

# What is Confession?

“The priests of the Church exercise the power of forgiving sins by hearing the confession of sins, and granting pardon for them as ministers of God and in His name.” (Baltimore Catechism #738)

## In Scripture

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Say to the children of Israel: When a man or woman shall have committed any of all the sins that men are wont to commit, and by negligence shall have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and offended, They shall confess their sin, and restore the principal itself, and the fifth part over and above, to him against whom they have sinned.” (Numbers 5:5-7)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.” (1 of St. John, 1:9)

“When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: **Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.**”  
(St. John 20:22-23)

“He riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments, and having taken a towel, girded himself. After that, he putteth water into a basin, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. He cometh therefore to Simon Peter. And Peter saith to him: Lord dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered, and said to him: **What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.** Peter saith to him: Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him: **If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part with me.** Simon Peter saith to him: Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him:

He that is washed, needeth not but to wash his feet, but is clean wholly.  
And you are clean, but not all.” (St. John, 13:4-10)

## According to Church Fathers

“It is necessary to confess our sins to those to whom the dispensation of God’s mysteries is entrusted. Those doing penance of old are found to have done it before the saints. It is written in the Gospel that they confessed their sins to John the Baptist, but in Acts they confessed to the apostles.” (St. Basil the Great, *Rules Briefly Treated* 288, 374 A.D.)

“If the serpent, the devil, bites someone secretly, he infects that person with the venom of sin. And if the one who has been bitten keeps silence and does not do penance, and does not want to confess his wound... then his brother and his master, who have the word that will cure him, cannot very well assist him.” (St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 10:11, 388 A.D.)

“When you shall have been baptized, keep to a good life in the commandments of God so that you may preserve your baptism to the very end. I do not tell you that you will live here without sin, but they are venial sins which this life is never without. Baptism was instituted for all sins. For light sins, without which we cannot live, prayer was instituted... But do not commit those sins on account of which you would have to be separated from the body of Christ. Perish the thought! For those whom you see doing penance have committed crimes, either adultery or some other enormities. That is why they are doing penance. If their sins were light, daily prayer would suffice to blot them out... In the Church, therefore, there are three ways in which sins are forgiven: in baptisms, in prayer, and in the greater humility of penance.” (St. Augustine, *Sermon to the Catechumens on the Creed* 7:15 and 8:16, 395 A.D.)

“Priests have received a power which God has given neither to angels nor to archangels. It was said to them: ‘Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose, shall be loosed.’ Temporal rulers have indeed the power of binding; but they can only bind the body. Priests, in contrast, can bind with a bond which pertains to the soul itself and transcends the very heavens. Did [God] not give them all the powers of heaven? ‘Whose sins you shall forgive,’ he says, ‘they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.’ What greater power is there than this? The Father has given all judgment to the Son. And now I see the Son placing all his power in the hands of men. They are raised to this dignity as if they were already gathered up to heaven.” (St. John Chrysostom, *The Priesthood* 3:5, 387 A.D.)