

Lord our God,
you created us in love
and redeemed us in mercy.

While we were exiled from heaven
by the jealousy of the evil one,
you gave us your only Son,
who shed his blood to save us.
Send now your Holy Spirit
to breathe new life into your children,
for you do not want us to die
but to live for you alone.

You do not abandon those who abandon you;
correct us as a Father
and restore us to your family.

Lord, your sons and daughters stand before you
in humility and trust.

Look with compassion on us
as we confess our sins.

Heal our wounds; stretch out a hand of pity
to save us and raise us up.

Keep us free from harm
as members of Christ's body,
as sheep of your flock,
as children of your family.

Do not allow the enemy to triumph over us
or death to claim us for ever,
for you raised us to new life in baptism.

Hear, Lord, the prayers we offer from
contrite hearts.

Have pity on us as we acknowledge our sins.
Lead us back to the ways of holiness,
protect us now and always
from the wounds of sin.

May we ever keep safe in all its fullness
the gift your love once gave us
and your mercy now restores.

Act of Repentance,
Rite of Penance, Appendix II, 12

Parish Liturgy Preparation

These celebrations are intended to be prepared with the particular circumstances of the parish in mind. The experience of catechists and other pastoral ministers (eg bereavement ministers, members of the SVP, marriage preparation groups) can assist clergy and liturgy preparation groups in the work of preparing the liturgy.

Personal Preparation for a Penitential Celebration

Penitential celebrations assist the community and its members to examine their lives in the light of the gospel.

It can be helpful to prepare for participation in them by spending time in quiet prayer, perhaps assisted by reading and listening to the Scriptures (perhaps revisiting the readings from the previous Sunday, or a favourite reading).

Others like to prepare by reflecting on the commands of the Lord:

- The Lord says: 'You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart.'
- Christ our Lord says: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'
- Christ our Lord says: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

**Liturgy
Office**
ENGLAND
& WALES

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Penitential Celebrations *fostering the spirit and virtue of penance*

Lord, **open** our
ears and our
hearts today to
the **message** of
your Son, so that
through the power
of his **death** and
resurrection
we may walk in
newness of life.

Rite of Penance

What are Penitential Celebrations?

The Penitential Celebration is at heart a time when God's people gather to listen more closely to his word, and to reflect on their lives in the light of that word. It is a time for contemplation, for being attentive to those things that at other times we cannot find time to focus on. We take part in such services to learn how to live lives more deeply grounded in the Gospel.

It is a form of celebration encouraged in the *Rite of Penance* (36-7, and Appendix II).

Are they different to Reconciliation Services?

The Penance or Reconciliation Service is when the parish community, having kept Lent or Advent together, gathers to celebrate the communal form of the Sacrament of God's mercy together. The Penitential Celebration, by contrast, is a service which might be repeated a number of times during Lent or Advent, to help people to focus on the spiritual meaning of the season, so as to keep it fruitfully.

The Penitential Celebration does not include the Sacrament of Penance because it is a service which helps people to prepare for that Sacrament. Sometimes however it is appropriate for opportunities for individual reconciliation to be provided after the Penitential Service.

Why do we need them?

The Church has a wide variety of rites and practices, each addressing different needs.

The particular benefits of this rite include:

- It gathers the Church for common prayer
- It is focused on prayerful listening to the word of God

One further particular value of this form of liturgy is that a Penitential Celebration provides an opportunity to examine one's life in the light of the Gospel, but does not push participants to any specific response, for example to 'go to Confession'.

Neither does a Reconciliation Service, strictly speaking, oblige people to 'go to Confession'. Yet the act of Confession and Absolution is an integral part of the sacramental Rite of Penance. But for some that would be too much too soon, for example for those who are 'returning' to the Church after time away and have various issues to explore before celebrating reconciliation sacramentally.

Penitential celebrations confront people with the challenge and consolation of the Gospel, but they offer the greatest of freedom to people to respond in their own time. They are intended to lead people back to the sacrament of Penance but at their own pace.

How are they structured?

Opening Song
Greeting by the Minister
Prayer
Readings
 First Readings
 Responsorial Psalm
 Gospel
Homily
Examination of Conscience
Act of Repentance
Dismissal
Blessing

Sample services and texts can be found in the *Rite of Penance*, Appendix II. Readings can be found in Volume III of the *Lectionary*: Penance and 'For the Forgiveness of Sins'

What is the theme of these services?

As with all liturgy, the central focus is the Paschal Mystery, the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the Mystery of God's reconciling love which this reveals.

There are a variety of approaches to each Mystery. Normally each celebration will focus on a single one of these. It is important to avoid being too didactic in the exploration of any particular theme. Participation in the liturgy is a subtle matter whereby each one present is assisted by the Spirit to reflect on the Word in prayer and contemplation.

It would be entirely appropriate to use the Cycle of Prayer to highlight different aspects of the Church's mission, exploring our participation in these through a series of celebrations throughout the year.