

Chapter 5: We Ask for Forgiveness



Introduction

How easy is it for you to say, "I'm sorry" or "Please forgive me"? For some people, this is very hard to do. Even if it is hard, we should do it anyway. No one is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes. Everyone sins. We need to be honest with ourselves, with other people, and with God when we make mistakes or do bad things.

The good news is that God loves you very, very much. He loves you even when you are not perfect, even when you sin. You should never worry about confessing your sins to God. If you are sorry and promise to do better, he will always love you and forgive you.

Scripture Story: Jesus Forgives a Woman's Sins

Jesus was having dinner at the house of a man named Simon. All the guests were eating and talking, when suddenly a woman walked in. She was looking for Jesus. This is how it happened:

In that town was a woman who lived a sinful life. She heard that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, so she brought an alabaster

jar full of perfume and stood behind Jesus, by his feet, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them.

[Jesus said,] "The great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven."

Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." (Luke 7:37-38, 47-48)

Like the woman in the story, we have room in our hearts for two things: love and sin. Remember that sin is anything we think, say, or do that goes against God's Law, especially the commandment of love.

The more love we have in our hearts, the less room we have for sin. The more sin we have—the more meanness and selfishness—the less room we have for love. When we are forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we have more room for love.

True Sorrow for Sin

This story teaches us that Jesus is a friend of sinners and forgives them. It shows us the meaning of being truly sorry for our sins. The woman had true **contrition**. *Contrition* means “having true sorrow for our sins.”

The woman showed her contrition and love with her tears, kisses, and gift of perfume. Jesus forgave her sins because she had great love. We also need to ask Jesus to forgive our sins. This is why Jesus gave the Church the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The Sacrament gives us an opportunity to come to Jesus and ask his forgiveness.

God’s Treasure of Forgiveness

The woman gave her greatest gift to Jesus—not the perfume, but her great love. Jesus gave back a greater treasure, the treasure of forgiveness. If we give our love and contrition to God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we too will receive God’s treasure of forgiveness.

In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we must confess all mortal sins. A mortal sin is a serious sin, committed on purpose, that completely breaks our relationship with God. Mortal sin is a serious sin against the Ten Commandments and God’s Law of Love. Mortal sin is a sin like murder. Or we can sin against God by refusing to worship him as he deserves. We can refuse to go to Mass on Sunday or on Holy Days of Obligation.

These are the Holy Days of Obligation:

- Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1)
- Ascension (40 days from Easter Sunday; may be celebrated on the last Thursday or Sunday before Pentecost)
- Assumption of Mary (August 15)
- All Saints’ Day (November 1)
- Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- Christmas (December 25)

Mortal sin cannot be committed by accident. It is very serious. To commit a mortal sin, you must first *know* it is a serious sin, you must *choose* to do it, and you must *freely* do it.

If we commit a mortal sin and are sorry for it afterward, we must go to confession as soon as possible. We have broken our loving relationship with God and with the Church, and we must ask forgiveness. The Sacrament of Reconciliation then reconciles us, or brings us back, to God and to the Church. This is the only ordinary way that a mortal sin can be forgiven and we can be reconciled with God and the Church.

A less serious sin is called venial sin. Venial sin weakens, but does not break, our relationship with God. A venial sin cannot be committed by accident. We must know something is a sin, must *choose* to do it, then do it freely. Some examples of venial sin are talking back to our parents and being sassy and rude, or fighting with our brothers and sisters. Can you think of some others?

The Church encourages us to confess venial sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation because receiving forgiveness from God in this Sacrament helps us to do better and to follow Jesus more closely. Even though venial sin does not totally break our relationship with God, we want to stay away from it. We do not want to harm our loving relationship with God or others the least little bit.

There are other ways venial sin can be forgiven. We can ask God to forgive us at the beginning of every Mass, in the Penitential Act. We can ask God to forgive us in our private prayer. The best way to receive God’s forgiveness is in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, because the grace we receive from this Sacrament helps us to grow in God’s love.

Things to Remember

- God will forgive our sins if we are truly sorry.
- We have more room for love when we are forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- There is a difference between mortal (serious) sin and venial (less serious) sin.
- We must confess mortal sins. It is also helpful to confess venial sins because, through the grace of the Sacrament, we grow in love.