

Preparing for the Sacrament of Penance

As you prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, ask God the Holy Spirit's help to examine your conscience well by prayerfully reviewing your conduct in light of the commandments and the example of Christ. The questions in this pamphlet should assist you in making a thorough review. Tell the priest the specific kind of sins you have committed and, to the best of your ability, how many times you have committed them since your last good confession.

To make a good confession, you need to confess any mortal (gravely serious) sins you have committed, since you can obtain forgiveness for your venial (smaller) sins by sacrifices, acts of charity, prayer and other pious actions. Confession of venial sins, however, is very helpful for avoiding sin and advancing in holiness toward Heaven. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent" (CCC 1857). If you are in doubt about whether a sin is mortal or venial, mention it to the priest.

Remember that God loves you as a beloved son or daughter. The point of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is to be restored to a relationship of holiness with this God who loves you. So, as you examine your conscience, focus more on the "God of the commandments" than the "commandments of God." For that reason, ask God the Holy Spirit to give you real sorrow for the sins you've committed out of love for God and a deep resolve, out of sorrow, to try never to commit these sins again.

Examination of Conscience

Catholics for centuries have found it profitable to examine their consciences in light of the Ten Commandments. Penitents are encouraged to expand on them in their prayerful review of their conduct.

FIRST COMMANDMENT

"I am the Lord your God.

You shall not have strange gods before Me." (Ex 20:2,3)

- Have I really loved God above all things or have I made other things — money, clothes, sports, TV, music, pleasure, peer approval, or a famous celebrity — more important than God?
- Have I made time for God each day in prayer? Do I pray only when I need something or do I also seek to praise and thank Him, too?
- Have I made a serious effort to get to know my faith well, since my relationship with God is supposed to be the most important thing in my life?
- Have I endangered my faith in God by superstitious or evil practices, like witchcraft, wicca, ouija boards, fortune tellers and so on?
- Am I wholehearted in accepting and following God's teaching or do I only pick and choose only the parts of His message that please me?

- Do I believe the false idea that one religion is just as good as another?
- Have I denied my faith before others? Have I been willing to affirm, defend and practice my faith before others and not just in private?

SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain." (Ex 20:7)

- Do I love and have reverence for God's Name?
- Have I used God's name carelessly, in anger or in surprise?
- Have I called down evil on anyone?
- Have I used foul language?
- Do I try my best to fulfill the promises and resolutions that I have made toward God, especially those of my Baptism and Confirmation?
- Have I shown disrespect for the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, the Church and those who have consecrated their lives to God?

THIRD COMMANDMENT

"Remember to keep holy the Sabbath Day." (Ex 20:8)

- Did I miss Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation through my own fault?
- Have I really prayed and paid attention during Holy Mass or have I just gone through the motions? Do I participate at Mass by singing and praying the responses, or do I simply sit as a spectator wanting to be entertained? Do I pay attention to the Word of God and try to apply it to my life?
- Have I arrived at Mass late due to carelessness or left early without a serious reason?
- Have I kept the Eucharistic fast before Holy Mass?
- Have I received Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?
- Did I do work on Sunday that was not necessary? Have I used Sunday just as part of the "weekend" or as a day for acts of love toward God, my family and those in need?

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

"Honor your father and your mother." (Ex 20:12)

- Have I failed to be grateful and to thank my parents for the sacrifices they have made for me?
- Have I disobeyed my parents or those in authority (principals, teachers, coaches, police, etc.)?
- Have I disrespected my family members or treated them poorly, by insulting, mocking, ridiculing or yelling at them?
- Do I listen to my parents' reasoning when they say "no" to me?

- Do I try to bring happiness and peace to my family or do I cause tension and division?
- Do I offer to help out around the house?
- Do I make time to visit my elderly relatives and those in poor health?
- Have I ignored or avoided my old friends in order to be part of the popular crowd?

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not kill." (Ex 20:13)

- Have I physically harmed someone or tried to do so? Have I been violent in my words or actions?
- Have I intentionally cut or harmed my body, forgetting that it is meant to be a Temple of God?
- Have I done drugs, allowed myself to become intoxicated or done other things that will damage my health? Have I sold or distributed illegal drugs?
- Have I put others down to feel better about myself?
- Have I caused another to sin?
- Have I held grudges or tried to get even with others? Have I hated or failed to forgive someone?
- Do I get angry easily and lose my temper? Do I act rudely, impolitely or arrogantly toward others?
- Did I attempt suicide or entertain thoughts of taking my life?
- Have I harmed animals, littered or been destructive to the environment?
- Did I have an abortion, or encourage or help someone else to have one?

SIXTH & NINTH COMMANDMENTS

"You shall not commit adultery." (Ex 20:14)

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." (Ex 20:17)

- Have I remained chaste and pure in mind and body, as God asks of me?
- Do I understand and appreciate the gift of my sexuality and desire to save the gift of myself for marriage?
- Did I deliberately look at impure TV programs, computer sites, videos, pictures, or movies?
- Have I fondled or kissed another person lustfully? Have I treated others, in my deeds or thoughts, as objects?
- Did I commit impure acts with myself (masturbation) or with others through adultery (sex with a married person), fornication (premarital sex) or homosexual activity?
- Have I been an occasion of sin for others by acting or dressing immodestly?
- Do I have a reverence for the institution of marriage as God made it, a union by God of one man and one woman?

SEVENTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS

"You shall not steal." (Ex 20:15)

"You shall not covet your neighbor's goods." (Ex 20:17)

- Have I been greedy or jealous of things others have? Do I resent their popularity or success?
- Have I nagged my parents into buying things my friends have, or complained when they did not purchase something for me?
- Did I shoplift, steal or take things that didn't belong to me? Did I receive stolen goods? Have I returned or made restitution for things I have stolen?
- Did I damage others' property without owning up to it and repairing it?
- Have I played fairly? Have I cheated at school or in games?
- Have I "forgotten" to return something I borrowed?
- Have I wasted time, goods or food?
- Do I generously share what I have with the needy?
- Do I use the money I have responsibly?
- Am I generous in supporting the mission of the Church? Do I participate with my time, talents and treasure in the apostolic and charitable works of my parish community?

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Ex 20:16)

- Have I lied?
- Have I kept my promises?
- Did I break a secret or a confidence?
- Have I injured another's reputation by lying about them (calumny) or have I hurt others by revealing true hidden faults about them (detraction)?
- Have I gossiped or passed on rumors?
- Have I judged others?
- Did I insult or tease others with the intention of hurting them?

OTHER SINS

- Have I helped others when they've needed it?
- Did I intentionally refuse to mention some grave sin in my previous confessions?
- Have I fulfilled my obligation to go to confession at least once a year and of going worthily to Holy Communion at least during the Easter season?
- Did I fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?
- Did I abstain from meat on the Fridays of Lent or Ash Wednesday?

Going to Confession

The penitent and the priest begin with the sign of the Cross, saying:

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The priest urges the penitent to have confidence in God with these or similar words:

May the Lord be in your heart and help you to confess your sins with true sorrow.

The priest may read or say a passage from Sacred Scripture after which the penitent then states:

Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (however many days, weeks, months or years) since my last confession.

The penitent then states his or her sins. For the confession to be valid, the penitent must confess all of the mortal sins he or she is aware of having committed since the last confession, be sorry for them, and have a firm purpose of amendment to try not to commit the same sins in the future.

After this, the priest will generally give some advice to the penitent and impose a penance. Then he will ask the penitent to make an act of contrition. The penitent may do so in his or her own words, or may say one of many memorized acts of contrition like the following:

Act of Contrition

O My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you, whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with the help of your grace, 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, O Lord, have mercy.

After this the priest will absolve the penitent in the following words:

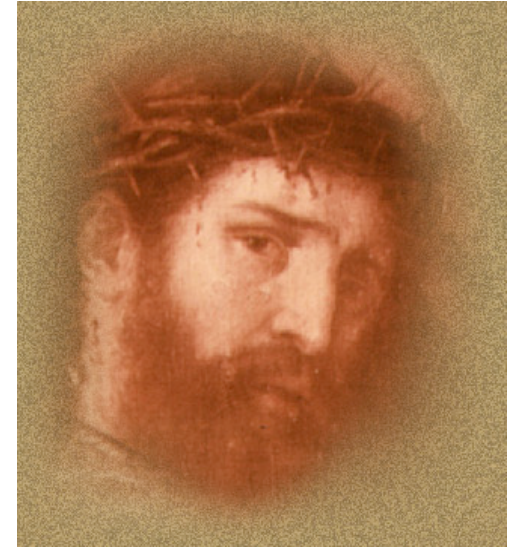
God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father,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

The penitent makes the sign of the Cross and answers:

Amen

The priest will then dismiss the penitent with a short prayer and encouragement. The penitent should then try to fulfill the penance imposed if it is something that can be done quickly.

Encountering Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation



A Guide for Teens To Making a Thorough Examination of Conscience and a Good Confession

"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."

Pope John Paul II, San Antonio, Texas
September 13, 1987