

Confession – Teaching from the Baltimore Catechism

What is confession?

Confession is the telling of our sins to an authorised priest to obtain forgiveness.

Why must we confess our sins?

We must confess our sins because Jesus Christ obliges us to do so in these words, spoke to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood: *“Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained”*.

How do these words of Christ oblige us to confess our sins?

These words of Christ oblige us to confess our sins because the priest cannot know whether he should forgive or retain our sins unless we tell them to him.

Is it necessary to confess every sin?

It is necessary to confess every mortal sin which has not yet been confessed and forgiven; it is not necessary to confess our venial sins, but it is better to do so.

What are the chief qualities of a good confession?

The chief qualities of a good confession are three: it must be humble, sincere, and entire.

When is our confession humble?

Our confession is humble when we accuse ourselves of our sins with a conviction of guilt for having offended God.

When is our confession sincere?

Our confession is sincere when we tell our sins honestly and frankly.

When is our confession entire?

Our confession is entire when we confess at least all our mortal sins, telling their kind, the number of times we have committed each sin, and any circumstance changing their nature.

What are we to do if without our fault we forget to confess a mortal sin?

If without our fault we forget to confess a mortal sin, we may receive Holy Communion, because we have made a good confession and the sin is forgiven; but we must tell the sin in confession if it again comes to our mind.

What happens if we knowingly conceal a mortal sin in confession?

If we knowingly conceal a mortal sin in confession, the sins we confess are not forgiven; moreover, we commit a mortal sin of sacrilege.

What must a person do who has knowingly concealed a mortal sin in confession?

A person who has knowingly concealed a mortal sin in confession must confess that he has made a bad confession, tell the sin he has concealed, mention the sacraments he has received since that time, and confess all the mortal sins he has committed since his last good confession.

Why should a sense of shame and fear of telling our sins to the priest never lead us to conceal a mortal sin in confession?

A sense of shame and fear of telling our sins to the priest should never lead us to conceal a mortal sin in confession because this is a grave sacrilege, and also because the priest, who represents Christ Himself, is bounded by the seal of the sacrament of Penance never to reveal anything that has been confessed to him.

Why does the priest give us a penance after confession?

The priest gives us a penance after confession that we may make some atonement to God for our sins, receive help to avoid them in the future, and make some satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to them.

What kinds of punishment are due to sin?

Two kinds of punishment are due to sin: the eternal punishment of hell, due to the unforgiven mortal sins, and temporal punishment, last only for a time, due to venial sins and also mortal sins after they have been forgiven.

Does the sacrament of Penance, worthily received, always take away all punishment?

The sacrament of Penance, worthily received, always takes away all eternal punishment; but it does not take away all temporal punishment.

Why does God require temporal punishment for sin?

God requires temporal punishment for sin to satisfy His Justice, to teach us the great evil of sin, and to warn us not to sin again.

Where do we pay the debt of our temporal punishment?

We pay the debt of our temporal punishment either in this life or in Purgatory.

What are the chief means of satisfying the debt of our temporal punishment, besides the penance imposed after confession?

Besides the penance imposed after Confession, the chief means of satisfying the debt of our temporal punishment are: prayer, attending Mass, fasting, almsgiving, the works of mercy, the patient endurance of sufferings and indulgences.