

# Session 4



PENANCE  
AND ANOINTING  
OF THE SICK  
GOD'S MERCY REVEALED

# PENANCE AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK

## God's Mercy Revealed



### LEADER PREPARATION OVERVIEW

**God, in his infinite mercy,** understands that we will fall short, we will sin—but he doesn't leave us in that sin. Through the Sacrament of Penance we can be restored to love and friendship with God and receive the grace to mend our relationships with each other. Like the father of the prodigal son, he welcomes us back at the smallest sign of our sorrow and repentance. Just as Jesus did not condemn the adulterous woman, he forgives us completely and tells us to “Go and sin no more.”

Little wonder then that the Sacrament of Penance, also known as Reconciliation, is one of the last and greatest gifts Jesus left us. When he told his Apostles after the Resurrection, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven,” he gave them authority to bestow the Father's tangible mercy to all generations that follow. As the priest, given the power through Apostolic succession to forgive sins in Jesus' name, grants us “pardon and peace,” we can be sure that we are truly forgiven our trespasses, no matter how dark and ugly they might be, as long as we come with contrite hearts and repentance. What an incredible gift of mercy and forgiveness!

### THIS SESSION WILL COVER:

- **Why Penance is such an important part of Catholic faith**
- **Why we confess our sins to a priest**
- **A step-by-step guide to reception of the sacrament**
- **The benefits and graces of frequent Confession**
- **And finally, a look at the other Sacrament of Healing—Anointing of the Sick**

# STEP # 1

## OPENING PRAYER



**SAY:** Welcome to this session of *Symbolon*. This week we will examine the Sacraments of Reconciliation, or Penance, and the Anointing of the Sick.

*Have participants turn to page 29 of their Guide to find the Opening Prayer and discussion questions.*

Let us begin with this short prayer for healing, for we are always in need of Christ's healing and mercy.



Lord, you invite all who are burdened to come to you.  
Allow your healing hand to heal me.  
Touch my soul with your compassion for others.  
Touch my heart with your courage and infinite love for all.  
Touch my mind with your wisdom,  
that my mouth may always proclaim your praise.  
Teach me to reach out to you in my need,  
and help me to lead others to you by my example.  
Most loving heart of Jesus,  
bring me health in body and spirit  
that I may serve you with all my strength.  
Touch gently this life which you have created,  
now and forever. Amen.

—[www.ourcatholicfaith.org](http://www.ourcatholicfaith.org)

## CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

*(Optional)*

**Suggested Scripture readings for  
a Celebration of the Word of God**

*(see Introduction to Symbolon at  
[www.SymbolonCatholic.org](http://www.SymbolonCatholic.org))*

**Psalm 32**

**1 John 1:8-10**

**Matthew 18:18**



## STEP #2 INTRODUCTION



**SAY:** We are all sinners. But even though we sin, God so loves us so much that he gives us a way to confess our sins and be restored to a relationship with him through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus also gives us the powerful Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to give us grace, strength, and peace during illness and even at the time of our death.

**Some of the topics we will look at in this Session include:**

- **Why we confess our sins to a priest**
- **How and why Jesus gave the power to forgive sins to his Apostles and their successors**
- **What to do in the sacrament of Penance**
- **The Seal of Confession**
- **How often we should receive the Sacrament of Penance**
- **And finally, the Anointing of the Sick**

**We will start by watching a short video.**

## STEP #3

### VIDEO PART I: PENANCE AND ANOINTING OF THE SICK



*Play DVD Part I, which will play for approximately 14 minutes.*

## STEP #4 PROCLAMATION

*After the video has stopped,*



**SAY:** We have learned about how the Sacraments of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick are God's great instruments of mercy and healing throughout our lives.



### DIGGING DEEPER

#### **Penance**

“The interior penance of the Christian can be expressed in many and various ways. Scripture and the Fathers insist above all on three forms, *fasting, prayer, and almsgiving*, which express conversion in relation to oneself, to God, and to others. Alongside the radical purification brought about by Baptism or martyrdom they cite as means of obtaining forgiveness of sins: effort at reconciliation with one's neighbor, tears of repentance, concern for the salvation of one's neighbor, the intercession of the saints, and the practice of charity ‘which covers a multitude of sins.’” —CCC 1434

Jesus, the divine Son of God, came to reconcile us to the Father. He forgave people's sins and gave this power to the Apostles to exercise in his name. We can see this when he said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23).

This power has been handed down throughout the centuries through apostolic succession to the bishops and priests in the Church today in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Through this sacrament, our sins are forgiven. The sacrament reconciles us with God, reconciles us with the Church, gives us "peace and serenity of conscience," and gives us greater spiritual strength to help us overcome sin in the future.

Finally, in a second Sacrament of Healing—Anointing of the Sick—a baptized person who is seriously sick or in danger of death because of illness or old age is anointed with holy oil. This sacrament unites the person's sufferings with Christ's sufferings, and strengthens them to endure their trial. And if the person is dying, it prepares them for entrance into eternal life.

## STEP #5

### VIDEO PART II: GOD'S MERCY REVEALED



**SAY:** In our second video segment, we are going to look more deeply at what the Church teaches about the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick.



*Play DVD Part II, which will play for approximately 29 minutes.*

## STEP #6

### BREAK

*After stopping the video,*



**SAY:** Now let's take a short break. When we come back, we are going to discuss some of the things we learned in this last video segment.

*Break should be about 10 minutes.*

## STEP #7

### DISCUSSION

*Have participants refer to their Guides to find these questions.*



**SAY:** Welcome back to our session on Penance and Anointing of the Sick. Let's talk a bit about what we learned in the last video segment.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION #1

**According to the presenters, what are the effects of the Sacrament of Penance?**

### LEADER'S TIPS:

- **Forgiveness of sins**
- **A restored relationship with God**
- **Repaired relationship with the Church and our fellow Christians**
- **Peace and serenity of conscience**
- **Strength to overcome future sin and the ability to grow in grace**

## DISCUSSION QUESTION #2

**Even though going to Confession can be intimidating, what are some of the reasons we shouldn't fear the Sacrament?**

### LEADER'S TIPS:

- **God already knows our sin and is waiting to forgive us.**
- **The priest will not be shocked at any sin, since "there is nothing new under the sun."**
- **Telling another human our shortcomings is healing on emotional as well as spiritual levels.**
- **There are real graces that will enable us to live better lives waiting for us in the Sacrament.**
- **What we say in the Confessional is bound by the Seal of Confession and can never be revealed to anyone else.**
- **The Sacrament offers us a chance to "begin again" no matter what we might have done in our lives.**



### DIGGING DEEPER

#### Why Confess Our Sins?

"The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission, man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible." —CCC 1455

## STEP # 8 (OPTIONAL) SUMMARY & EXHORTATION

*At this point, the facilitator, small group leader, or catechist has the option to give a summary of the main points that have been presented in the video segments. Here are some key points you may want to cover.*

Let's review what we've learned about Penance and the Anointing of the Sick.

- Jesus, the divine Son of God, came to reconcile us to the Father. He forgave people's sins and gave this power to men to exercise in his name. In John 20:19-23, we are told he breathed on the Apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (CCC 1485).
- Only God can forgive sin, but he does so through the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (CCC 1441-1442).
- This power has been handed down to the Apostles' successors throughout the centuries to the bishops and priests in the Church today (CCC 1444-1445, 1461).
- The sacrament reconciles us with God, reconciles us with the Church, gives us "peace and serenity of conscience," and gives us greater spiritual strength to help us overcome sin in the future (CCC 1496).
- As we prepare for confession, we should examine our consciences (CCC 1453). One way to do this is by using the Ten Commandments as a starting point.
- The spiritual effects of the Sacrament of Penance include: reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace; reconciliation with the Church; peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; and increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle (CCC 1496).
- The second Sacrament of Healing is the Anointing of the Sick:

This sacrament is given by a priest to a baptized person who is seriously sick or in danger of death because of illness or old age. The sacrament unites the sick person to Christ's suffering, gives strength, courage and peace to endure their suffering in a Christian way, and brings forgiveness of sins if the person is not able to receive the Sacrament of Confession. The sacrament also can bring restoration of health, if it is conducive to the person's salvation, and it prepares them for passing to eternal life (CCC 1532).

## STEP #9

### CALL TO CONVERSION



**SAY:** Spend a few moments reflecting on some of the things we learned today about Penance and Anointing of the Sick. Use your Guide to write down your thoughts and reflections on the following questions:

1. Recall the Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery and the story of the prodigal son. What do these stories reveal about God's mercy, his desire to forgive and heal you?
2. Read and reflect on the following message from Pope Francis:

*“One might say: I confess only to God. Yes, you can say to God ‘forgive me’ and say your sins, but our sins are also committed against the brethren, and against the Church. That is why it is necessary to ask pardon of the Church, and of the brethren in the person of the priest. ‘But Father, I am ashamed....’ Shame is also good, it is healthy to feel a little shame, because being ashamed is salutary. When a person feels no shame, in my country we say that he is ‘shameless’; a ‘sin verguenza.’ But shame too does good, because it makes us more humble, and the priest receives this confession with love and tenderness and forgives us on God’s behalf. Also from a human point of view, in order to unburden oneself, it is good to talk with a brother and tell the priest these things which are weighing so much on my heart. And one feels that one is unburdening oneself before God, with the Church, with his brother. Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession!”*

—General Audience at St. Peter’s Square (2/19/14)

3. What is keeping you from encountering Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? Is there something that you need to confess in order to be “restored to health”? Remember what Pope St. John Paul II said: “Confession is an act of honesty and courage—an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God.”



## STEP # 10

### CLOSING PRAYER



**SAY:** I hope you take time this week to reflect on the Church's teaching on Penance and Anointing of the Sick. Your Guides will give you prompts if you need some guidance.



Let's close our time together today by saying an Act of Contrition:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend thee, my God, who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.



### FOR FURTHER READING

For more in-depth reading, see the following *Catechism* passages:

**Jesus reconciles us to the Father: CCC 1485**

**Names of the Sacrament of Penance: CCC 1423-1424**

**God alone forgives sin: CCC 1441**

**Priests given power of Forgiveness: CCC 1442, 1444-1445**

**The spiritual effects of the Sacrament of Penance: CCC 1496**

**Contrition: CCC 1451**

**Absolution: CCC 1449**

**Anointing of the Sick: CCC 1532**

#### Other Resources:

St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*  
(*On Reconciliation and Penance*)

*Lord, Have Mercy: The Healing Power of Confession* by Scott Hahn

*Going to Confession?* by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*Go In Peace: Your Guide to the Purpose and Power of Confession*  
by Father Mitch Pacwa and Sean Brown

*The Light Is On For You: The Life-Changing Power of Confession*  
by Cardinal Donald Wuerl

*Pastoral Care of the Sick (Bilingual Edition)*  
by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* Chapters 18-19

