

# Questions about Confession

*Answers from Catechism of the Catholic Church*

## What is sin?

1849 **Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity.** It has been defined as "an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law."

## What does sin do?

1487 The sinner wounds God's honor and love, his own human dignity as a man called to be a son of God, and the spiritual well-being of the Church, of which each Christian ought to be a living stone.

1488 **To the eyes of faith no evil is graver than sin and nothing has worse consequences for sinners themselves, for the Church, and for the whole world.**

1459 Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries). Simple justice requires as much. But **sin also injures and weakens the sinner himself, as well as his relationships with God and neighbor.** Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must "make satisfaction for" or "expiate" his sins. This satisfaction is also called "penance."

## Are there different levels of sin?

1854 Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. the **distinction between mortal and venial sin**, already evident in Scripture, became part of the tradition of the Church. It is corroborated by human experience.

1857 **For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."**

1855 **Mortal sin** destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it. *Examples of mortal sins: abortion and sexual impurity*

1863 **Venial sin** weakens charity; it manifests a disordered affection for created goods; it impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not set us in direct opposition to the will and friendship of God; it does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness."  
*Examples of venial sins: lying and stealing*

## **Why do we confess our sins to the priest in confession?**

1441 Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, "The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" and exercises this divine power: "Your sins are forgiven." Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.

1442 Christ has willed that in her prayer and life and action his whole Church should be the sign and instrument of the forgiveness and reconciliation that he acquired for us at the price of his blood. But **he entrusted the exercise of the power of absolution to the apostolic ministry** which he charged with the "ministry of reconciliation." The apostle is sent out "on behalf of Christ" with "God making his appeal" through him and pleading: "Be reconciled to God."

1485 "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week," Jesus showed himself to his apostles. "He breathed on them, and 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'" (Jn 20:19, (22-23)).

## **Why do I need the sacrament of confession?**

1469 This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. the sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a **revitalizing effect on the life of the Church, which suffered from the sin of one of her members.** Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the **sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods** among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland.

1496 The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are:

- reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace;
- reconciliation with the Church;
- remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins;
- remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin;
- peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation;
- an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.