



The Sacrament of Penance

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world!

How to go to confession:

- Begin in prayer by asking God for help.
- Review your life since your last confession. The Ten Commandments may be a good place to start. There is a short examination of conscience on the back of this sheet also.
- Tell God how sorry you are for these sins and how you resolve not to commit these sins again.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you confess your sins fully and, if necessary, courageously, and ask the Spirit's blessing and guidance over the confessor's advice, counsel, and penance.
- Wait in line patiently and prayerfully. Pray not only for yourself, but also pray for the person receiving the sacrament. If it is taking a long time for a single penitent (more than 5 minutes), go ahead and knock on the door to remind the priest and penitent that there are still people in line, but do not enter.
- When you enter the confessional, close the door behind you. You may use the screen for anonymous confession or you may go face-to-face. Begin with the sign of the cross and/or the greeting,

“Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been _____ (days/weeks/months/years) since my last confession. These are my sins: _____.”

- Speak in a normal tone of voice and rate of speed.
- Don't confess *tendencies* or *faults* or *flaws* (or those of others), just confess *your own sins*.
- If the priest asks any questions, answer simply. Often he is trying to clear up 'code' or euphemisms in order to understand the nature and extent of one's struggle with sin—he's not looking for explanations or excuses. (“Breaking the sixth commandment” could mean any of a hundred different things.)
- Don't worry about what the priest is thinking about you. He is usually impressed with your courage and faith. He is also bound under pain of sin and excommunication to never reveal the contents of a confession he hears—even at the cost of his own life.
- Indicate to the priest when you are finished with your confession (so he doesn't have to guess about this). Commonly, one closes by asking absolution and penance for 'these and all the sins of my life'.
- Listen carefully as the priest assigns a penance and tell him that you will do it. It may be a prayer, a good deed, or another action intended to help detach a person from the habit of sin. If you don't completely understand your penance or if you are unable to do it, *ask questions and/or let the priest know*.
- The priest will ask you to recite an *Act of Contrition*. (If you do not know one, it will be provided, but make a resolution to learn it.) There are many versions which can be used, but here is a common one:

“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.”

- Listen attentively as the priest pronounces the prayer of absolution. It is Christ who forgives your sins through the Church and the ministry of the priest. Make the sign of the cross as the priest blesses you.
- The priest will then dismiss you. He will say (in these or similar words): “Go in peace”. You respond: **“Thanks be to God”**.
- Go to the Church and offer your own prayers of thanksgiving for having been forgiven. As soon as practical and possible, complete your penance. You are forgiven and may receive Communion if you are unable to do your penance immediately, but don't forget it!
- Encourage others to receive this sacrament of God's love.

An examination of Conscience:

Recall your sins. Prayerfully ask yourself what you have done with full knowledge and full consent against God's law and the Church's commandments:

- Do I come to the Sacrament of Penance with a spirit of trust, but not presumption, that the Lord will heal me from all my sins? Am I truly sorry for my sins?
- Did I pray to God every day? Have I thanked God for his gifts to me? Do I place God first in my life?
- Did I put my faith in danger through readings hostile to Catholic teachings or by involvement in non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious practices: palm reading, fortune-telling, horoscopes, modern prophecy?
- Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I curse or take a false oath? Am I faithful to my vows or promises as a spouse/religious/priest? Do I avoid foul language?
- Did I miss Mass on Sundays or Holy Days through my own fault? Am I attentive at Mass? Did I come late or leave early? Did I keep fast and abstinence on the prescribed days? Do I fast before receiving Communion?
- Did I disobey or disrespect my parents or other lawful authority (teacher, employer, civil laws) in important matters? Do I pray for them?
- Did I hate or quarrel with anyone, or desire revenge? Have I refused to forgive? Have I 'kept the peace' to avoid having to deal with a difficult situation?
- Have I risked my life or that of another person through malice, negligence, daring, or inattentiveness?
- Did I get drunk or use illicit drugs? Did I illegally or intemperately provide alcohol or drugs for others, esp. minors?
- Did I consent to, recommend or advise, or actively take part in an abortion or other acts against the dignity of human life such as contraception? Do I assist those in need with good counsel?
- Did I willfully look at pornography or entertain impure thoughts or engage in impure conversations or actions? Did I lead others to do so? Do I dress modestly and appropriately? Have I acted out of vanity?
- Was I unfaithful to my spouse physically or emotionally? Did I engage in sexual activity outside of marriage? Have I worked at improving my marriage?
- Did I steal or damage another's property? Have I been honest in my business relations? Do I put in an honest day's work? Do I compensate employees fairly? Am I in unreasonable or inappropriate debt by overspending?
- Have I been responsive to the needs of the poor and respected the dignity of others? Do I envy the rich? Do I provide for the needs of the local and universal Church according to my means? Am I a cheerful giver?
- Did I tell lies or sin by taking the good name of another? Do I judge others rashly in serious matters? Gossip?
- Have I envied other people of their talents or property?

FASTING PRAYER GOOD WORKS

The Seven Capital Sins and their Opposite Virtues:

(c.f. Prov 6: 16-19)

Lust — involves excessive or obsessive thoughts or desires, often (but not exclusively) of a sexual nature. Love of God is secondary to love of the goods and pleasures of this world. The opposing virtue is *Chastity*.

Gluttony — involves over-indulgence or over-consumption to the point of waste. In particular, the sin of gluttony is an offense against the rightful needs of the poor. The virtue to counter gluttony is *Temperance*.

Greed (Avarice) — is also a sin of excess applied to the acquisition of wealth. One's hope and protection against the challenges in life is placed in worldly goods instead of God. Greed is defeated through *Generosity*.

Sloth — is not so much laziness as much as it is indifference to God's gifts, particularly when one does not value or use these gifts to their full potential. The countering virtue is *Diligence*.

Wrath — is the inordinate and uncontrolled feelings of hatred and anger. One should be righteously angry against injustices of the world, but when this leads to selfishness or self-interest, it is a perversion of justice leading to revenge or spite. To overcome wrath, one must practice *Forgiveness*.

Envy — is the sorrow over another's good. *Kindness* counters envy.

Pride — is the original and most serious of the deadly sins. Pride is the love of one's self over God and neighbor. *Humility* teaches us how to overcome pride.

Some prayers for penitents:

Prayer to St. Michael: St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits who wander about the world, seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

The Memorare: Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your mercy, hear and answer me. Amen.

Prayer of St. Francis: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!

The Ten Commandments (Ex 20: 2-17)

You shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind.

1. You shall have no gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of God in vain.
3. You shall keep holy the Sabbath.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

4. You shall honor your father and mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's property.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

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