

How can I fulfill my “Easter Duty” when I do not have the possibility of receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist during the “stay home” mandate due to the Coronavirus Pandemic?

The teachings of the Church regarding this the ‘Easter Duty’, as reflected in both the *Catechism* and the *Code of Canon Law* indicate that there is an obligation to receive these sacraments at least once a year (usually during the Easter season for the Eucharist) unless there is a “just reason” that requires its fulfillment at another time of the year. In the Archdiocese of Baltimore, it is impossible to fulfill these obligations until the sacraments are readily available again. In short, the presence of the COVID-19 situation is a “just reason” to *delay* the fulfillment of this duty and thus the obligation is moved to a time in the future when these sacraments are available again.

While not actually using the term “Easter Duty”, the 1983 code retains the annual requirement, but allows for greater latitude in the time permitted for the reception of Eucharist. Additionally, the United States has an indult extending the time for this annual reception from the beginning of Lent through the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity.

Two specific canons require the annual reception of these sacraments. Canon 920 addresses annual reception of Eucharist during the Easter season and canon 989 indicates the need for annual confession. These canons state:

Can. 920 §1. After being initiated into the Most Holy Eucharist, each of the faithful is obliged to receive holy communion at least once a year. §2. This precept must be fulfilled during the Easter season unless it is fulfilled for a just cause at another time during the year.

Can. 989 After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her *grave* sins at least once a year (cf. CCC 1457)

Canon 989 does not mandate a specific time period for reception of the sacrament. One receives the sacrament prior to the reception of Eucharist when in a state of grave sin, so as to be in a state of grace. While the *Catechism* acknowledges the seriousness of venial sins, Can. 989 does not *require* their confession here.

Pope Francis addressed the issue of not being able to confess directly to a priest in his remarks on March 20, 2020. The pope said, “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 full text of the Pope’s homily can be found at

<https://zenit.org/articles/cant-go-to-confession-pope-says-talk-to-god-your-father-ask-forgiveness-full-text-of-morning-homily/>

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.”

The term Easter Duty was introduced in earlier codes of canon law because of widespread neglect of the sacrament in the Middle Ages. Therefore, various church councils from the 6th C onward enacted disciplinary laws obliging the faithful to receive the Sacraments of Confession and especially Eucharist, particularly on the principal feasts.