

# Words ‘we all long to hear’ lay in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

BY JAMES RAMOS

Texas Catholic Herald

HOUSTON — As the Lenten season continues, parishes across the Archdiocese host Lenten Missions and additional hours for the Sacrament of Reconciliation at Penance Services, each focused on helping parishioners and public alike to more fully understand and experience the Paschal Mystery.

“During the season of Lent,” said Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, “we undertake many forms of penance: ashes on our heads on Ash Wednesday, our fasting, abstinence, increased almsgiving as well as the unique Lenten commitments we individually make.”

Fasting, abstinence and service through almsgiving remain the basis for our Lenten devotions.

“Yet much as the Lord exhorts us through the prophet Joel to ‘rend your hearts, and not your garments’ (2:13), our exterior penances mean little if they do not reflect interior conversion,” said Cardinal DiNardo.

This repentance of heart “is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions

we have committed.” (CCC 1431)

Cardinal DiNardo said, “In the beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation, this reality is realized most fully as we take our particular sins and shortcomings before the Lord, longing for freedom from slavery to sin and death.”

Pope Francis also encouraged the faithful to look at the Sacrament of Reconciliation without fear.

God “does not want to beat us and condemn us,” but rather “he always looks for a way to enter the hearts” of those who are repentant, the pope said in a homily Feb. 27.

“When we priests — in the Lord’s place — hear confessions, we also must have this attitude of goodness like the Lord, who says, ‘Come, let us talk, there is no problem, there is forgiveness,’ and not with a threat from the beginning,” he said.

Through the sacrament of reconciliation, he added, Jesus “does not threaten but rather calls us with kindness, having confidence in us,” which allows people seeking forgiveness to take “a step forward on the path of conversion.”

Recalling the example of a cardinal who, in the confessional, would not say much when someone confessed a great



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Even the pope goes to confession.

sin, Pope Francis said God also does not dwell on sins and instead gives “a receipt of forgiveness.”

The pope said he finds it helpful to see the Lord’s attitude as that of “a father with a son who thinks he’s big, who believes he’s grown up, but instead is really just halfway there. The Lord knows that we are all halfway there and many times we need this, to hear

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DANIEL CARDINAL DINARDO

this word: ‘Come, don’t be frightened, come. There is forgiveness.’ And this encourages us to go to the Lord with an open heart. It is the Father who awaits us.”

Cardinal DiNardo echoed this perspective: “The Lord, the Father of Mercies, speaks the words through the Church and the ministry of the priest that we all long to hear as he pronounces mercy, not condemnation, and restores us to the fullness of life with Him.” †

## THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS: A GUIDE TO THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

When was the last time you went to confession? Has it been a while? Do you have questions or thoughts about the Sacrament such as:

- **It’s been so long, I can not remember the words...**
- **I have committed too many sins, the priest will never forgive me...**
- **Does the Church still teach that we have to go to Confession...**
- **What’s the Sacrament even called? Is it Penance, Reconciliation or Confession...**

If you have experienced one of these thoughts you are not alone. This brief guide contains some resources to help you rediscover the Sacrament of Penance and answer questions about the Church and Church teachings. We invite you to take this guide with you to confession as a way of reflection.



Reconciliation (also known as confession or Penance) is a Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ in his love and mercy to offer sinners forgiveness for offenses committed against God.

At the same time, sinners reconcile with the Church, because it is also wounded by our sins.

Every time we sin, we hurt ourselves, other people, and God. In Reconciliation, we acknowledge our sins before God and his Church. We express our sorrow in a meaningful way, receive the forgiveness of Christ and his Church, make reparation for what we have done, and resolve to do better in the future.

### THE FOUR PARTS OF CONFESSION

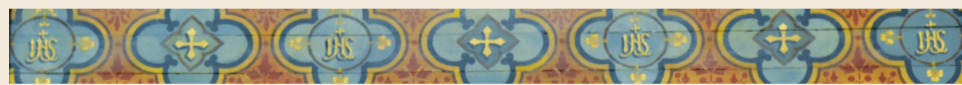
- **Contrition:** a sincere sorrow for having offended God, and the most important act of the penitent. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.
- **Confession:** confronting our sins in a profound way to God by speaking about them — aloud — to the priest.
- **Penance:** an important part of our healing is the “penance” the priest imposes in reparation for our sins.
- **Absolution:** the priest speaks the words by which “God, the Father of Mercies” reconciles a sinner to Himself through the merits of the Cross.

### A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

(Adapted from *Examination of Conscience in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*)

Take a moment to reflect on how sin has damaged your relationship with others.

- What false “gods” do I place above God and people?
- After leaving Mass, do I continue to glorify God by the actions in my life?
- How have I failed to love others in my family, workplace, or community?
- Do I hold any views that are prejudiced or biased or that perpetuate stereotypes?
- Have I responded to the needs of the poor and those whose rights are unfulfilled?
- Do my personal, economic, and public choices reflect a genuine concern for others and the common good?
- Have I stood up to protect the dignity of others when it is being threatened?
- Am I aware of problems facing my local community and involved in efforts to find solutions?
- How do I protect and care for God’s creation?



### RITE OF RECONCILIATION STEPS

▪ *If it has been a while, let the priest know and he can help guide you through the steps for a good confession.*

1. Priest gives a blessing or greeting.
2. Make the Sign of the Cross and say, “Bless me, father, for I have sinned. My last confession was [give weeks, months, or years].”
3. Confess all of your sins to the priest. (If you are unsure or uneasy, tell him and ask for help.)
4. Say, “I am sorry for these and all of my sins.”
5. The priest gives a penance and offers advice to help you be a better Catholic.
6. Say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, then absolves you from your sins.

### AN ACT OF CONTRITION

God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace to confess my sins, do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.