

The second form of the rite, “is particularly meaningful at various seasons of the liturgical year and in connection with events of special pastoral importance. The only point that needs mentioning here is that for celebrating the second form there should be an adequate number of confessors present.”⁵

Rite III - Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents With General Confession and Absolution

The reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution is *exceptional in character*. “It is therefore not left to free choice but is regulated by a special discipline”⁶. Judgement as to whether there exist the conditions required (c.f Canon 961 §1, 2) is not a matter for the confessor but for the diocesan Bishop who can determine cases of such necessity in the light of criteria agreed upon with other members of the Episcopal Conference.⁷

The Importance of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

“Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses from such confession, in which case reconciliation can be obtained in other ways”.⁸

“According to the Church's command, after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year. Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.”⁹

5 & 6 Para 32. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation RECONCILIATIO ET PAENITENTIA (2 December 1984)
7. & 8 Apostolic Letter, in the Form of Motu Proprio MISERICORDIA DEI—On the certain Aspects of the Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.
9. Paragraph 1457. Catechism of the Catholic Church

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To: Priests and Pastoral Assistants
Parish Liturgy Committees
Directors of Religious Studies
PPRE Teachers



The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

**If we say, “We have fellowship with him,”
while continuing to walk in darkness,
we are liars and do not act in truth.
But if we walk in light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another,
and the blood of His Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin.
If we say, “We are free from the guilt of sin,”
we deceive ourselves: the truth is not to be found in us.**

1 John:6-8

Every sin we commit, beside being something personal, has also communitarian and ecclesial dimensions¹. It was particularly to assist us in understanding the latter dimensions as well as the nature and effects² of the Sacrament of Penance that the Second Vatican Council asked for a revised rite and formula for celebration of the sacrament. The most notable element of the revision was a focus on the communal celebration of the Rite.

Following the suggestions of the Second Vatican Council, the *Ordo Paenitentiae* provided three rites which, while always keeping intact the essential elements, make it possible to adapt the celebration of the sacrament of penance to particular pastoral circumstances.

1. C.f. Catechism of the Catholic Church Paragraph 1849
2. Sacrosanctum Concilium, Paragraph 72.

The Liturgical Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

With the introduction of the new rite, 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 Heavenly Father and show the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. It is not to be just a joyless confession and absolution of sin alone, but above all a liturgical celebration. And as a liturgical celebration it is an act of worship, an opportunity to encounter and experience the merciful presence of God, in the Word, the priest, the gathering and the sacrament.

The new rites provide a range of alternative texts for the Confessor and the Penitent to help them better articulate the experience of each particular celebration.

Rite I - Rite of Reconciliation of Individual Penitents

Individual and integral confession and absolution remains the sole means by which the faithful who are conscious of grave sin are reconciled with God and the Church.

The first form, the reconciliation of individual penitents, is the only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the sacrament, and it cannot and must not be allowed to fall into disuse or be neglected³.

The Parts of the Rite

- **Reception of the Penitent**
 - Greeting
 - Sign of the Cross
 - Invitation to Trust
- **Liturgy of the Word**
 - Scripture Reading
- **Liturgy of Reconciliation**
 - Confession of Sins
 - Acceptance of Penance
 - Act of Contrition - Penitent's Prayer of Sorrow
 - Absolution
- **Proclamation of Praise of God and Dismissal**



Rite II - Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents With Individual Confession and Absolution

Celebrating the sacrament as a community highlights the ecclesial nature of the sacrament. This is the very essence of the second form of the rite. Its structure has much in common with many other liturgical rites in which the liturgical assembly gathers around the bishop or priest who presides. The preparatory acts help to give greater emphasis on the communitarian aspects of the sacrament, especially in the Liturgy of the Word, both in the proclamation of the Scriptures, and in the response to them in mind and heart. The communal elements are also extended to various parts as outlined below.

The Parts of Rite II

- **Introductory Rites**
 - Hymn
 - Sign of the Cross
 - Greeting & Introductory Words
 - Opening Prayer
- **Liturgy of the Word**
 - Scripture Reading & Homily
 - Examination of Conscience
- **Liturgy of Reconciliation**
 - Communal Prayer of Contrition or Litany of Sorrow
 - The Lord's Prayer
 - Individual Confession of Sins
 - Acceptance of Penance or Satisfaction
 - Individual Absolution
- **Proclamation of Praise for God's Mercy**
 - General exhortation to do good.
 - Hymn or psalm or a litany to acknowledge God's mercy
- **Concluding Prayer of Thanksgiving**
- **Concluding Rite**
 - Blessing and Dismissal



Despite the emphasis on the communal elements, the second form is still essentially "*the same as the first form in the culminating sacramental act*, namely individual confession and individual absolution of sins. It can thus be regarded as equal to the first form as regards the normality of the rite"⁴.

3. Para 32. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation RECONCILIATIO ET PAENITENTIA (2 December 1984)

4. Para 32. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation RECONCILIATIO ET PAENITENTIA (2 December 1984)