

# Understanding the Mass

## Confessional

*Each week, we are explaining the different parts of the Mass - what is in the church, what we use in the Mass, and why (and how) we celebrate Mass the way we do.*

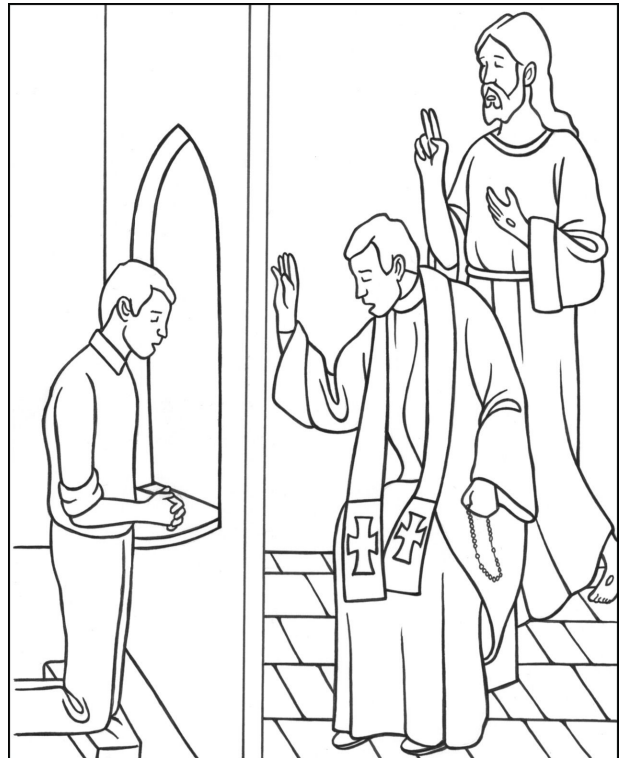
*Today our topic is the **Confessional**.*

The **confessional** (also known as the Reconciliation chapel or Reconciliation room) is a special space in the church for the **Sacrament of Confession** (or Sacrament of Reconciliation), which is a celebration of God's love for us, during which we say sorry to God for our sins and we receive God's forgiveness.

Saint James referenced confession in the New Testament he wrote in his letter: "confess your sins to one another and pray for one another".

Early Christians confessed their sins face to face to a bishop in the church and in some instances also to the congregation.

Face-to-face confession - often made kneeling before a priest or sitting in a chair at his side - was common until the Middle Ages when a screen was placed between the confessor and women making their confessions. The use of this screen became more and more widespread, and from the 16th century onwards, a dedicated small space called a "confessional booth" was used. You can still see these in some churches today, particularly very old ones.



In 1974, following the second Vatican Council, a new rite of Confession was introduced. Today most churches have a dedicated room set aside for Confession (not just a booth) which has chairs, kneelers and a screen, and each of us can choose how we would like to go to confession.

*Look at the confessional in your church and make a list of what you see:*