

A GUIDE *to* MAKING *your* CONFESSION

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

At a time and place convenient for you, when you can be alone, and with pen and paper at hand, examine your conscience in the light of God's love and of your own state in life.

Begin by reminding yourself that sin is not so much the breaking of a law as a refusal to love. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Then, ask the Holy Spirit's guidance and blessing. Perhaps you will want to use this collect:

Come. O Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind and inflame my heart, that I may worthily confess all my sins and, being truly penitent, may both amend my life and serve thee faithfully; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Then review your life since the time of your last confession. Look at your relationship with God and others in the places where you live your life; look at how you have conducted yourself in these places; look at how you have treated yourself and others; reflect on thoughts you can remember having and what you did with these thoughts: did you keep returning to sinful ones; did you express these in word or deed?

Write down on your paper all the sins against God, neighbor and self which you can **remember**. The word 'remember' is very important. In making your confession, you do NOT confess anything you think you may have committed, but of which you have no *specific* memory. You may confess only those wrongs which you have a *specific* memory of having done or those good things which you *specifically* remember having had the opportunity to do, but which you refused to do.

A confession must be **specific**. No broad, general statements, like "I have fallen into pride"...but, "I have fallen into the sin of pride in these specific ways: I tried to force my spouse to submit to my will one time by silent treatment for a period of several hours; another time by verbal abuse. Twice, I bragged about my academic honors in order to impress others. Once I held myself aloof from others because I felt I was not as 'cultured' as they and did not wish to risk being 'put down' by them." Specificity includes declaring how often you think you have fallen into some particular sin, the circumstances of it, and what you think your motivation was.

Once you have written down any sins which first come to mind, then, and only then, use some such aid to examination, such as the following "sin list," to act as a sieve for your memory. Read through the list, asking yourself its questions, and writing down the specific ways in which you have fallen into any on the list:

PRIDE is at the root of all sins; it is putting oneself rather than God at the center of our lives and trying to make God and others put us at their center.

Have I intentionally failed to

- Worship God every Sunday and holy day of obligation in his Church?
- Trust God in day-to-day life?
- Accept my work as part of my vocation from God and to seek to glorify him by my exercise of it?
- Make time in my life for personal attentiveness to God (a discipline of prayer) and for my own spiritual growth (e.g. through a discipline of study)?
- Refrain from abusing God's holy Name?

Have I been caught up in getting more and more of anything from myself instead of giving from what God has given me of time, talent, and treasure to his glory and for the good of others?

Have I been vain, arrogant, snobbish? Or have I demeaned myself in any way, considering myself of much less worth or value than others? Have I lied for any reason?

Do I admit my own need for help and ask for it? Do I accept myself, despite my limitations and my weaknesses?

ENVY results from fear of not having or losing something I want for myself and is expressed in dissatisfaction with my own life and begrudging others their gifts and good fortune.

Have I been annoyed when other people were praised? Have I taken pleasure in the misfortune of others? Have I been malicious or contemptuous...shown prejudice in any respect?

ANGER blinds my judgment and tries to eliminate any obstacle to making myself the center of all life.

Have I tried to create a pleasant, constructive environment in all the places and among all the people I live my life? Have I been thoughtless and cruel towards others? Have I tried to foster and maintain friendships and given genuine respect and support to their people? Have I been fair and honest in my relationships? Have I respected the rights and sensitivities of others? Do I tend to categorize people unfairly or ignore them because they are different?

Have I been angry at the faults of others...of myself? Have I given into resentment...been cynical? Attacked another in thought, word or deed? Have I refused to forgive others, sought to make them "pay" for what I think they "did" to me? Have I been hostile, nagging, rude, pouting? Refused to pray for or do good to those I feel are my "enemies?"

SLOTH is not merely laziness; it includes indifference and extends to the refusal of joy by making no attempts to combat boredom.

Have I neglected my spiritual life because it seemed so "dry?" Have I procrastinated, wasted time, or failed to do my best? Have I ignored those who are needy, unpopular, or difficult to get along with? Have I spent too much time on TV or other forms of self-entertainment? Have I neglected the duties which a constructive and responsible person should render to my home, my parish, my community and society? Am I trying to improve the quality of life around me, or do I foul up the environment and waste the good things I have? Am I working at becoming a better person and better Christian? Am I making the most of my talents, my education and my opportunities?

AVARICE (or *Covetousness*) is the inordinate love of material things and the status, power, or sense of security they bring.

Have I made “the good life” or “a higher standard of living” into my god? Have I been domineering, patronizing, extravagant, stingy? Have I stolen, cheated, given bribes? Am I a good steward of my time, talent and treasure, obedient to what God expects of me in each of these areas of his gifts to me?

GLUTTONY is an undue attention to physical pleasure or comfort; it includes being fussy or fastidious, as well as a lack of discipline.

Have I over-indulged in food or drink? Have I refused to discipline my body by fasting or practicing abstinence? Have I neglected my health? Have I failed to get enough rest, exercise, recreation? Have I condemned various pleasures in life as evil in themselves? Have I been fussy about my person or any matter?

LUST is misuse of our gift of sexuality for selfish ends and in violation of how God intends us to use it in accordance with our state of life (married or single).

Am I grateful for having been created by God a sexual creature, a creature with a body who relates to him and others through my body? Am I desirous of growing in sexual maturity and responsibility so that I use my body in a way which is pleasing to God and do not misuse my sexual powers in selfish or exploitative ways?

Have I been unfaithful in any way to my spouse? Have I engaged in sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage? Have I lured others into sexual sins? Have I been immodest? Have I been prudish? Have I condemned or repressed the legitimate use of my being a sexual creature, whether in marriage, or in the expression of friendship or affection by such as a chaste hug or kiss or touch? Have I been deliberately cruel to persons or to animals?

MAKING YOUR CONFESSION

Find out from the priest to whom you will make your confession how the Sacrament of Reconciliation is administered by him: at the altar rail, in a confessional booth, in his study?

When you get to the place where you will make your confession, review your list and then make an act of contrition, perhaps using the following prayer:

O my God, I believe in thee, I hope in thee, and I love thee. I grieve that I have so often offended thee by my sins, and I resolve henceforth by thy grace and mercy to lead a better life.

If you have to wait for others who are ahead of you, you may find it helpful to pray the Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

After you have made your confession, listen carefully to any advice which the priest gives you. Before pronouncing Absolution, he may give you a *Penance*, something to say or to do by which you express your thanks to God and his Church for their forgiveness of you. Penance should be done either before leaving the place of confession or before your day comes to an end. If you do not understand what you are supposed to say or do, tell the priest and he will explain it more carefully.

Whether the priest gives you a penance or not, do remember soon after your confession to thank God and his Church for their forgiveness and to ask God for his help in resisting temptation:

O most merciful god, accept my unworthy thanks for thy great mercy in washing away all my sins. May the grace of this Absolution strengthen and sustain me, and may thy great mercy defend me from all the assaults and temptations of Satan in the days ahead. Amen.



A FORM OF CONFESSION

(see *The Book of Common Prayer* [1979] pp 447-452)

The Penitent begins

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

The Priest blessed the Penitent, after which the Penitent says

I confess to Almighty God, to his Church, and to you, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially _____. For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly beg forgiveness of God and his Church, and ask you for counsel, direction, and absolution.

Here the Priest may offer counsel, direction, and comfort.

The Priest then pronounces Absolution, after which he says

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, and who conferred power on his Church to forgive sins, absolve you through my ministry by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and restore you in the perfect peace of the Church. *Amen.*

Priest The Lord has put away all your sins.

Penitent Thanks be to God.

The Priest concludes

Go (or abide) in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.