



LESSON TWENTY

The Sacrament of Reconciliation: Christ Forgives Us

Opening Prayer

*“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my
transgressions.*

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin! ...*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.”*

Amen.

(Psalm 51:1–2, 10)



Lesson Objectives:

- ❖ Understand the importance and necessity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the life of a Christian, establishing the consequences of sin and the need for ongoing conversion.
- ❖ Differentiate between venial and mortal sin and reflect on conversion as a personal turning back to God's love and mercy.
- ❖ Recognize that the Sacrament of Reconciliation was instituted by Christ himself, with foundations in Sacred Scripture, and learn how to prepare for and receive the sacrament.

BURNING QUESTIONS

- ❖ Why do I need to confess my sins to a priest when I could just go right to God?

What differences do you see between telling God you have sinned and going into a church to make your confession to a priest? Why do you think Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive the sins of others?

- ❖ If I've already been baptized, why do I need to go to confession?

Baptism cleanses us completely, so what happens when we sin after that? Even in our human relationships, is saying "I'm sorry" a one-time event?

St. Maria Faustina Kowalska

Feast Day: October 5

Lived: August 25, 1905–October 5, 1938 · Głogowiec, Poland · Patron of Divine Mercy devotion

A humble Polish nun with little formal education, Faustina was chosen by Jesus to carry his message of mercy to the world. In visions Jesus told her: “Tell souls where they are to look for solace; that is, in the Tribunal of Mercy [the Sacrament of Reconciliation]. There the greatest miracles take place” (*Diary*, 1448). She gave the Church the Image of Divine Mercy and the Chaplet. St. John Paul II canonized her in 2000 and established the Sunday after Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday, fulfilling a request Jesus had made to Faustina decades earlier.



“The greater the sinner, the greater the right he has to My mercy.”

St. Faustina, *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul*

Jesus Seeks Sinners

The Divine Physician

Jesus actively sought out sinners: he visited the woman at the well (see John 4), ate with tax collectors, forgave the woman taken in adultery (see John 8:7–11), and called Matthew from his tax booth. When the religious authorities mocked him for this, he replied: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32).

What Sin Is

Sin is always an offense against God, “a rupture of communion with him” (CCC 1440). It is a failure in genuine love for him and for others (see CCC 1849). The Church understands that not all sins are equal (see 1 John 5:17). Mortal sin (serious matter, committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent) severs the life of grace entirely. Venial sin wounds it. Both call for healing; both are addressed in Reconciliation, though only mortal sin requires it before receiving Communion (see CCC 1855–1863).



“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 5:32

Christ Institutes the Sacrament

The Authority to Forgive

On the evening of the Resurrection, Jesus breathed on his apostles and said: “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). This is the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus explicitly gave the apostles—and through them, their successors—the authority to forgive sins in his name.

The Mercy That Awaits

The *Catechism* calls the confessional the “tribunal of mercy”—but it is not a courtroom. The priest does not judge; he witnesses and pronounces absolution. God already knows the sin; he invites us to name it, not to shame us but to heal us. The priest who hears a confession is bound by the Seal of Confession, never to reveal what is said to him.



“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins.”

1 John 1:8-9

How to Make a Good Confession

Four Steps

For a valid and fruitful Reconciliation, we should do four things: 1. Examination of conscience—a prayerful review of one’s life since the last confession; 2. Contrition—sorrow for sins committed and a sincere intention to avoid sin and its near occasions; 3. Confession—telling one’s sins to the priest with sincerity; 4. Satisfaction (penance)—accepting and performing the penance assigned.

The Fruits of the Sacrament

The Sacrament of Reconciliation restores our friendship with God and our communion with the Church. It lays aside the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sin. It gives peace and a quiet conscience. And it strengthens us to face future occasions of sin (see CCC 1496). Many who were afraid find afterward that Reconciliation was not what they feared but what they had been longing for all along.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity.”

Psalm 32:1–2



Discussion Questions

- ❖ What does “guilt is to sin what pain is to the body” mean? How does it change the way you think about feeling ashamed of your sins? In what ways might embracing appropriate guilt (rather than avoiding it) actually lead to greater spiritual freedom?
- ❖ What’s the problem with treating confession like a car wash? What makes it difficult for you to see Reconciliation as an encounter with Christ’s mercy rather than a spiritual requirement to check off?
- ❖ Why do you think we’re all tempted to explain away our sins or blame others? How might taking full responsibility for our actions, without backstory or excuses, actually make the experience of Reconciliation less awkward and more liberating?

Faith and Fun

What color vestment or stole does a priest normally wear when celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

a. White

b. Purple

c. Red

d. Green

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Purple symbolizes penance and preparation and is also used during Lent and Advent because both liturgical seasons are penance and preparation for either Christ's death or his birth.

The Confessional

A Place of Healing

The confessional is the physical space where the Sacrament of Reconciliation takes place. It is not a place of shame or interrogation. It is a place of healing, where the mercy of God meets our honesty and humility, setting us free. God already knows our sins. He invites us to name them—not to humiliate us but to heal us. In the same way that we must reveal our physical injuries to a doctor for healing, we bring our spiritual wounds to the Divine Physician.

Behind the Screen or Face-to-Face

Confession may take place behind a screen, which allows for anonymity, or face-to-face, where the penitent and priest sit across from each other. Either way is acceptable. The seal of confession is absolute and inviolable: a priest is bound under the most serious obligation never to reveal anything heard in confession for any reason whatsoever.



Living It Out:

This week, set aside time to prayerfully review your life by examining your conscience (see Further Resources, p. 347). Be honest, and don't be afraid: Christ meets you with mercy, not condemnation.

Closing Prayer

*My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.*

Amen.

Announcements / Reminders — add notes here