



## **Living the Liturgy**

---

*the gifts of God in all of life*

### **Confession and Absolution**

*Confession* is the act of speaking our sins to God, either generally or individually. *Absolution* is the act of being forgiven in God's name. Often, the liturgy begins with Confession and Absolution.

The repeated and frequent use of Confession and Absolution is taught by both Jesus Christ and His apostles in Holy Scripture:

- ~ Jesus sends His apostles to forgive sins in His name (Matthew 16:19; John 20:21-23), with the promise that He forgives through them.
- ~ Jesus tells His disciples to forgive each other "seventy-times seven" times with the promise that so will God forgive them (Matthew 18:21-22, 35). He teaches them to ask for forgiveness daily (Matthew 6:9, 12).
- ~ St. John understood confession to be a continuing feature of life for himself and other Christians (1 John 1:8-10). St. Paul and St. James admonish the church to confess to one another and to restore sinners gently (Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:16).

God has given the whole Church this right of hearing confession and speaking forgiveness. One way the Church exercises that right is in the holy office of ministry, in which individual Christians are publicly ordained to exercise it "in the stead and by the command" of Christ, "as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself" (Luther, Small Catechism). Here is grace-down-to-earth: Jesus speaking through actual people on earth to put His forgiveness in your ears.

Historically, the Church practiced Confession and Absolution either individually or in a special service on Saturdays. Shortly after the Reformation, some Lutherans began holding such services immediately before Holy Communion on Sunday. It is for this reason that our liturgy sometimes begins with Confession and Absolution still today. Most frequently, Lutherans have simply called it *Absolution*, stressing the divine gift of forgiveness over our act of confession. It was out of love for private Confession and Absolution that Luther sparked the Reformation, insisting that the word of absolution, and not purchased "indulgences," forgave sins.

On the back of this page, you will find ways to rest in the gift of Confession and Absolution every day.

## **Confession and Absolution Every Day**

---

The key to resting in the joy of Absolution every day is pushing beyond “enough” to embrace “all”. God would give you more than enough. He would have you say “Yes!” to Absolution in all its forms and without begrudging any of them:

**At Home, Part A.** Confess your sins in private prayer with the assurance of God’s grace. Christ’s cross has purchased forgiveness even before you ask! And in asking, you rest in the gift. A simple way to do it: when you come to “Forgive us our trespasses,” in the Lord’s Prayer, pause and list them. Then continue with the prayer.

**At Home, Part B.** Two elderly women entered into a pact in North Dakota: whoever rose first in the morning put her wreath on her door and began making coffee. When the next one rose and went to her door, she would see the neighbor’s wreath, and know that she was to go next door. Together, they’d confess their sins to each other and then forgive each other: “In the name of Jesus, I forgive you your sins.” Find a trusted Christian friend or family member with whom you might do something similar.

**In the Liturgy, Part A.** Pastors are given you as public ministers of this forgiveness. God gives them to you for counsel and to speak forgiveness in His name. They don’t hold onto the sins you confess, because your sins are not theirs to hold: they are buried with Christ. Seek out your pastors for individual Absolution, that you might hear it spoken directly to you. Ask for absolution when visited by a pastor.

**In the Liturgy, Part B.** Hear these words at the start of worship and love them: “As a called and ordained minister of the Church, and by the authority of Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” These words are sometimes spoken differently. Any way they come, they come not on the pastors’ authority, but in the name of God and with the authority of Christ. They emphasize the gift of Jesus: “I forgive you.”

**In the Liturgy, Part C.** Public services dedicated only to Confession and Absolution, and held separately from Holy Communion, are part of the Church’s heritage. They are appropriate during Lent, on Maundy Thursday, or whenever Absolution is needed for the care and comfort of souls.

**For Parents and Grandparents.** Lead children in reflecting on their sins by reading the Ten Commandments. Read over the liturgy of Absolution with them (in the bulletin, or page 77 in the hymnal), and teach them to participate in the Confession and to listen for the Absolution, receiving it as a proclamation from heaven itself.