

- **The Catechism**— Words from the CCC on repentance and reconciliation
- **Thoughtful Questions** - questions to ask yourself and to bring to prayer

REPENTANCE AND RECONCILIATION

Jerry Johnson

"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

The very first response that Jesus called the people to when he began his ministry was repentance. But, just what does it mean to repent and what are we repenting from? Paragraph 1431 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives an answer to both of these questions.

*"Interior repentance 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. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of his grace. This conversion of heart is accompanied by a salutary pain and sadness which the Fathers called *animi cruciatus* (affliction of spirit) and *compunctio cordis* (repentance of heart)."*

That is a lot of food for thought. To begin with, we see that repentance involves a definite change in our lives. A turning away from evil and sin because of a heartfelt sorrow for the wrongs we have committed. I think one key word in the catechism's description is "desire". We must have a definite desire to make the necessary changes in our life, while always trusting in God's mercy and relying on his grace to help us. That seems simple enough to understand, maybe not so easy to do. But now for a tough question: How do we

come to know what changes need to be made? To put it another way, how do we recognize the sin in our lives? The catechism, paragraph 1713 states: " *Man is*



obliged to follow the moral law, which urges him to do what is good and avoid what is evil. This law makes itself heard in his conscience."

So is that the answer? Do we just need to follow our conscience? Unfortunately, that

doesn't always do the trick, since our conscience can be mistaken. Listen to St. Paul's letter to Titus, chapter 1:15, " *To the clean all things are clean, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is clean; in fact, both their minds and their consciences are tainted. They claim to know God, but by their deeds they deny him. They are vile and disobedient and unqualified for any good deed."*

Apparently you can claim to know God and yet have a tainted conscience, which leads you to disobedience. First Corinthians, chapter 8, also speaks of a conscience being weak and defiled. So, what is the solution? In St. Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 1, he gives us an idea: " *The aim of this instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith."* A "good conscience" is one of the aims of his instruction.

Apparently our conscience needs to be instructed. The catechism agrees. Paragraphs 1783-1785 are subtitled " *The Formation of*

Conscience". (See pg.2) To summarize, it states that our conscience must be formed and educated because we are subjected to negative influences and prefer our own judgment. This is a lifelong task and we must make use of the Word of God, gifts of the Holy Spirit, the witness and advice of others and the authoritative teaching of the Church to accomplish it. Having formed and examined our conscience, we then have the proper disposition to receive the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. This is also referred to as the sacrament of conversion, of confession and of forgiveness, which are all descriptions of what takes place in this important sacrament. It makes sense that if Jesus first calls us to repentance, he would offer us the means to confess our sins, show our repentance, receive forgiveness and be reconciled to the Church. Don't miss this opportunity! Receive the Sacrament often and with a humble and repentant heart. God's grace and forgiveness awaits us!

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FROM THE CATECHISM of the Catholic Church

1783 Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.

1784 The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The

education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

1785 In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path; we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.

1440 Sin is before all else an offense against God, a rupture of communion with him. At the same time it damages communion with the Church. For this reason conversion entails both God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church, which are expressed and accomplished liturgically by the sacrament of Penance and

Reconciliation.

1451 Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."

1491 The sacrament of Penance is a whole consisting in three actions of the penitent and the priest's absolution. The penitent's acts are repentance, confession or disclosure of sins to the priest, and the intention to make reparation and do works of reparation.

1494 The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of "satisfaction" or "penance" to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ.

SACRED SCRIPTURE



John 20:19, 22-23
"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'"

1 John 2:1-2

"My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

James 5:16

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

Matthew 1:1-2

"In those days John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea (and) saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

Recommended Reading On Repentance and Reconciliation

For the Beginner...

Lord Have Mercy

By Scott Hahn

Pardon and Peace:

A Sinner's Guide to Confession

By Fr. Francis Randolph

Digging Deeper...

The Way to Christ: Spiritual Exercises

By Pope John Paul II

Thoughtful Questions

- Do I do what is necessary to educate and form my conscience according to God's Word and the teachings of his Church?
- Do I receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation regularly?
- Do I have a repentant heart?