

Liturgy of the Word

Call to conversion

Liturgy of Reconciliation

Confession of Sins and Acceptance of Satisfaction

Penitent's Prayer of Sorrow

Absolution

Conclusion

Proclamation of Praise of God and Dismissal

The revision of the Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents was less dramatic than the introduction of an entirely new form of the rite for collective celebration. Consequently it seems to have been more often over-looked. However where the revision has been well understood and implemented by priests and penitents alike it has brought significant pastoral and spiritual benefit.

These two forms of the Rite of Penance are the normal and ordinary ways of celebrating the sacrament. The Rite offers a third form (including general absolution) but its use is permitted in truly exceptional circumstances, and only then with the prior and express permission of the Bishop of the Diocese.

The two ordinary forms of the Rite each have their own particular advantages and strengths. The criteria for deciding which of the two forms of celebration to use in any circumstance should depend not on subjective reasons but by a desire to advance the true spiritual good of the faithful. (cf. *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* 32).

Questions

1. How has your experience of the Rite of Penance changed down the years? What have been positive developments? What have not been?
2. Where do you see difference between these two forms of the Rite of Penance? What significance reason for the differences can you suggest?
3. What would you see as the strengths of each of the two forms? Are there any disadvantages? If so, how might they be overcome?
4. How has each form been received in your parish? In what ways might the parish be helped to appreciate the opportunities each form makes available?

Acknowledgements

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Thinking about Reconciliation

a reader for priests and people

Part Four:

The Rite of Penance

Open our eyes to see the evil we have done.
Touch our hearts and convert us to yourself.
Where sin has divided and scattered,
may your love make one again;
Where sin has brought weakness,
may your power heal and strengthen;
where sin has brought death,
may your Spirit raise to new life.
Give us a new heart to love you,
so that our lives may reflect the image of your Son.
May the world see the glory of Christ
revealed in your Church,
and come to know
that he is the one whom you have sent,
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

Amen.

Rite of Penance 54

As we have seen all sin, as well as being a sin against God, has social and ecclesial dimensions also.

It was particularly to better assist engagement with these latter dimensions that Vatican Council II required a revision of the Rite of Penance.

The most notable element of that revision was a focus on communal celebration of the Rite. The revised Rite offered two liturgical forms – one sacramental, the other not – in which the liturgical assembly could focus on the Lord's call to conversion and his offer of mercy. This sacramental form is officially titled 'Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution', and here is more commonly referred to as 'the second form of the Rite'. The non-sacramental form is officially titled 'Penitential Celebrations'. In the Rite these celebrations are dealt with in paragraphs 36 and 37 of the

Introduction and in Appendix II. The Liturgy Office will shortly be preparing a separate paper considering the opportunities offered by such Penitential Celebrations.

The revised *Rite* also includes a revision of the previous form for individual penitents, officially titled 'Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents' and here more commonly referred to as 'the first form of the Rite'.

The second form of the Rite of Penance

Communal celebration shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of penance. The faithful listen together to the word of God, which proclaims his mercy and invites them to conversion; at the same time they examine the conformity of their lives with that word of God and help each other through common prayer. After each person has confessed his sins and received absolution, all praise God together for his wonderful deeds on behalf of the people he has gained for himself through the blood of his Son. RP 22c

The form of the sacramental rite is given in the following table:

Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution

Introductory Rites

- Song
- Sign of the Cross
- Greeting
- Introductory Words
- Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

- Readings
- Homily
- Examination of Conscience

Liturgy of Reconciliation

- General Confession of Sins
- Individual Confession of Sins and Absolution
- Exhortation to do good works
 - to proclaim the grace of repentance
- Proclamation of Praise for God's Mercy
- Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving

Concluding Rite

- Blessing
- Dismissal

The structure of the rite has much in common with many other liturgical rites. It begins with the gathering of the liturgical assembly, including the bishop or priest presider. It continues with the Liturgy of the Word – both the proclamation of the Scriptures and our response to them in mind and heart. We then enact our response liturgically, here through the celebration of the Liturgy of Reconciliation. Finally those who have gathered as the Body of Christ are dismissed to live in their daily lives what has been celebrated, and to bear witness to the saving love of Christ.

The Liturgy Office has produced resources to assist parishes and individuals prepare and celebrate this form of the Rite of Penance. They are available for downloading from www.liturgyoffice.org.uk/Resources/

The first form of the Rite of Penance

In the revision of the previous Rite new emphasis was placed on the quality of encounter between priest and penitent – the priest is not only required to judge wisely the matters placed before him, but also to reveal the heart of the Father and show the image of Christ the Good Shepherd.

The revision made it yet more clear that even in this form the Rite of Penance is a liturgical rite. It is not a forensic confession and absolution of sin alone, but as with other liturgies it too is an act of worship, an opportunity to encounter and experience the merciful presence of God in assembly and minister, in word and in sacrament.

The revision placed new emphasis on the ministry of the word (e.g. RP 45, and RP Chapter IV, 55), and the range of alternative texts for priest and penitent provided better to articulate the experience of each particular celebration (e.g. RP 43, 45, 47, 49).

Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents

Reception of the Penitent

- Greeting
- Sign of the Cross
- Invitation to Trust
- Revelation of state of life