

A Perfect Act of Contrition

On March 20th, Pope Francis live-streamed a message regarding the issue of people who cannot get to confession because of the COVID-19 lockdown. The Holy Father reminded us of the traditional Catholic teaching on the power of making a perfect act of contrition. He remarked, *"This is the right time, the opportune moment. An act of contrition done well, and our souls will become white like the snow."*

What is a perfect act of contrition? The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that perfect contrition is present when our sadness for sin results from our love for God above all else. In short, perfect contrition is hatred for sin because we love God. On the other hand, imperfect contrition is the result of fear, which is to say, I am sad for my sins because I am afraid of Hell. One type of contrition results from love. The other results from fear.

When we go to sacramental confession, imperfect contrition is sufficient to receive the pardon of our sins. However, in extraordinary circumstances when we cannot get to confession, we can make an act of perfect contrition which is sufficient to have our sins forgiven. It is important to note that a perfect act of contrition includes the intention to receive sacramental confession at the very first opportunity. All mortal sins, forgiven through the act of perfect contrition, must be mentioned to the priest in confession as soon as possible.

The fact that we can always make an act of perfect contrition in a situation like the COVID-19 pandemic is very consoling. At this time of plague and being unable to go to the Sacrament of Penance, Pope Francis instructs us to make a perfect act of contrition and promise God, *"I will go to confession afterward, but forgive me now. And immediately you will return to a state of grace with God."*

This generosity on the part of God has been needed at various times throughout history. In the plagues of Middle Ages, in the midst of various wars, and in places where priests were scarce, the ability to make a perfect act of contrition was a healing salve for sinners in love with God.

That same healing salve is available to all of us at this difficult time of pandemic.

How to Make a Perfect Act of Contrition

1. Call to mind your sins.
2. Reflect on God's tremendous and unconditional love for you and how your sin offends that love. Express your sorrow for disappointing God.
3. Make the intention to go to sacramental confession as soon as it is possible for you with the intention of mentioning any mortal sins forgiven through your perfect act of contrition.
4. Pray an Act of Contrition.

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.