
GUIDE FOR A GOOD CONFESSION

"To those who have been far away from the sacrament of Reconciliation and forgiving love, I make this appeal: Come back to this source of grace; do not be afraid! Christ himself is waiting for you. He will heal you, and you will be at peace with God!"¹

"Even if you do not confess, God is not ignorant of the deed, since he knew it before it was committed. Why then do you not speak of it? Does the transgression become heavier by the confession? No, it becomes lighter and less troublesome. And this is why he wants you to confess: not that you should be punished, but that you should be forgiven; not that he may learn your sin—how could that be, since he has seen it?—but that you may learn what favor he bestows. He wishes you to learn the greatness of his grace, so that you may praise him perfectly, that you may be slower to sin, that you may be quicker to virtue. And if you do not confess the greatness of the need, you will not understand the enormous magnitude of his grace." (St. John Chrysostom)

The basic requirement for a good Confession is to have the intention of returning to God like the *Prodigal Son* and of acknowledging our sins with true sorrow before his representative, the priest.

1. Homily of Pope St. John Paul II on September 13, 1987, at Westover Hills, San Antonio, Texas.

Examination of Conscience

Examine your conscience. Recall your sins. Calmly ask yourself what you have done with full knowledge and full consent against God's Commandments.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

- Did I perform my duties toward God reluctantly or grudgingly?
- Did I neglect my prayer life? Did I recite my usual prayers?
- Did I receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin or without the necessary preparation?
- Did I fail to keep the one-hour Eucharistic fast?
- Did I fail to mention some grave sin in my previous confessions?
- Did I seriously believe in something superstitious or engage in a superstitious practice (palm-reading or fortune telling for instance)?
- Did I seriously doubt a matter of Faith, especially involving morals?
- Did I put my faith in danger — without a good reason — by accessing the Internet; reading a book, pamphlet, or magazine; engage in a conversation or view a movie or television program that contains material contrary to Catholic Faith or morals?
- Did I endanger my faith by joining or attending meetings of organizations opposed to the Catholic Faith? Did I take part in one of its activities?
- Have I committed the sin of sacrilege by act or by word against a sacred person, place, or thing?

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

- Did I fail to try my best to fulfill the promises and resolutions that I made to God?
- Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I make use of God's name mockingly, jokingly, angrily, or in any other irreverent manner? Am I in the habit of cursing?
- Have I participated actively in religious ceremonies outside the Catholic Church?
- Did I tell a lie under oath?
- Did I break (private or public) vows?

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

- Did I miss Mass on a Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation by neglect or intentionally?
- Did I fail to dress appropriately for Mass?
- Have I, without sufficient reason, arrived at Mass so late that I failed to fulfill the Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation?
- Did I allow myself to be distracted during Mass, by not paying attention, looking around out of curiosity, etc.?
- Did I cause another to be distracted?
- Do I silence my phone and other electronic devices during Mass?
- Have I performed any work or business activity that would inhibit the worship due to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the appropriate relaxation of mind and body, on a Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation?

- Did I fail to generously help the Church in her necessities to the extent that I am able?
- Did I fail to fast or abstain on a day prescribed by the Church?

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

(FOR PARENTS)

- Have I neglected to teach my children their prayers, send them to church, or give them a Christian education?
- Have I given them bad example?
- Have I neglected to watch over my children, to monitor their companions, the books they read, the movies and TV shows they watch, or their use of the Internet?
- Do I monitor the games and viewing (tablets, computers, phones, etc.) of my children and teens, especially for pornography and excessive violence?
- Have I failed to see to it that my child made First Confession, First Holy Communion, and the Sacrament of Confirmation?

(FOR CHILDREN)

- Was I disobedient toward my parents or others in authority?
- Did I neglect to help my parents when my help was needed?
- Did I treat my parents with little affection or respect?
- Did I react negatively when I was corrected by my parents?
- Did I fail to do my chores cheerfully?

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- Did I easily get angry or lose my temper?
- Did I injure or take the life of anyone? Was I ever reckless in driving?
- Was I an occasion of sin for others by way of conversation; offensive jokes; negative religious, racial, or sexual comments; manner of dressing; inviting somebody to attend offensive shows; recommending inappropriate or immoral Web sites on the Internet; lending harmful books or magazines; helping someone to steal, etc.? Did I give scandal to others? Did I try to repair the damage done by the scandal I gave?
- Did I lead others to sin? What sin or sins were involved?
- Did I fail to maintain a healthy lifestyle to the detriment or the neglect of my physical health? Did I attempt to take my life?
- Have I mutilated myself or another, including through excessive piercings or tattoos?
- Did I get drunk or use prohibited drugs?
- Did I use marijuana for non-medical purposes (to get high), even where it is permitted by civil law?
- Did I eat or drink more than a sufficient amount, allowing myself to get carried away by gluttony?
- Did I participate in any form of physical violence?
- Did I consent to or actively take part in direct sterilization (tubal ligation, vasectomy, etc.)? Do I realize that this will have a permanent effect on my married life and that I will have to answer to God for its consequences?

- Did I consent to, advise, or actively take part in an abortion? Was I aware that the Church punishes with automatic excommunication (*latae sententiae*) those who *procure and achieve* abortion? Do I realize that this is a very grave sin?
- Did I desire revenge or harbor enmity, hatred, or ill-feelings when someone offended me?
- Did I ask pardon whenever I offended anyone?
- Did I insult or offensively tease others?
- Did I quarrel with one of my brothers or sisters?
- Did I bully another, especially at work, school, or home?

THE SIXTH AND NINTH COMMANDMENTS

- Did I fail to live as a true Christian, avoiding giving in to my passions?
- Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts or fantasies?
- Did I consent to evil desires against the virtue of purity, even though I may not have carried them out? Were there any circumstances that aggravated the sin: affinity (relationship by marriage), consanguinity (blood relationship), either the married state or the consecration to God of a person involved?
- Did I engage in impure conversations? Did I start them?
- Did I look for fun in forms of entertainment that placed me in proximate occasions of sin, such as certain dances, movies, shows, books, or on the Internet with immoral contents? Did I avail myself of a prostitute or keep bad company?

- Did I realize that I might already have been committing a sin by placing myself in a proximate occasion of sin, such as sharing a room with a person I find sexually attractive, or being alone with such a person in circumstances that could lead to sin?
- Did I fail to take care of those details of modesty and decency that are the safeguards of purity for myself and others?
- Did I fail to say a prayer at a moment of temptation?
- Did I fail, before going to a show or reading a book, to find out its moral implications, so as not to put myself in immediate danger of sinning and in order to avoid distorting my conscience?
- Did I willfully look at an indecent picture or cast an immodest look upon myself or another?
- Did I commit an impure act? By myself, through masturbation (which is objectively a mortal sin)? With someone else? How many times? With someone of the same or opposite sex? Was there any circumstance of relationship (such as affinity) that could have given the sin special gravity?
- Do I have friendships that are habitual occasions of sexual sins? Am I prepared to end them?
- Did I confuse romance with lust?
- In courtship, is true love my fundamental reason for wanting to be with the other person? Do I live the constant and cheerful sacrifice of not putting the person I love in danger of sinning? Do I degrade human love by confusing it with selfishness or mere pleasure?

- Did I engage in acts such as passionate kisses, improper touches, or prolonged embraces?
- Have I engaged in premarital sex?

(FOR MARRIED PEOPLE)

- Did I fail to show proper respect to my wife, my husband, my children?
- Did I, without serious reason, deprive my spouse of the marital right? Did I claim my own rights in a way which showed no concern for my spouse's state of mind or health? Did I betray conjugal fidelity in desire or in deed?
- Did I take "the pill" or use any other artificial birth control device before or after new life had already been conceived?
- Did I, without well-grounded reasons arising from physical or psychological condition of myself or my spouse, or from external circumstances, make use of infertile periods so as not to conceive new life?
- Did I suggest to another person the use of birth-control pills or another artificial method of preventing pregnancy (like condoms)?

(On abortion, contraception, sterilization, etc., see also **THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT**).

THE SEVENTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS

- Did I steal? What object did I steal? How much money, or how much was the object worth? Did I give it back, or at least have the intention of doing so? Did I knowingly accept stolen goods or services (cable television, Internet access) without payment?

- Have I done or caused damage to another person's property? To what extent?
- Did I harm anyone by deception, fraud, or coercion in business contracts or transactions?
- Did I unnecessarily spend beyond my means? Do I spend too much money out of vanity or caprice?
- Do I give alms according to my capacity?
- Was I envious of my neighbor's goods?
- Did I neglect to pay my debts?
- Did I knowingly accept stolen goods?
- Did I desire to steal?
- Have I lacked diligence or was I lazy in putting in the work required of me?
- Was I greedy? Do I have an excessively materialistic view of life?

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

- Did I tell lies? Did I repair any damage that may have resulted as a consequence of this?
- Have I consciously withheld unconfessed mortal sins from my confessor because of shame or other reasons?
- Have I unjustly or rashly accused others?
- Did I sin by detraction, that is, by telling the faults of another person without necessity?
- Did I sin by calumny, that is, by telling derogatory lies about another person?
- Did I engage in gossip, backbiting, lying, or slander?
- Did I reveal a secret without due cause?

Shorter Examination of Conscience

- When was my last good Confession? Did I receive Communion or other sacraments while in the state of mortal sin? Did I intentionally fail to confess some mortal sin in my previous Confession? Do I try to go to sacramental confession every month or so? Do I pray every day? Do I envy other people, their possessions, their accomplishments, their manner of dress, their wealth, their apparent “good life”?
- Did I willfully and seriously doubt my faith, or put myself in danger of losing it by reading literature hostile to Catholic teachings or by getting involved with non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious activities: palm reading, fortune telling, Ouija boards, Tarot cards, or consult a medium who claims to have the ability to contact the dead?
- Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I curse or take a false oath? Did I use bad language? Do I swear needlessly?
- Did I miss Mass on a Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation through my own fault, without any serious reason? Did I fast and abstain on the prescribed days?
- Did I disobey my parents or lawful superiors in important matters?
- Did I fail to perform my duties diligently at work? Am I lazy or negligent in fulfilling my responsibilities at work? Do I make good use of my time at work? Do I allow myself to be distracted at work with my smart phone or other electronic devices? Do I take items from work (steal)?
- Was I selfish in how I treated others, especially my spouse, my brothers and sisters, my relatives,

or my friends? Did I hatefully, quarrel with anyone, or desire revenge? Did I refuse to forgive? Did I cause physical injury or even death? Did I get drunk? Did I eat to excess? Did I take illicit drugs? Did I consent to, advise, or actively take part in an abortion?

- Did I willfully look at indecent pictures or watch immoral movies? Did I read immoral books or magazines? Did I access pornography on the Internet? Did I engage in impure jokes or conversations? Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts or feelings? Did I commit impure acts, alone or with others? Did I physically touch another (or persons) inappropriately at work? Did I have sexual relations outside of marriage with the opposite sex or the same sex? Did I masturbate? Did I take contraceptive or abortifacient pills, or use other artificial means in order to prevent conception?
- Did I steal or damage another's property? How much? Have I made reparation for the damages done? Have I been honest in my business relations?
- Did I tell lies? Did I sin by slander? By detraction—telling unknown grave faults of others without necessity? Did I judge others rashly in serious matters? Have I tried to make restitution for any damage of reputation that I have caused?

Before Confession

Be truly sorry for your sins.

The essential act of Penance, on the part of the penitent, is *contrition*, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit it again, out of the love one has for God (which is reborn with repentance). Understood in this way, *con-*

trition is, therefore, the beginning and the heart of *conversion*, of that evangelical *metanoia* which brings the person back to God like the Prodigal Son returning to his father, and which has in the Sacrament of Penance its visible sign, and which perfects attrition (imperfect contrition—born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and other penalties threatening the sinner).²

The *resolution to avoid committing these sins in the future* (amendment) is a sure sign that your sorrow is genuine and authentic.

This does not mean that one has to promise never to fall again into sin. A resolution to try to avoid the near occasions of sin suffices for true repentance. God's grace in cooperation with the intention to rectify your life will give you the strength to resist and overcome temptation in the future.

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

or :

**My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong
and failing to do good,**

2. Cf. St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Pœnitentia*, 31; cf. CCC, 1453.

**I have sinned against you
whom I should love above all things.
I firmly intend with your help,
to do penance,
to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ
suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy.**

or :

I confess... (p.70).

You are now ready to go to Confession. The rite is presented on page 312.

During Confession

- You can begin your confession by making the Sign of the Cross and greeting the priest: **"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."**
- The priest gives you a blessing. One response you might give is these words St. Peter said to Christ: **"Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you"** (Jn 21:17). One then continues with the time since one's last confession: **"My last good confession was . . . (approximately how many weeks, months or years)."**
- *Say the sins that you remember.* Start with the one that is most difficult to say; after this it will be easier to mention the rest. If you received general absolution, tell this to the priest and mention the sins forgiven then.
- If you do not know how to confess, or you feel uneasy or ashamed, simply ask the priest to as-

sist you. Be assured that he will help you to make a good confession. Simply answer his questions without hiding anything out of shame or fear. Place your trust in God: he is your merciful Father and wants to forgive you.

- If you do not remember any serious sins, be sure to confess at least some of your venial sins, adding at the end: **"I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life, especially for..."** (mention in general any past sin for which you are particularly sorry; for example, all my sins against charity)."
- The priest will assign you some penance and give you some advice to help you to be a better Christian.
- Listen to the words of absolution attentively. At the end answer: **"Amen."** Be willing to do the penance as soon as possible. This *penance* will diminish the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven.

After Confession

- *Give thanks* to God for having forgiven you once again.
- Promptly and devoutly *fulfill the penance* given by the priest. Although you may receive holy Communion even before performing your penance, it is advisable to do it as soon as possible.
- If you *recall some serious sin* that you forgot to tell, rest assured that it has been forgiven with the others, but be sure to include it in your next Confession.

Rite of Confession

After the customary greetings, the penitent crosses himself:

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

The priest urges the penitent to have confidence in God. The priest may say:

May the Lord be in your heart

and help you to confess your sins with true sorrow.

Either the priest or the penitent may read or say by heart some words taken from the holy Scripture about the mercy of God and repentance, e.g.:

"Lord, you know all things;

you know that I love you" (Jn 21:17).

The penitent accuses himself of his sins. The priest gives opportune advice, imposes the penance on him, and invites the penitent to manifest his contrition. The penitent may say:

Lord Jesus, Son of God,

have mercy on me, a sinner.

The priest gives him the absolution:

God, the Father of mercies, | through the death and
resurrection of his Son | has reconciled the world to
himself | and sent the Holy Spirit among us | for
the forgiveness of sins; | through the ministry of the
Church, | may God give you pardon and peace, |
and I absolve you from your sins | in the name of
the Father, and of the Son, ✠ | and of the Holy Spirit.

The penitent answers: **Amen.**

The priest dismisses the penitent with this or any of the alternative formulae:

May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, | the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints, | whatever good you do and suffering you endure | heal your sins, help you to grow in holiness, | and reward you with eternal life. | Go in peace.

The penitent should fulfill the penance imposed.