

## The Order of the Penitents

**Directions:** Read the brief description of the group of people called the “Order of the Penitents” and answer the questions below.

*In the early Church, the Sacrament of Penance (often called “confession” today) was very different. Instead of confessing sins in private to a priest, a person who had committed serious sins would confess his or her sins to the bishop who would give a penance to be carried out, usually during Lent. Their penances were a set of actions that could include fasting, manual labor for the Church, pilgrimages, and caring for the poor or ill.*



*While the penitents worked through their penances, they were usually distinguished from the rest of the Church community by wearing special clothes, sitting in special places during mass, and by being dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word. At the beginning of Lent, they wore ashes as a sign of their repentance—a practice that all Catholics take part in today.*

1. How did the Order of the Penitents differ from the way we celebrate the Sacrament of Penance today?

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2. How were the penitents distinguished from the rest of the Church community?

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3. What did the penitents wear at the beginning of Lent as a sign of repentance?

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4. Which of these two forms of the Sacrament of Penance would you rather do and why?

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