

# A Guide to Confession



and Examination of Conscience

## Penance

It is impossible for us to respond to Our Lady's plea at Fatima for prayer and conversion without making frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance. In fact, our personal conversion from sin to the love of Jesus Christ is authenticated through the grace that comes to us in the Sacrament of Penance.

Before we are even able to begin to make reparation to God for other people's sins, we must confront our own sinfulness and seek to put Christ's perfect charity into practice in our lives.

Our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation on the evening of His Resurrection. Appearing to His Apostles, He gave them the power to forgive all sins in His name. In that first meeting of the risen Christ and His Apostles, the Lord said to them, and in reality, to all priests of every time and place: "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.*"

The confession of sins to a priest is Christ's idea and plan. In confession we bring our soiled and wounded souls to Christ and receive the fullness of His forgiveness through the absolution of the priest. Christ wants us to know and to feel how deeply He understands us, loves us, and wants to heal and transform us in His grace. This is why He wills that forgiveness be a concrete experience in His Church. We approach Him through His priest and again - through the priest - receive His merciful forgiveness.

*On our part what must we do to experience the forgiveness of our crucified and risen Lord?*

### Examination of Conscience

First, we must ask the Holy Spirit to help us see ourselves as God sees us. We must beg Him to help us to know our weaknesses and the areas of self-centeredness in our lives.

It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and draws us to the heart of Jesus in the Sacrament of Penance. It is He who convinces us of our desperate need for the healing and mercy of Christ. Seeking the truth about ourselves is what we mean by the *Examination of Conscience*. There are many ways to do this. We may consider our observance of the commandments. Some people examine their imitation of the virtues of Jesus and Mary.

At different times in our lives we may use different methods. However, the important thing is to allow the Holy Spirit to show us where we need conversion. It is

always important to realize that God has given us an objective law, and sin is a self-centered, self-seeking, violation of that law of love. We must always seek our moral guidance from the official teaching office of the Church.

### Sorrow for Sins

Secondly, we must seek *true contrition* for our sins from the Holy Spirit. In this regard, it is valuable to think frequently of the suffering of the crucified Christ and to recall that He bore the guilt of our sins on the cross. We must realize that our sins have wounded Christ and His Church. If our contrition is real it must include a sincere desire to abandon sin and all of the occasions that lead us to sin. We call this our *Purpose of Amendment*.

The Church teaches us that it is God's will that we confess all mortal sins to the priest as well as the number of times we have committed them. The necessity of the confession of mortal sins is of Divine Institution (cf. Jn. 20: 22-23). This sincere and blunt self-accusation before Christ in the person of His priest is what is known as *the integrity of the Sacrament of Penance*. We realize, of course, that God knows all that we are and all that we have done before we confess our sins. However, it is Christ's will that we humble ourselves, admit our guilt and see His forgiveness through the priest who at the moment of confession and absolution is Christ Himself.



### Frequent Confession Encouraged

I should also point out that the Church encourages us to go to confession frequently even if we are not guilty of serious sin. The confession of venial sins helps us to grow in humility and charity and, above all, it helps us to root out all sin and attachment to sin in our lives.

Last of all, in order to meet the merciful Christ in this Sacrament, we must sincerely desire to make reparation to God for our sins through acts of prayer, penance and charity.

Once we have expressed sorrow for our sins by humbly confessing them to the priest, have resolved to make amends for them and have accepted the penance the priest has given us, we receive the embrace of Christ's mercy and forgiveness through sacramental absolution. It is worthwhile for us to meditate often on the words of absolution which are spoken to us by the Lord Himself in the person of His priest:

*"God the Father of Mercy, 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 grant 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. Amen."*

### *Monthly Confession ~*

#### *Necessity for First Saturday Reparation*

We who seek to respond to Our Lady's Fatima Message of prayer and penance, must frequently make use of the Sacrament of Penance. Monthly confession is an essential component of our First Saturday Devotion in honor of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Besides preparing ourselves more thoroughly for the reception of penance, we should also seek ways of helping others – in particular the young – to discover the peace of Christ's forgiveness in the frequent reception of this Sacrament.

Our Lady is the refuge of sinners and the Mother of Mercy. Let us turn to Her and ask Her to be our guide and our Mother on the way of perfect conversion to Jesus.

## Examination of Conscience

- .. I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.
- Do I give God time every day in prayer?
  - Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
  - Have I been involved with superstitious practices or have I been involved with the occult?
  - Do I seek to surrender myself to God's Word as taught by the Church?
  - Have I ever received Communion in the state of mortal sin?
  - Have I ever deliberately told a lie in Confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?
- ! You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Have I used God's name in vain: lightly or carelessly?
  - Have I been angry with God?
  - Have I wished evil upon any other person?
  - Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.
- Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation?
  - Have I tried to observe Sunday as a family day or day of rest?
  - Do I do needless work on Sunday?
4. Honor your father and your mother.
- Do I honor and obey my parents?
  - Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
  - Have I given my family good religious example?
  - Do I try to bring peace into my home life?
  - Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?
5. You shall not kill.
- Have I had an abortion or encouraged anyone to have an abortion?
  - Have I physically harmed anyone?
  - Have I abused alcohol or drugs?
  - Did I give scandal to anyone, thereby leading them into sin?
  - Have I been angry or resentful?
  - Have I harbored hatred in my heart?
  - Have I mutilated myself through any form of sterilization?
  - Have I encouraged or condoned sterilization?
6. You shall not commit adultery.
- Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thought and action?
  - Have I engaged in any sexual activity outside of marriage?
  - Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control in my marriage?
  - Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life?
  - Have I been guilty of masturbation?
  - Have I sought to control my thoughts?
  - Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other people as objects?
  - Have I been guilty of any homosexual activity?
  - Do I seek to be chaste in my thoughts, words, and actions?
  - Am I careful to dress modestly?

7. **You shall not steal.**
  - Have I stolen what is not mine?
  - Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?
  - Do I waste time at work, school or home?
  - Do I gamble excessively, thereby denying my family of their needs?
  - Do I pay my debts promptly?
  - Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?
  
8. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**
  - Have I lied?
  - Have I gossiped?
  - Have I spoken behind someone else's back?
  - Am I sincere in my dealings with others?
  - Am I critical, negative, or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
  - Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
  
9. **You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.**
  - Have I consented to impure thoughts?
  - Have I caused them by impure reading, movies, conversation, or curiosity?
  - Do I seek to control my imagination?
  - Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations?
  
10. **You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.**
  - Am I jealous of what other people have?
  - Do I envy the families or possessions of others?
  - Am I greedy or selfish?
  - Are material possessions the purpose of my life?
  - Do I trust that God will care for all of my material and spiritual needs?

### *Helps to Grow in Holiness*

- Do I consciously seek to imitate Christ in all of my dealings with others?
- Do I have a confessor who gives me spiritual direction?
- Do I try to go to confession at least once a month as part of the First Saturday Devotion?
- Do I ask Our Lady to help me to examine my conscience and to make a sincere and honest confession?
- Do I seek to lead others to make frequent use of the Sacraments?

### *How to go to Confession*

You always have the option to go to confession anonymously, that is, behind the screen or face to face, if you so desire.

After the priest greets you in the name of Christ, make the sign of the cross. He may choose to include a reading from Scripture for reflection. Then say: "*Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been (state how long) since my last confession. These are my sins.*"

Tell your sins simply and honestly to the priest. (You might even want to discuss the circumstances and the root causes of your sins and ask the priest for advice or direction.)

Listen to the advice the priest gives you and accept the penance from him. Then make an Act of Contrition for your sins.

The priest will dismiss you with the words of praise: "Give thanks to the Lord for His is good" or "the Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace." And you respond by saying "*His mercy endures forever*" or "*Thanks be to God.*"

Spend some time with Our Lord thanking and praising Him for the gift of His mercy. Try to perform your penance as soon as possible.

### *An Act of Contrition*

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they have offended Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love.

I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.

### *An Act of Contrition\**

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 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.

\*From the Rites of the Catholic Church as revised by decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI. English translation prepared by The International Commission of English in the Liturgy.