

Sacrament of Confession

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St. Cosmas Aitolos

Perhaps the most misunderstood sacrament of the Christian Church is confession (or repentance). How did it originate? What role does a priest play? Is there a special procedure for confession? The Holy Scriptures hold answers to these questions.

God's Word promises «If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness» (1 John 1:9). The faithful are to bring their sins to God in repentance and receive cleansing and forgiveness.

The early Christians would stand and confess their sins to God in the presence of the whole congregation. Jesus encouraged His followers to walk in the light

together, to confront problems corporately, to «tell it to the church» (Matt. 18:17). Thus James writes, «Confess your trespasses to one another» (James 5:16). But as time went on and the Church grew in numbers, strangers came to visit and public confession became more difficult. Out of mercy, priests began to witness confessions of sin privately on behalf of the Church.

Jesus, giving His disciples the authority to forgive sin, said, «If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained» (John 20:23; c.f. Matt. 16:19, 18:17-19). From the beginning, Christians understood that the grace of ordination endowed the shepherd of the flock with the discernment and compassion to speak the words of remission, on behalf of Christ, regarding the sins of those who confess and turn from sin. For God has promised the removing of sin from us «as far as the east is from the west» (Ps. 103:12). St. John Chrysostom says, «The priests decree below, God confirms above, and the Master agrees with the opinion of His slaves». ([περισσότερα...](#))