


Today we are going to talk about the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent, more commonly known as Confession. However, when we call the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent “Confession,” we leave out a very important aspect of this rite. Yes, a person who has sinned confesses, but then that person is absolved of their sin, and God remembers it no more. So I will call this rite “Reconciliation” because that term encompasses both confession and absolution.

There is a reason why I am leading this Forum, today, on the First Sunday in Lent. Carol Spigner and I think it wise to make explicit our availability, should you desire to avail yourself of this Rite of our church.



We start with sin

- Sin is “missing the mark.”
- Sin is broken relationship with God and with each other.

Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all of creation. (BCP p. 848)

- Public versus private sin
- Committed by “thought, word, and deed”
- Things done and left undone

There are several ways, in our Anglican tradition, to find forgiveness of our sins, and the assurance that our sins, indeed, have been forgiven. I'll ask you in a minute to name them. First, though, I need to start with “sin” itself, though. Because in my 20-plus years of parish ministry, the only safe place to approach the sin of others is to say that I am a sinner. We are all sinners.

- Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way...”
- Romans 3:10 agrees, “There is none righteous, no, not one.”
- However, Jeremiah 31:34 assures us that God will forgive us and remember our sin no more.

In fact, in the Apostles Creed, we affirm that “I believe in ... the forgiveness of sins...” We confess that Christ Jesus came down from heaven “for us and for our salvation” (BCP pp. 236, 358). So, as Christians, we know that sin exists, we participate in it, and there is a way to get past the sin we commit.

Ray Lewis of Super Bowl fame



I recently read an article in “The Washington Post” entitled “Does God have a dog in this fight?” Maybe you saw a similar article before the recent Super Bowl, wondering if God favored one team over the other.

This particular article talked about some of the high-profile Christian athletes who were to play in the Super Bowl, including Ray Lewis, a well-known evangelical Christian and captain of the Baltimore Ravens. The article mentioned an incident in which Mr. Lewis was involved some 13 years ago outside of an Atlanta nightclub in which two people ended up dead.

Now it's clear to me that Mr. Lewis is a Christian. And I know that Jesus Christ forgives sins. So I have no doubts in reconciling these two realities about Ray Lewis' life. But this article got me wondering, “What if someone like Mr. Lewis came to me, told me about a very serious and troubling sin that had happened years ago, and wanted assurance of God's forgiveness for his role in that incident? What options would be available to him?” Do you have any ideas on this subject?

| When to use Reconciliation? | |
|---|---|
| When we sin | |
| All sins are sins against God | Confess these sins to God, privately |
| Some sins are also sins against others | Confess these sins also to others |
| Make restitution, where possible | |

The first way to avail ourselves of forgiveness, and thus obtain Reconciliation, is to confess our sins **immediately and directly**. I call this the Baptist approach—AND IT WORKS!

- All sins are sins against God; those that are **ONLY** sins against God should be confessed privately, only to God.
- Some sins are also against other people. We need to confess these sins to those whom we have harmed.

A vital component of Reconciliation always, regardless of method used to obtain Reconciliation is that we are sorry for our sin, and that we make restitution, when possible. Jewish tradition is to return 120%, if money is involved or the sin can be reduced to a monetary sum. Zaccheus, the tax collector who climbed a tree to meet Jesus, made restitution 400%.

What happens if we cannot make restitution? We do the best we can, and still seek forgiveness.

When to use Reconciliation?

Each Eucharist

**“Most merciful God,
we confess that we
have sinned against
you in thought, word,
and deed...”**

**“Almighty God have
mercy on you,
forgive you all your
sins...”**

“Gracious Father, we give you praise and thanks for this Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, the pledge of our redemption; and we pray that it may bring us forgiveness of our sins, strength in our weakness, and everlasting salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (BCP p. 457, from *Ministration to the Sick*)

The second way to obtain Reconciliation is to confess our sin during Holy Eucharist. Can someone read the Confession, found on page 360 of the BCP?

Notice that right after we confess our sin, the priest stands and absolves us of our sin. To which the people respond, ... (?)

Anglicans (and Roman Catholics) believe that the priest has been delegated the authority, by Christ Jesus, to actually pronounce the forgiveness of sin. Of course, it is Christ Jesus who actually does the forgiving and forgetting, but that authority has been delegated to the church by Jesus giving Peter the keys to the kingdom. Do you remember what he said? “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

I should also mention that we Anglicans see a close connection between participating in the Eucharist and the forgiveness of our sins. We see this most obviously in the Post-Communion prayer we say for the Eucharist in the Ministration to the Sick, on page 457. Would someone read this prayer for us?

What is Reconciliation?

Book of Common Prayer (p. 861)

“Reconciliation of a Penitent, or Penance, is the rite in which those who repent of their sins may confess them to God in the presence of a priest, and receive the assurance of pardon and the grace of absolution.”

I know that you have all availed yourself of Reconciliation using one or both of these two methods. The third method is what I want to concentrate on today, though, because it might be less familiar to you. If you would turn to page 861 in your BCP, you will find what our Episcopal catechism, our teaching, says about Reconciliation of a Penitent. Would someone read this?

Notice that there are two people required to have this rite: 1) we have to have a person who wishes to repent of their sins, 2) someone to hear that confession. The catechism specifies that the other person is a priest, and this is usually the case, but if you will turn to page 446 of your BCP and read paragraph three, you will notice that the second person DOES NOT HAVE TO BE A PRIEST.

((Mention how 12-Step programs and their Step 4 is similar to, and different from, Reconciliation))

You will also notice that the person who does the confession receives two things during the Rite of Reconciliation: the assurance of pardon (which Jesus delegated to us) and the grace of absolution (which comes from God) . In other words, they are often more assured at the end of this rite that their sin, indeed, has been forgiven.

Why confession “in the presence of a priest”?

Especially useful for:

- **Putting down long-held “baggage” (of sin)**
- **Resolving particularly troublesome sins**
- **Preparing to die**



In this regard, Reconciliation is especially useful for these types of situations.

((NOTE: During the discussion, someone pointed out that there often is a much greater likelihood of confidentiality when we confess to a priest, rather than to a layperson. This can be especially important when someone confesses having committed a crime.))

Who should use Reconciliation?

- **All who desire it**
- **Not restricted to times of sickness**

**“All may,
some should,
none must”**



Our Prayer Book tells us that this rite is available “for all who desire it;” you don’t have to be sick or terminally ill (or in prison) to use it. The often-quoted rubric about formal Confession is, “All may, some should, none must.”

Where to do it?

- In the priest's office
- At the altar/in the chapel*

See BCP

p 446

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Our Prayer Book also says that Confessions may be heard anytime and anywhere. That being said, though, they are most often heard in one of two places. (Would someone read the fourth paragraph on page 446 of the Book of Common Prayer?)

- In the priest's office, or even more often,
- at the altar of the church, or in a chapel of a church.

Often the confessor (the person who hears the confession) sits inside the altar rail, while the penitent (the person who says the confession) sits or kneels on the other side of the railing.

Our bishop, Bishop Shannon, counsels us to use the latter, the church or chapel, as the setting needs to be one that is HOLY.

The mechanics of Reconciliation

- **We can only confess things that are our fault (not things done to us)**
- **The priest normally cannot discuss the confession ever, even with the person who made the confession, unless the penitent brings it up.**
- **NOTE: Some states have laws requiring reporting of “known or suspected child abuse.”**

There are some mechanics of Reconciliation that the priest oftentimes will talk with a person about before undertaking the rite itself. First, we can only confess things that we have done, that are our own fault. I say this because sometimes people who have been abused, for example, or have been victimized in some way, want to confess to set down this baggage. However, we cannot confess something done to us; that is for someone else to confess.

Second, we all know that what is told a priest during a confessional cannot be shared with anyone else. This is generally true. However, there are some exceptions you should know about before undertaking a confession. **First**, if you tell a priest, even during confession, that you intend to harm yourself or another person, some priests would feel compelled to break their bond of silence. **Second**, six states (including Virginia) require priests to report “known or suspected child abuse” ... past or present... to the authorities. **HOWEVER**, the norm, the rule, is that the priest normally cannot discuss the confession even, even with the person who made the confession, unless the penitent brings it up.

It often is a good idea to meet with a priest before the actual Reconciliation, so that you can talk about these and other practical aspects of saying the Rite.

General Procedure

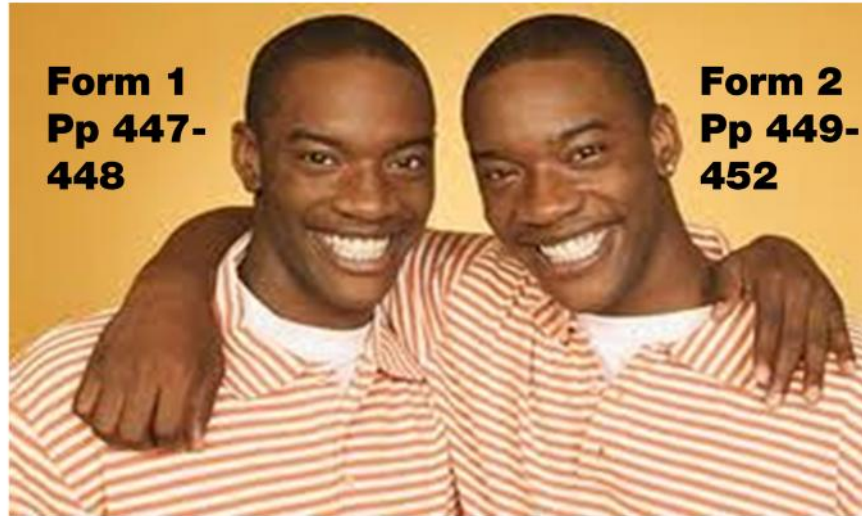
- 1. Blessing**
- 2. Confession**
of “all serious sins troubling the conscience” and giving “evidence of contrition”
- 3. Absolution**
priest gives counsel, direction, and comfort as needed, and pronounces absolution
- 4. Dismissal**

The general procedure is for the priest to begin with a blessing and end with a dismissal, which has the effect of bracketing what happens during the rite with prayer. The basic elements are that the penitent confesses “all serious sins troubling the conscience” and “giving evidence of contrition.” It would be difficult to absolve someone of a sin for which they were not sorry.

Then is the response to the confession, with the priest giving counsel, direction, and comfort as needed, then pronouncing absolution.

The forms of Reconciliation

BCP offers two EQUIVALENT forms



Form 1
Pp 447-
448

Form 2
Pp 449-
452

Our Prayer Book contains two forms, which are equivalent. You can talk to the priest about which one you would prefer to use.

Form One is succinct. The priest invites you to confess. You confess. As I mentioned, the priest may offer counsel, direction, and comfort. Then the priest pronounces absolution. I especially love the ending of Form one. At the end the priest adds, “The Lord has put away all your sins.” The penitent says, “Thanks be to God.” Then the priest concludes, “Go in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.”

Form Two has more words, more options, more scripture inserted. However, the same basic things happen. The ending, though, is different. The priest says, “Now there is rejoicing in heaven; for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins.” To which the response is, “Thanks be to God.”

Result

God “pardons and absolves all who truly repent, and with sincere hearts believe his Holy Gospel.” (BCP p. 269)

The result is that God “pardons and absolves all who truly repent, and with sincere hearts believe his Holy Gospel.” In fact, God remembers our sin no more.

As I said earlier, both Carol and I are available, during Lent especially (but also at other times) to walk with you through the Rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent. All you have to do is to schedule a time with us, and we will be there for you.

Did Lance Confess?



NOTE: We were short on time, so I did not use this slide this time.

As you may know from reading the church's weekly e-Notes message, I first began to think about this topic when Mr. Lance Armstrong "confessed" to Oprah Winfrey on national television. I wondered whether Mr. Armstrong was contrite, sorry for what he had done wrong. I wondered whether he intended to never do that wrong again. And I wondered whether ?and how he was going to make restitution for what he had done wrong. So what do you think, did Lance Armstrong "confess?" What do you think?