How Do We Ritualize the Reconciliation Jesus Offers Us?
In two ways

1. the sacrament of the Eucharist
2. the sacrament of reconciliation

• Jesus’ entire earthly ministry was one of healing and reconciliation.
• He exhorted all people to repent.
• The sacrament of reconciliation celebrates, helps us notice in a particular way, the reconciliation Christ won for us on the cross.
• Jesus reconciled us to God through his sacrifice. Yet still we continue to sin.
• Important: The focus of this sacrament, however, is not our sinfulness.
• While we must acknowledge that we are sinners, the focus of the sacrament of penance is God’s awesome mercy through Christ.

God Calls Us to be Reconciled with God and with the Church.

• The Rite of Penance reminds us that when we sin, we harm our relationship with God.

• When sinners repent, they run into the arms of the merciful Father who knows them best and loves them most, and who offers unconditional love. They are embraced by the God who shows unparalleled compassion for his children. He goes in search of the lost and makes every effort to bring them home into the fold of his loving embrace.

• God’s love unites us with the people of God.

• The Rite of Penance reminds us that the sin of one person impacts others. The sin of one does not just harm the sinner, it harms others as well.

• The good news is that if the sin of one harms others, similarly, the holiness of one benefits others.

• The good we do influences others. Our good example makes a difference. The sacrament of reconciliation strengthens us to live a life of holiness that we are all called to live.

• The Rite of Penance reminds us that penance always includes reconciliation with our brothers and sisters who are harmed by our sins (cf. Rite of Penance #5).

• We are strengthened through this sacrament to be agents of peace and justice in a world ravaged by sin and oppression.

• Yet, the Rite also reminds us that people frequently come together to participate in injustice (cf. Rite of Penance, #5).

• The Rite of Penance reminds us that it is not just our personal sins, but our participation in the social dimension of sin that we must examine and bring before God.

• “Sin and its effects are visible everywhere: in exploitive relationships, loveless families, unjust social structures and policies, crimes by and against individuals and against creation, the oppression of the weak and the manipulation of the vulnerable, explosive tensions among nations and among ideological, racial and religious groups, and social classes, the scandalous gulf between those who waste goods and resources, and those who live and die amid depravation and underdevelopment, wars and preparation for war. Sin is a reality in the world” (National Catechetical Directory, #98).

• The Rite of Penance reminds us that we should help one another do penance by working with others to realize justice and peace in the world.
The Effects of Reconciliation

- Reconciliation with God anticipates and includes complete *metanoia*, conversion of the entire self, and conversion of mind and heart to God.

- Once converted, the penitent can do no less than be genuinely sorry for his or her sins and truly commit to amend his or her life. True conversion ultimately leads to transformation. Once penitents are truly sorry for sin and long for authentic transformation they:
  - Confess their sins to the Church’s minister.
  - Make satisfaction for those same sins.
  - Commit to go and sin no more. They commit to change their lives.

- In so doing and by the power of the Holy Spirit given to the Church, such penitents are forgiven.

- The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that reconciliation with God causes a “spiritual resurrection.”

- We are restored to the state that was intended for us at the creation of the world. We are in complete harmony with God and free from sin, until such time that we once again fall prey to its trap (CCC, 1468).

- God grants pardon to the sinner through the sacramental sign of absolution.

- As stated, the primary sacramental sign associated with the sacrament of reconciliation is the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands is a sign of invocation of the Holy Spirit.

Four Elements of the Rite of Penance

1. Contrition
2. Confession
3. Penance
4. Absolution

Contrition

- As stated earlier, the sacrament of reconciliation celebrates what God has already accomplished through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ.

- Contrition is deep sorrow for sin and the intention to avoid sin in the future.

- Contrition is true sorrow for sin and hatred for the sin committed, together with the firm resolve not to sin again (cf. CCC, 1451).

- True contrition involves the complete conversion of heart.

- The sinner commits to changing his or her life and living in the shadow of Christ. With the help of God, he or she strives to grow in holiness.

- In the interest of true conversion, the sinner examines his or her conscience in order to uncover the areas of sin still in need of God’s healing, liberating mercy, and forgiveness.

Two Forms of Contrition

1. Perfect contrition
2. Imperfect contrition (Refer to CCC #1451-1453).
Perfect contrition

- Perfect contrition simply flows from our love relationship with God, our absolute love of God.
- We are sorry for our sins because we love God so much and we know that our sins offend God and keep us from perfect intimacy with him.
- When we have perfect sorrow for our sins because of our love for God, our minor (venial) sins are automatically forgiven. Our grave (mortal) sins are forgiven as long as we promise to avail ourselves of the sacrament as soon as we are able.

Imperfect contrition

- Imperfect contrition is simply sorrow for sin because we hate the ugliness of sin or because we fear eternal damnation.
- Such contrition, while not perfect, is nevertheless a potential catalyst to bring us to the sacrament.
- Imperfect contrition does not have the power in and of itself to forgive serious sin.

Confession

- The sinner is called to examine his or her life before God.
- The sinner is exhorted to consider the areas and habits of sin in his or her life.
- The sinner is invited by God to enter into deep conversion and sorrow for sin.
- The sinner then is invited to name his or her sins.
- The sinner confesses them to God's minister who has been given the power to forgive sins by the Holy Spirit (Rite of Penance: # 6b).
- Only God forgives sins; Jesus was given authority on earth to forgive sins, and he gave that authority to the apostles and exhorted them to exercise it.
- The authority to forgive sins in Jesus' name continues through the unbroken line of the apostles, through the ministers of the Church, the ordained priesthood.
- When sins are confessed, hearts are opened to God's minister who has taken a sacred oath not to reveal anything that is spoken when confession is made. What is said is between the confessor and the sinner is bound by the seal of confession. The priest may never divulge the content of sacramental confession. To break the seal of confession is to commit the gravest of sins.

Act of Penance

- Our response to God's incredible mercy is to perform an action that demonstrates our willingness to change, our commitment to avoid the same sins that we seem to commit over and over again: the habit of sin.
- When we sin, our actions harm our neighbor (CCC, 1459) and we must do what we can to restore the relationship and repair the harm.
- Sin harms our spiritual life. The act of penance is medicinal; it helps to heal our sin-sick soul. While we are forgiven through the sacramental sign of absolution, the disorder that causes sin is not automatically healed.
- Serious sin harms our spiritual health. We make satisfaction or penance in order to strengthen us not to sin again. The act of penance strengthens us and helps restore us to spiritual health.
- In the act of penance, the sinner affirms that Christ already made satisfaction for the sin of humanity by his sacrificial death on the cross. Sinners cooperate with the satisfaction already accomplished by making their own satisfaction.
Sinners promise not to sin again. The sinner affirms that his or her actions speak louder than words by performing an act of penance.

This act of penance may be accomplished in a variety of ways.

- The priest might suggest that the penitent pray certain prayers, meditate on the cross of Christ, read sacred Scripture, or perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy (see last page).
- The priest might suggest that wrongs be righted and that harm done to another be rectified to the best of the sinner’s ability.

The Rite of Penance insists that sinners live ongoing lives of penance when they serve their neighbor and patiently accept the joys, sorrows, and crosses of everyday life; when they read the Scriptures and help the poor; when they perform the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.

In summary, penance is accomplished when the sinner makes satisfaction for sins committed, when he or she promises to amend his or her conduct, and make reparation for injury.

We can do nothing to earn God’s forgiveness. It is freely given. However, we can show God that we are serious about our intention to change our lives. Satisfaction is the means by which we commit to amend our behavior.

Absolution

- God grants pardon to the sinner through the sacramental sign of absolution.
- Through the sacramental symbol of laying on of hands, the priest confers God’s forgiveness. The Holy Spirit is invoked through the sacramental sign of extended hands and through that “epicletic” action (an epicletic action is an action that invokes the Holy Spirit), the sinner is forgiven.
- The transformative power of the Holy Spirit invites deep conversion of heart and strengthens the sinner to avoid sin in the future.
- Through absolution the sinner is not only reconciled with God, but also with the Church.
- In the story of the Prodigal Son, (Luke 15:11-32) the father not only welcomed his son home and restored him to full stature; he also reconciled him with the community.
- Through sacramental absolution, the sinner is clothed with the reconciling robe of mercy and restored to full stature as a child of God and a member of the people of God.

Prayer of Absolution

God the Father of mercies,
through the death and the resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us
for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church
may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

- Note that the prayer of absolution shown above acknowledges that it is through Jesus’ death and resurrection that we are forgiven; the church’s ministry extends that forgiveness.

Forms of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

The New Rite:
3 Forms:

- Individual Confession and Absolution
- Communal Celebration w/ Individual Confession and Absolution followed by a communal prayer of thanksgiving
- Communal Celebration w/ Communal Confession and General Absolution

(There is also an abbreviated rite for those in danger of death.)

Rite for Individuals:

1. The priest greets the penitent.
   This invitation usually includes a greeting, making the sign of the cross and inviting the penitent to trust in God’s mercy
2. There is an optional Scripture reading, chosen by either the priest or penitent
3. The penitent confesses his/her sins; the priest suggests a penance, to which the penitent may or may not agree. The penitent may discuss options with the priest.
4. The penitent prays the prayer of contrition, using either a memorized prayer or penitent’s own words
5. The priest prays the prayer of absolution while either imposing hands on the penitent’s head or extending his hands over the penitent.
6. The rite concludes with praise of God and dismissal of the penitent.

Rites for groups:

1. Introductory Rites (greeting, opening prayer)
2. Celebration of God’s Word (reading, psalm, reading, Gospel), homily and examination of conscience
3. Rite of reconciliation (call to penance, prayer of contrition, litany of forgiveness, Lord’s prayer and closing prayer
4. Individual confession and absolution**
5. Proclamation of praise for God’s mercy
6. Concluding prayer of thanksgiving
7. Blessing and dismissal

** In the third form of the rite this step is replace by general confession and absolution. A litany of sins would be read with the penitents asking for forgiveness as a group. The third form of the rite is reserved for situations where there is danger of death (troops about to go into battle) or when there are too many people and not enough priests for each to be heard in a reasonable amount of time (remote areas). While a person in the state of mortal sin may participate in the third form of the rite, the penitent is to seek to celebrate the first form of the sacrament as soon as possible.
Spiritual and Corporal work of mercy

**Spiritual Works of Mercy** (based on Christ’s teaching and Christian practice since the Apostles)

1. Counsel the Doubtful
2. Instruct the Ignorant
3. Admonish the sinner
4. Comfort the sorrowful
5. Forgive Injuries
6. Bear wrongs patiently
7. Pray for the living and the dead

**Corporal Works of Mercy** (based on Matthew 25:31-46)

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit the imprisoned
7. Bury the dead