

The Sacrament of Penance

Dear pilgrim,

Have you noticed them? Yes, have you noticed these men dressed in black or white robes walking behind the chapters—perhaps even yours? Why do they wear a violet stole around their necks? Why do some pilgrims spend a long moment with them and then rejoin their chapter with a broad smile? These men in robes are the distributors of God's Mercy!

For Jesus has always wanted, time and again, to wait for us when we have sinned. The entire Gospel is a call to conversion and the welcoming of sinners:

"Go and sin no more," He says to the adulterous woman; and He repeats, *"Your sins are forgiven,"* to all who approach Him with trust.

All Sinners

Are you a sinner? In every *Hail Mary* you have answered this question: *"Pray for us sinners."* Yes, we are sinners! Poor sinners!

Perhaps you have never dared to approach one of these "men in robes" who follow you? Perhaps you have completely forgotten your sins? Perhaps you feel crushed by them? Or maybe you do not know how to go about it? Then do not be afraid, dear pilgrims!

Before you, on this very road, tens of thousands of people have approached a priest and received God's forgiveness, which transformed their lives and restored their peace and joy.

Prepare yourself with the help of the Pilgrim's Handbook by making a good examination of conscience. Do not hesitate to ask for advice from your chapter leader, seminarians, religious brothers and sisters walking with you, and embark on the adventure of the Mercy of the Heart of Jesus, who is waiting for you... Not tomorrow, not later, but now.

Recognizing One's Misery

"Mercy"—a word, a fundamental reality, the reality of the Heart of God coming to meet your misery. One condition alone: humility. Being humble enough, small enough, to recognize your misery, to acknowledge that you need God.



Rembrandt, *Le Retour du fils prodigue* (détail) (1668)

It is not easy to go and confess all your wrongdoings... That is true! The process is difficult, except for children; but what peace, what joy follows this effort!

Perhaps you fear what the priest will say when you confess your sins? But he will only repeat what Jesus said: *"Go and sin no more!"* He will give you some good advice—advice that would be hard to find elsewhere. He will help you if you struggle to say everything, he will explain what you do not understand, and he will rejoice with you, for *"there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance."*

Listen to this story: It is about a drug trafficker sentenced to 13 years in prison. His cellmate patiently spoke to him about God and preached the famous *Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*—yes, in prison! And this man converted... Today, he shares his testimony, and to better express his journey, he invented a wonderful word: *"I am a mercy-received."*

Young people discovering God's Love on this road, fathers or mothers burdened by a difficult life or crushed under the weight of the Cross, become *"mercy-received"* yourselves! Let yourself be loved by the One who shed all His Blood for you.

And for you, pilgrims, who are accustomed to confessing, take this opportunity to strive for a better confession than usual. On this journey, you have time to prepare, to make a thorough examination of conscience, to awaken within your soul a sincere contrition.

For it is essential for everyone, especially with the help of the *Pilgrim's Handbook*, to earnestly reflect on how you may have offended God.

The primary disposition for confession is contrition. It is not an optional extra; it is the very essence of returning to God!

Regretting One's Sins

What Jesus expects from each of us is, above all, a sincere and true regret for having sinned, for having offended God. Without this regret, our confessions are worthless. And this sincere regret necessarily includes a firm resolution not to sin again. Otherwise, wouldn't it be mocking God?

It is this firm resolution that will help us find concrete ways to avoid sinning again—for example, by giving up certain company, avoiding certain programs, etc. However, even with this firm resolution, we may fall again, and we might think: *"What's the point of confessing if I always end up doing the same thing?"*

Dear pilgrims, let us be careful not to confuse *"wanting to sin again"* with *"knowing that we will probably sin again."*

For instance, someone who confesses to having lost their temper and genuinely does not want to do it again is right to go to confession, even if they know that, given their temperament, they will probably fail again. Hypocrisy would be saying, *"I confess to getting angry"* while secretly intending to keep doing it.

Do you understand? Then, let us return to our God as a son returns to his father after having offended him—with great humility and boundless trust, like the Prodigal Son.

Dear pilgrims, this road from Paris to Chartres is beautiful—very beautiful—because before you, and soon with you, it has been the road of forgiveness, the road of Mercy, the road of the Love of Jesus.

So, do not delay any longer—go and meet one of the priests accompanying us. You will give God the joy of making you a new "*mercy-received!*"

And have no fear:

- The priest you speak to knows how difficult this step is—he himself undergoes it as a sinner.
- Moreover, he has heard many confessions before; nothing will surprise him.
- Finally, as a representative of Christ, he is bound by the strictest secrecy—the seal of confession can never, under any circumstances, be broken.

Now, let us remain in silence to reflect on the beauty of this marvelous sacrament and to prepare ourselves by consulting our *Pilgrim's Handbook*.

Some Reference Works...

Divine Mercy

- *Dives in Misericordia (Rich in Mercy)*, Encyclical by Saint John Paul II, 1980.
- *Reconciliation and Penance*, Apostolic Exhortation by Saint John Paul II.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1420–1498.

MEDITATION B – THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

For Adults

- *Why and How to Confess*, by Fr. A. Romero, Éditions du Laurier.
- *Sinners Wanted*, by Fr. Bernard Bro OP, Éditions du Cerf.
- *The Sacraments of Mercy*, by J.-C. Sagne OP, Éditions Mediaspaul.
- *The Wonders of Confession*, by Fr. Paul O'Sullivan OP.
- *Penance*, by Dom Bernard Maréchaux OSB, Éditions du Sel.
- *The Art of Confession*, by H.-Ch. Chéry OP, Éditions du Cerf.

For Children

- *My Confession Notebook*, by Monique Berger, Éditions Transmettre.
- *A Little Guide for Children's Confession (Ages 7-10)*, by Jean-Paul Savignac, Éditions du Laurier.
- *My First Communion and First Confession Guide*, by Madeleine Russocka, Éditions Transmettre.

Citations B – The Sacrament of Penance

"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

— First Epistle of Saint John (1:9).

"There are some who say: 'I have done too much evil; God cannot forgive me.' This is a great blasphemy. It is placing a limit on God's mercy, yet His mercy has no limits—it is infinite. [...] We greatly need the light of the Holy Spirit to recognize our sins, because our heart is the seat of pride, which seeks only to make our sins appear smaller than they are. You see, we absolutely need the help of the Holy Spirit to see our sins as they truly are. [...] The mercy of God is like an overflowing torrent. It carries away hearts in its path."

— Saint Curé of Ars.

"Oh! If only sinners knew My Mercy, such a great number of them would not be lost. Speak to souls about My Mercy so that they do not fear to come to Me; speak to them of My Mercy."

— Revelations to Saint Faustina.