; he made his Confession. He said, "Father, I have sinned against you and against Heaven. I don't deserve to be called your son." Immediately, the father forgave him, and put a ring back on his finger, put robes on him (the robe of Sanctifying Grace), and he was given his sonship back. That's the image we should always have of going to Confession.

In fact, there was a book out called Prodigal Daughters. It's a book about 15 women that had left the Catholic Faith, and done all sorts of evil things in their past. Some had had abortions; others had gotten into drugs and alcohol. They wrote this book where every one of them had a chapter about how they had strayed, and gone away from God, and how they came back to receive His love, mercy, and forgiveness. It's really a wonderful book. If you read The Confessions of St. Augustine you'll see what his life was like, how God forgave his sins, and how he came back to God and the Faith.

A couple of the things we should remember when we go to Confession; there are five steps. The first one was to examine our conscience. I'd recommend that you do pray to the Holy Spirit. Say, "Come Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind, and my heart, so I may know what my sins are, and confess them sincerely." The best way to examine your conscience is to go through the list of the Ten Commandments, which we gave you, and the Teachings of the Church.

Then, think in terms of the ways we can sin. That would be our thoughts, our words, our deeds, and our omissions. We can sin through our thoughts and our desires, maybe like wishing evil upon a person, coveting your neighbor's wife, or something like that, an evil thought. We can sin through our words, perhaps using God's Name in vain, or telling lies, or gossiping. We can sin through our deeds and actions, by stealing or hurting someone. We can sin through omission by not doing something like we should do, maybe by not praying, or not going to Church on Sundays. This is a good thing to do when you're examining your conscience.

Remember that there are two kinds of sin, *venial sins* and *mortal sins*. A venial sin is a slight sin, or small breaking of the Commandments of God. A mortal sin is a major sin committed against God. When we go to Confession, we do have to confess all of our mortal sins. We can and should confess venial sins, but we don't have to, to have them forgiven. Venial sins can be forgiven in other ways, by just saying a prayer, when we go to Mass and praying the, "I confess to Almighty God, to you my brothers and sisters..." That takes away venial sins. The mortal sins we need to confess when we go to Confession. But it is good to confess venial sins, things like impatience, growing angry with the kids, and telling a little white lie or something like that, or using foul language. We should confess venial sins. When we do, we get the grace and the power to overcome those sins in our life.

Mortal sins, like pre-marital sex, adultery, abortion, contraception, homosexual activities, stealing a large sum of money, or murder would need to be confessed. When a person goes to Confession, they would need to confess the approximate number of times that the sin was committed.

In Confession, remember you should never give any details. Never describe the sin or anything. What you should do is just say what the sin was, and the approximate number of times it was committed. Let's say if somebody says, "Well, I didn't go to Church for ten years," that's all they would have to say about that. Or if they said, "I committed adultery on two occasions," you have to mention the type of sin it was, and the approximate number of times.

It is hard, I understand, if it's your First Confession, or if it's been 30 years; it's hard to think back over 30 years. But, there are ways. If somebody says, "I used God's Name in vain approximately three times a week for the last 20 years," that's how you can phrase those things, so that you don't forget to omit any mortal sins. Make sure you do say the kind of sin it was and the approximate number of times that it was committed.

When we come down to being sorry for our sins, we should be sorry for our sins, because they offend a loving God. This is called *Perfect Contrition*. Perfect Contrition is when we're sorry because our sins offended such a good and holy God. In Perfect Contrition, we're sorry for our sins, because we don't want to go to Hell, which is still good. In Perfect Contrition it is still OK, because we should be sorry for our sins, because we don't want to go to Hell; but Perfect Contrition is when we don't want to offend a loving God. One is fear of punishment, and one is love of God. It's like a child who says, "I don't want to offend my parents, not because I'm afraid of getting spanked, but I don't want to offend them because they love me so much, and I want to honor them and respect them." Without Confession, this is the only way you can have your sins forgiven – through Perfect Contrition.

For example, all of our Protestant brothers and sisters need to have this kind of contrition to have their sins forgiven. There's a prayer, the *Act of Contrition*. That's a good prayer; you should say that every night, which is, "Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended You." (That's imperfect contrition). "I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of Heaven, and the pains of Hell. But most of all, because my sins offend You, my God, who is All Good, and deserving of all my love." (That's Perfect Contrition). "I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and amend my life. Amen." That's an act of Perfect Contrition.

Say that every night. For example, say you're a Catholic, and can't get to Confession, say the Act of Contrition with the intention of going to Confession as soon as you can in the near future. Let's say, if somebody had committed a mortal sin, or a serious sin, immediately they should say an Act of Contrition, with

the intention of going to Confession. Let's say they're on their way to church, and on the way to Confession, they get hit by a big Mack truck, and get killed; they'd be saved, because they were sorry for their sins. They'd made the Act of Perfect Contrition, and had the intention of going to Confession, so God would certainly forgive them.

There's such a thing called *General Absolution*. This is very rare. In danger of death, for example, like when the Titanic hit the iceberg and was going down, there was at least one Catholic priest on board – maybe more. There wasn't time for individual Confession, and so they all prayed the Act of Contrition together, and the priest gave them General Absolution. That's where he forgives their sins. If the person survives, then they still would need to go to individual Confession, but General Absolution would be in danger of death. For example, when our military guys are heading over to Iraq, or to the Gulf War, they would receive General Absolution, if there wasn't enough time for individual Confession. They would receive forgiveness. The priest would give the Prayer of Absolution, saying, "I absolve you of your sins, in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The priest would give that to everyone. If the person died, they'd be saved; they'd be taken care of. But, if they did survive, they would later go to individual Confession at their next opportunity. General Absolution is very rare, and it should only be done in cases of extreme necessity, like on the Titanic, or a sinking ship, or an airplane going down. If I'm on an airplane, and let's say, God forbid that it started to have problems; I would give absolution to everybody on the plane. It wouldn't help me a whole lot, but at least I could help them out, and maybe God would have mercy on me if I helped them out.

(The first side of the tape ended at this point, and resumes).

Again, we talked about having a firm purpose of amendment, making the intention to avoid these sins, and the near occasions of sins in the future. For example, if somebody had a problem with alcohol, and every time they went to a certain bar they got drunk, they'd need to avoid that bar – that's avoiding the near occasions of sin.

When we go to Confession, we should confess our sins with humility, and with sincerity. We shouldn't make any excuses. We shouldn't exaggerate. Remember, you're talking to God, who knows your heart. You do need to articulate your sins. For example, just like with your kids, when they do something wrong, what do you tell them, "What do you say now?" Then they say, "I'm sorry." Do you need to hear the child say it? Well, you don't really need to, but you want them to say they're sorry, because that develops them as a person. Or, they're supposed to say "please" and "thank you," right? If they just don't take something, they should say, "Please pass the butter; please pass the salt." You want them to articulate that, to say they're sorry. If one boy punches the other boy, you tell him, "Hey, what do you say?" "I am sorry." You want them to articulate that. God wants us to articulate our sins, for our own development, and for our own forgiveness.

When you go to Confession, make sure you tell your sins, and not the sins of your husband, or your wife. A lot of people do that. They come in there, and they might confess their husband's sins, "Oh, he's such a cranky person; he yells at me; he's never in a good mood." Don't confess another person's sins, just confess your own sins; there will be plenty of those.

Make a good Confession, which means confess all your mortal sins, all your serious sins. Tell the kind of sin it was, and the number of times that it was committed, approximately. There might be some other circumstances that perhaps should be shared, not details. For example, if somebody says that, "I stole five hundred dollars." If they stole that money from a church, that makes it more serious than if they stole it from some other place. If somebody stole money from a very poor person, that would make it a worse sin than if they stole it from somebody else. If there are some circumstances that would show a difference in the gravity of the sin, then that should be explained.

How does a person go to Confession? When you go, you can either go behind a screen, or face-to-face. On one side, you have the priest, sitting there in the chair. The priest is sitting here. Then, there is a screen here. Usually, there is a kneeler on this side. The person would come and kneel down here. There's a little curtain, so the person could go anonymously behind the screen and go to Confession. Or, there's another chair over here, where the person could come around, and sit and talk face-to-face with the priest. It's your option. Some people prefer kneeling down, and going behind the screen, remaining anonymous. Some people prefer face-to-face, just being able to see the priest.

Remember, there's something called the *Seal of Confession*. The Seal of Confession means that a priest can never reveal your sins. If we all go behind the screen, he doesn't know who you are anyway. The priest doesn't remember what people say in Confession; he blocks that out. He's God's instrument, to listen to the sins, then give absolution and forgiveness. The Seal of Confession is an unbreakable bond, which the priest can never reveal what people tell him in Confession. There have been priests that have been put to death for not sharing what was told them. They were told, "If you tell us what this person said in Confession, we'll save your life," and the priests have had to die, rather than reveal any sins that were told them in Confession. Remember that – it's a great thing, the Seal of Confession.

When you go to Confession, you make the Sign of the Cross first, saying, "In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Then you say, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. This is my First Confession. These are my sins." Then you go through the Ten Commandments:

- Have I used God's Name in vain?
- Have I missed Mass on Sundays or the Holy Days?
- Have I kept holy the Sabbath?

- Have I honored my father and mother?
- Have I hurt anybody?
- Etc...

After your First Confession, you say, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It's been one week (or one month, or however long), since my last Confession. These are my sins." Then, confess your sins clearly and sincerely to the Lord. After you're done confessing your sins, the priest will give you some words of encouragement and advice. Remember, the priest is a loving shepherd. He's a good shepherd. He's not a hanging judge. He's there to reconcile you to God. He'll give you some advice and some suggestions. Then, he'll give you a *penance* to say. He might say, "For your penance, read Psalm 23," or, "For your penance, say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys." Then he'll give you some advice, and say, "Now say your Act of Contrition." That's when you read (or have memorized) the Act of Contrition, which is on your sheet. You read that out loud, then the priest gives absolution, where he says, "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." Then he says the *Words of Absolution*, "I absolve you from your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When the priest makes the Sign of the Cross, you then bless yourself, and make the Sign of the Cross. He says, "Go in peace." You can say, "Thanks be to God," or, "God Bless," or, "Goodbye."

That's how you go to Confession. It normally doesn't take a long time to go to Confession, since you're not going into details. You're just saying the kind of sin it was, and the number of times it was committed. Again, if it's over many years, you can give an approximation. Since there are Ten Commandments, you could maybe go ten minutes, or twenty minutes, to allow a little bit more time for your First Confession. When we have our First Confessions, they'll be on Holy Saturday morning; Holy Saturday night is when we have the Easter Vigil. This is where everybody gets their First Communion and Confirmation. That's at the Saturday night Mass. So, that morning, Father Jack and myself will be hearing Confessions, and everybody will have a chance to go that morning, either to myself, or to Father Jack, behind the screen, or face-to-face.

(A question). If a person is sorry for their sins, then they'd be absolved. The only time that they wouldn't is if they're, let's say, not in a valid Catholic marriage, then they would have to wait until they get the marriage blessed in the Church. They would go to Confession on that day. See, a person has to be in a valid marriage to be able to receive the sacrament. Or, if they're single, of course, they can receive the sacrament. If somebody comes and says, "Well, I want to go to Confession, but I'm not married in the Church. I was born and raised Catholic, but I'm on my second or third marriage. I'm not married in the Church." They couldn't go to Confession. At that point, they have to wait, and either go through the annulment process to show their first marriage was not a true marriage, or, if

the previous spouse dies, they can get married in the Church. A person does have to be living in the state of grace, in a recognized marriage, to be able to receive the holy sacrament. In a sense, that's probably one of the only cases where a priest would say, "Well, we have to wait to do your Confession, for a few months, or until we can get the marriage situation resolved."

The only other case (I mean, very rarely), most people, 99 percent of people, when they go to Confession, are sorry for their sins. They want to be absolved. I guess the only difference would be, let's say, a boyfriend and girlfriend are living with each other, or an engaged couple is living with each other, and they go to Confession. They have no intention, no desire to separate, no desire to even have separate rooms. They just say, "Well, we don't care. We don't really want to change how we're living." The priest could say, "I really can't give you absolution if you're going to go back tonight and commit the same sin." If there's no goodwill, or no intention of getting over that sin, or removing yourself from that sin, then the priest might say, "I can't give you absolution until you're serious about that."

Sometimes the case comes up where a couple might be using artificial contraception. If there's goodwill, and an intention to eliminate that sin from their life, and if they're sorry for their sin, they confess it. They say, "We're going to take the classes in Natural Family Planning. We're not going to use contraception anymore," a priest should and does give absolution there. When a person goes to Confession and says, "I have no intention ever to change; I'm always going to use contraception;" they can't make a good Confession; they're not willing to get rid of that sin in their life. The priest would say, "I'm sorry, I can't give you absolution, if you're not willing to at least read, study, and look into why it's wrong, why the Bible says it's wrong, and that there are other alternatives that are morally acceptable in the eyes of God."

Refusing absolution is very, very rare. It could happen if somebody just comes in, and is very hard of heart. In one case, Bishop Sheen was hearing Confessions, and somebody came in and said, "I don't want to go to Confession. I only want to kill time." Bishop Sheen said, "Who are you fooling besides God?" The girl said, "My mother. She is out there thinking I'm in here going to Confession." It turned out she was a prostitute, and she didn't go to Confession at that point. She left, and Bishop Sheen pleaded with her, "Please go to Confession." She said, "No, I can't do it. I sold my soul to the devil. I made a pact with the devil. I can't go to Confession." So, she ran out of the church, and then, what Bishop Sheen did was, he heard Confessions for the next three hours. Everybody that came into Confession, he said, "Would you do me the favor? Would you be willing to say an extra Rosary for the conversion of a poor sinner?" Everybody, except for one person, said, "Yes, I will do that." After the Bishop finished hearing Confessions, as he went back to the altar rail and knelt down, at ten o'clock or eleven o'clock at night, twelve o'clock at night. Finally, at twelve thirty, this woman came back in the church, and made her Confession. But it took a lot of prayers, a lot of

penance, and a lot of sacrifice for her to get the grace to come back in to be reconciled to God.

So, there have been cases where a teenager comes, only because his mom or dad are forcing him to come. He said, "I don't have any sins. I know I'm just here to get my mom and dad off my back." The priest would try to talk with him and say, "Is there anything you can think of that you want to tell God you're sorry for?" Hopefully, the priest would work with the person; ninety nine percent of the time, people do make a good, sincere Confession. Very rarely does he have to say, "No, I can't give you absolution at this time."

(A question). If somebody commits a mortal sin, then they should, right away, say an Act of Contrition, and have the intention of going to Confession. In the meantime, they should not go to Communion? If they're aware of any mortal sin, they should not go to Communion until they've gone to Confession, and received absolution, and are back in the good graces of God, and have Sanctifying Grace back in their soul. That's right; that's the teaching of the Church.

(A question). The Pope goes to Confession at least once a week. Most Bishops go to Confession; priests go to Confession. It's basically just to other priests. One Protestant thought that when we went, we just looked in the mirror and absolved ourselves in the mirror, but that's not true. We have to go to another priest. Even the Pope goes to another priest for Confession. Mother Teresa went to Confession every week.

Some people say, "How often should you go to Confession?" The answer would be, is that Catholics are supposed to go to Confession at least once a year. I recommend at least four times a year; summer, spring, winter, and fall. Try to go at least four times a year. But, I would really recommend going at least once a month. Once a month for Confession would be very good. It's like balancing our spiritual checkbook; it's giving our soul a shower. Imagine if you met somebody that hadn't taken a shower in ten years. Imagine what their body would look like. It's the same thing with Confession. Confession is when we give our soul a shower. So, just as we wash our cars, we should also wash our souls. I think some people take better care of their cars than they do their soul. Or, they wash their dog or their cat; they give them a bath, but what about giving their soul a bath or a shower in Confession? The general rule is you should go, what I'd recommend, is try to go once a month to Confession; more, if need be. If somebody commits a serious sin, they should go right away, and not delay.

(A question). No, we can't even share that with another priest. The only thing would be, let's say, if somebody came with a very difficult moral decision or moral dilemma. I could call a priest friend of mine and say, "A person came to Confession. They had this situation with their husband, or with their child. Do you have any advice?" That's not breaking the Seal of Confession, because he has

no idea who you are. The Seal of Confession has to do with revealing the person's sins, telling somebody your sins.

(Another question). You could, while the person's going to Confession, try to talk them into getting counseling, getting help. A priest could pray for them. For example, if you went to Confession face-to-face, and said, "I stole a thousand dollars." Then, if I saw you out on the street, I couldn't say, "What are you doing with that thousand dollars?" If the person went to Confession, you would have to tell them they need to return that, they need to get that back to the proper owner. In Confession, you would tell the person to make restitution. If they stole money, they need to get that back to the person that they stole it from. If you have cases where somebody might be suicidal, if they go behind the screen, you wouldn't know who they are. You just try to give them the best advice you can, and tell them to go seek help or counseling; pray for them; plead with them. You can't act upon anything they told you in Confession. That's how important the Seal of Confession is.

Here's one last little story of Father Corapi. Some of you have heard his conversion tape. He's the one who was away from the Church for 20 years. When he came back to the Church, he was scared to death, because he had to go to Confession for the first time in 20 years. He had been a cocaine addict and an alcoholic. He had done all sorts of terrible things. He says that when the priest gave him absolution, he said he, "knew that he had never heard any more beautiful words than those words of absolution," when he heard the words that his sins were forgiven. He was ordained a priest, because after he came back from a sinful life of 20 years, he then entered the seminary, became a priest, and was ordained by the Pope. On the very day after he was ordained, he had just said his first Mass. He was walking through the Vatican, in St. Peter's Basilica, and he heard a man say, "Psst, Father! Come over here!" It was a man in the shadows. He walked over, and he said, "Are you a priest?" Father said, "Yes, as a matter of fact, I am. I'm just brand new as a priest, but I am a priest." The fellow said, "Can I go to Confession?" Father said, "Yes." The man went to Confession, and said, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It's been 35 years since my last Confession." Father heard his Confession, and gave him absolution. Then he knew that those were the most beautiful words he had ever heard in his life.

A few years later, Father Corapi was down in Florida, where his dad was living. His mother and father had been separated or divorced for many, many years. His father had left the family, and wasn't a very good provider. He was an alcoholic and had left the family years and years before. His mother was very saintly, but Father Corapi's father wasn't practicing the Faith for a long time. Father was down in Florida, and his dad was there. Right before Father Corapi was about to get on his plane, his dad said to him, "Do you have a couple of minutes for your old man?" Father Corapi said, "Yes, I do." Then, his father knelt down, and said, "Can you hear my Confession?" He said he heard these words come from his own father's mouth, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It's been 50 years since

my last Confession.” So, he heard his dad’s Confession. It was an incredibly moving experience. He gave his dad absolution, and he knew that never were any more beautiful words than those words, “I absolve you from your sins.”

It is a great sacrament. It’s wonderful to look forward to this sacrament. It’s like getting rebaptized. Once, I had the privilege of baptizing a 93 year-old woman in a nursing home. The nurse was standing there, and she said, “Oh, that person was so lucky! All her sins are forgiven!” When you go to Confession, you’re lucky as well, because, when you go to Confession, even though it takes courage, humility, and sincerity, you’re just as lucky as that 93 year-old woman, because all your sins will be forgiven as well. What a great sacrament this is! So, read about it. Read [The Catechism](#) about it, and [The Faith Explained](#), because it’s something that I think will really help you. Closer to Easter, we’ll just go through the Ten Commandments, and then help you to get ready for the Reconciliation.