

ACT OF PERFECT CONTRITION

In these very extraordinary times, the Church in her mercy offers alternatives to the norm of confessing to a priest due to the gravity of the situation faced in practically all parts of the world. Therefore, the norm regarding confessions should be the following:

“Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness and accompanied by the will or firm desire to confess, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1452).”

An act of perfect contrition requires:

1. The love of God above all things
2. The sincere desire for forgiveness
3. The ardent commitment to receive the sacrament of reconciliation when available.

Using this information, the faithful can be assured that the mercy of Christ has not abandoned them in a time of particular need. No one will be held accountable by God for sins for which one is truly sorry and which would have been confessed, had the opportunity been present. Thus, in the present circumstances, and even without sacramental confession, the solace of the Church is offered for any who have fears or anxieties about the need for confession. Individually, or in conjunction with a virtual prayer service the faithful, by one’s own Act of Perfect Contrition, he or she can receive an assurance of the forgiveness of his or her sins. Remember that this applies when Sacramental Confession is not possible and does not, in any way, diminish the ultimate need for Sacramental Confession. The person’s will to confess must be genuine and must be acted upon (with regard to mortal sins) when the present threat passes.

We can consider also the words delivered by the Supreme Pontiff on March 20, 2020:

“Do what the Catechism (of the Catholic Church) says. It is very clear: If you cannot find a priest to confess to, speak directly with God, your father, and tell him the truth. Say, ‘Lord, I did this, this, this. Forgive me,’ and ask for pardon with all your heart.”

Make an act of contrition, the Pope said, 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.”

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1452, says: “When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called ‘perfect’ – contrition of charity. Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.”

“As the catechism teaches,” Pope Francis said, “you can draw near to God’s forgiveness without having a priest at hand. Think about it. This is the moment.”