



## UPDATE ON THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND GENERAL ABSOLUTION

### OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020

Recently, the Archbishop received a few inquiries about the possible use of Chapter III in the *Rite of Penance*, Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution, as the COVID 19 Pandemic endures.

The Apostolic Penitentiary provided the Universal Church with guidance on the Sacrament of Penance during the Pandemic on March 20, 2020, which remains in force. This guidance reinforces the norm that individual confession is the ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament (Chapter I in the *Rite of Penance*). The possibility of general absolution can only be considered if the canonical requirements are in place, especially the imminent danger of death or grave necessity as established by the Conference of Bishops. In light of what is established in the universal law, with the possibility of hearing individual confessions everywhere throughout the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, there is no compelling need at this time for the Archbishop to grant permission for the use of General Absolution.

Priests may continue, if they choose to do so, to hear confessions, allowing for both anonymous and face to face confessions, outside the confessional. They may also choose to keep a reasonable distance from the penitent while in every instance the inviolability of the sacramental seal is safeguarded. The confessor is encouraged to wear a face covering during confessions since he may be with a penitent for a sustained period of time. At this point there is no evidence at all of the transmission of the virus in the Archdiocese during the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.

The faithful, who desire to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance but cannot do so in-person for one reason or another should be catechized about the benefit of perfect contrition for

sins and the gift of special indulgences at this time. Catechesis for both of these practices can be found on the website of ARISE and the Office for Divine Worship. For convenience sake, here is a description of perfect contrition:

*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 (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by votum confessionis, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452).*

*Thus, perfect contrition requires • the love of God • the sincere desire for forgiveness • the ardent commitment to receive the sacrament of reconciliation when available.*

Priests are encouraged to make the Sacrament of Penance as widely available as possible during the Pandemic, even during the celebration of Mass.

Thank you and God bless,  
Father Dennis Gill  
Director  
Office for Divine Worship