

**A GENTLE GUIDE
FOR RETURNING
TO CONFESSION**

FATHER IT'S BEEN ... A WHILE





Welcome home

Thinking About Coming Back to Confession?

Whatever the reason, it may have been a long time since you last went to Confession. Perhaps it has been a few years, perhaps many. Maybe you simply drifted away from it, had a difficult experience in the past, or life became busy and Confession quietly slipped out of the picture.

Whatever has brought you to the point of considering coming back, that decision is worth celebrating.

It takes courage to look honestly at our lives, particularly at the places where we know we have struggled, made mistakes or fallen short of the person we would like to be. It takes even more courage to consider speaking some of those things out loud. Avoiding them can sometimes feel much easier.

So if you are feeling nervous, awkward, embarrassed, unsure what to say — or even wondering whether you really want to go through with it — you are probably not alone.

You don't need to have everything sorted out before you come. You don't need to remember exactly what to do or what to say. And you certainly don't need to arrive with a perfect spiritual life.

You just need to be willing to take the next step.

Confession is not about being told off or made to feel ashamed. It is a place where we can stop carrying things alone; where we can be honest about what has gone wrong, receive forgiveness, and begin again.

There is something wonderfully hopeful about being able to begin again.

So, even if all you have done so far is pick up this booklet and think, "Maybe it's time," that matters.

Welcome back.

Why should I go?

I mean, you haven't been that bad, right? Here's the thing, Something brilliant happens when we go to confession regularly. We become more self-aware; we learn to notice the places where we most need God's help, and the places where we need to grow. When we avoid even thinking about these things, it's very easy to stay in denial; we paint the best picture of ourselves in our heads and miss all those things that stand in the way of a fuller life. Those things that stand in the way of deeper relationships, with God, firstly but with every other person we interact with.

01 Accountability

It is so easy to excuse our own behaviour, and to justify our choices. Regular confession gently challenges us to be honest with ourselves first and then prepare our hearts to take that to God. Speaking those places we've failed out loud helps us to acknowledge what we might otherwise choose to ignore. Scripture tells us the truth will set you free, the act of examining our consciences helps us to break unhealthy patterns that keep us bound and held back.

03 Hear the words

What more beautiful words are there to hear than "your sins are forgiven, go in peace"? This isn't a nice tidy ending, it's God's words spoken over you, His child. It gives us something concrete to hold onto, we have revealed the worst parts of ourselves to God, allowed ourselves to be vulnerable and yet we are not met with scorn or rejection but mercy, understanding and forgiveness. The words mark the turning point of a fresh start, a line drawn under the past.

02 Self knowledge

Confession encourages honest self reflection, so much of what we do is without thought of consciousness. We act out of wounds and experiences. If we have the same sins to bring each time, we are encouraged to look a bit deeper at the root of these. Naming our sin can really help us to confront it.

04 Unburdening

Jesus took our sins upon himself on the cross, offering the sacrifice that makes our forgiveness and reconciliation with God possible. Having received His mercy, we are still called to turn away from sin, make amends where we can, and accept the healing work of penance. This was personal, God knew what you would do, when you would do it and He also knew the damage it would do to your heart. So despite every kind of sin imaginable He had a cure, for every fail or fault, we could still be redeemed. You place those faults at the foot of the cross in that confession and He willingly takes them away, because that was always the plan for your healing and salvation.

05 Relationship with God

Everything worth having comes from God. So if you imagine that even our small sins and falls put a little mud on the windows of our soul, eventually the light can't get through. All that brightness that gives colour, definition and clarity to life is dulled, sometimes to the point of darkness. We adjust each time it gets a little darker and that can become our new norm. If it's been sometime then the before and after can be incredible. But even if not then getting our souls window cleaned is ensuring we are always receiving all He wants to give us.

07 Good for your health

We are created as a mind, body and spirit. Each of these are intimately connected to each other, I think we can forget that our mental health is directly connected to our physical health and our spiritual health is intricately linked to both. Confession (more so afterwards) can calm our nervous system, reduce stress hormones, improve sleep and reduce muscle tension. The physical benefits of these maybe seen all over the body. This isn't just a one level healing that God gives us here. You may not actually *feel* this but trust that God knows what you need.

09 Eternity

Our lives on earth are a journey towards eternity with God. A promised reward. Serious (Mortal) sins sever that connection. This is never done by accident, for a sin to be mortal it has to be a choice we willingly make. But even then, even having made that choice, like the Prodigal son, God waits for us in confession with arms open rejoicing at the return of His child. There is nothing He can't forgive - the only real boundary is our refusal to come and ask for it.

06 Hospital for sinners

We are told in scripture that all have fallen short of the Glory of God. That means there's not one of us that doesn't need His healing and His grace. The Church is not a museum for Saints its a hospital for sinners. That means even with all your shortcomings you are in exactly the right place. You don't have to be perfect to be here, in fact if that was a stipulation, the place would be empty. The church exists to bring people to God, and confession is one of the beautiful ways it facilitates this.

08 Humility

Protecting our pride can be a tempting default until we have to spell out all the ways we are in need of God's help. Humility isnt the same as humiliation. It is about seeing ourselves truthfully before God, recognising the strengths and gifts He has given us as well as those places we need His strength. Humility gives us compassion and understanding for those around us as we become more aware of our own issues. It also gives us the ability to seek and accept help. When we are too proud to accept help there is little healing God can give us - because we think we have it covered all by ourselves.

10 Restore the world

One more person on a road to becoming all God intended them to be heals the world, the effects transform us, then those around us, and like the ripples on a pond spread out to heal the world. Imagine if every person alive was trying to become more like Jesus each day, the world would be a very different place. Sin is never a private issue, every act of selfishness, anger or dishonesty leaves a mark. In just the same way every act of generosity, forgiveness, love and integrity leaves one of healing and light.



Common questions

Why not go to God directly?

You can, and you should! We can always turn to God in prayer and ask for His forgiveness. But Jesus also gave His apostles the authority to forgive sins (John 20:22–23). In Confession, we encounter Christ's forgiveness in a personal, tangible way, hearing the words of absolution and receiving the grace of the Sacrament

What if I forget a sin?

Don't worry! If you genuinely forget a sin, it is still forgiven in Confession. God knows your heart and isn't trying to catch you out. If you later remember a serious sin, simply mention it at your next Confession. What matters is your honesty and sincere desire for reconciliation.

What if the Priest thinks I'm bad?

Priests have heard all sorts of sins, and they are there to offer God's mercy, not to judge your worth. Remember, priests go to Confession too! You are not expected to be perfect, and nothing you confess can diminish your dignity or God's love for you.

Can the Priest talk to me about about it later?

No. What you say in Confession remains within the Sacrament. The priest cannot bring up your sins afterwards or use what you have confessed in any way that could betray your trust. If you wish to discuss something further, you can raise it yourself outside Confession. Some Priests have had to go to Jail in order to protect this trust.

Confidentiality

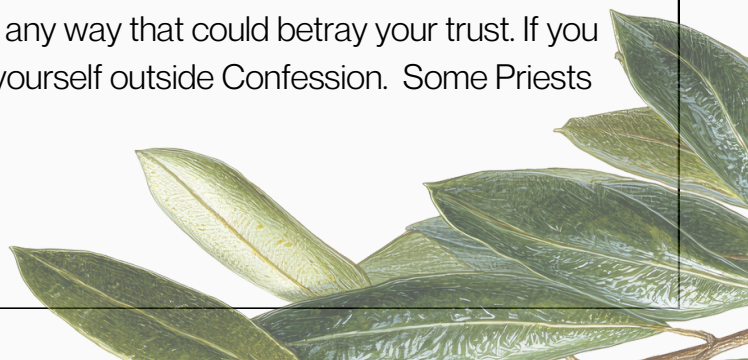
Absolutely. Priests are bound by the *Seal of Confession*, an absolute obligation never to reveal anything learned through Confession. They cannot disclose your sins to anyone, for any reason, even under threat of punishment. The Church takes this obligation extremely seriously.

What if I don't feel sorry?

Feeling emotional or guilty isn't the same as being sorry. Contrition is an act of the will, not necessarily a feeling. You may not experience strong emotions, but if you recognise that something was wrong, genuinely regret it and intend to try to change, you can make a sincere Confession. You can even ask God to help you grow in sorrow for your sins.

What if it's too embarrassing to say?

It can take real courage to confess something we feel deeply ashamed of, but remember, the priest is there to offer God's mercy, not to humiliate you. He will have heard many difficult things before. You can even begin by saying, "Father, I'm finding this really hard to say." Often, the sins we most want to hide are the ones we most need to bring into God's healing light. If you find it easier, choose a confessional that has a grill, sometimes this is easier than face to face for some people.



Preparing to go.....

Preparation before you go in will help you feel more comfortable and help you to make a full and frank confession. But if the opportunity arises and you just have to go for it - do it! Sometimes a little arrow prayer as you go in asking for the grace to recall everything you are carrying can be just as revealing.

Do you recall the Gospel reading in John 21 ? After the crucifixion, Peter and the disciples have been fishing all night and caught nothing. They see a figure on the shore who tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat and they catch an abundance of fish. Peter realises it's Jesus and in a moment he strips off and runs or swims towards Him with absolute joy.

Whilst they are sitting by the fire Jesus has lit for them and eating, Peter is sitting there knowing that only a short while before he had denied Him three times. Eventually Jesus calls Him over by himself for a chat. He looks Peter in the eye and asks Him three times "Do you Love me?" Jesus doesn't meet Peter with accusations, or punishment or anger. Jesus looks on Peter with love and helps Him to restore what has been broken. Perhaps we need to hold this image in our minds as we prepare to go, and know that Jesus looks at us with the same love and mercy as He did on Peter that day.

Take some time to pray, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what you are carrying

Read through an examination of Conscience

Make a list if it's helpful - but write it somewhere private

Are any of these sins mortal (for sin to be mortal it must be grave(serious) you must have full knowledge that it was wrong and deliberately consented to it)? confess these ones first

Consider the venial sins too, the ones that might not sever our relationship but dirty up our soul windows, so that over time we dont get all the light we need to thrive.

Get up and go into confession ready to hand it all over to God.

