

A GUIDE TO CONFESSION

(ALSO KNOWN AS THE SACRAMENT OF “RECONCILIATION” OR “PENANCE”)

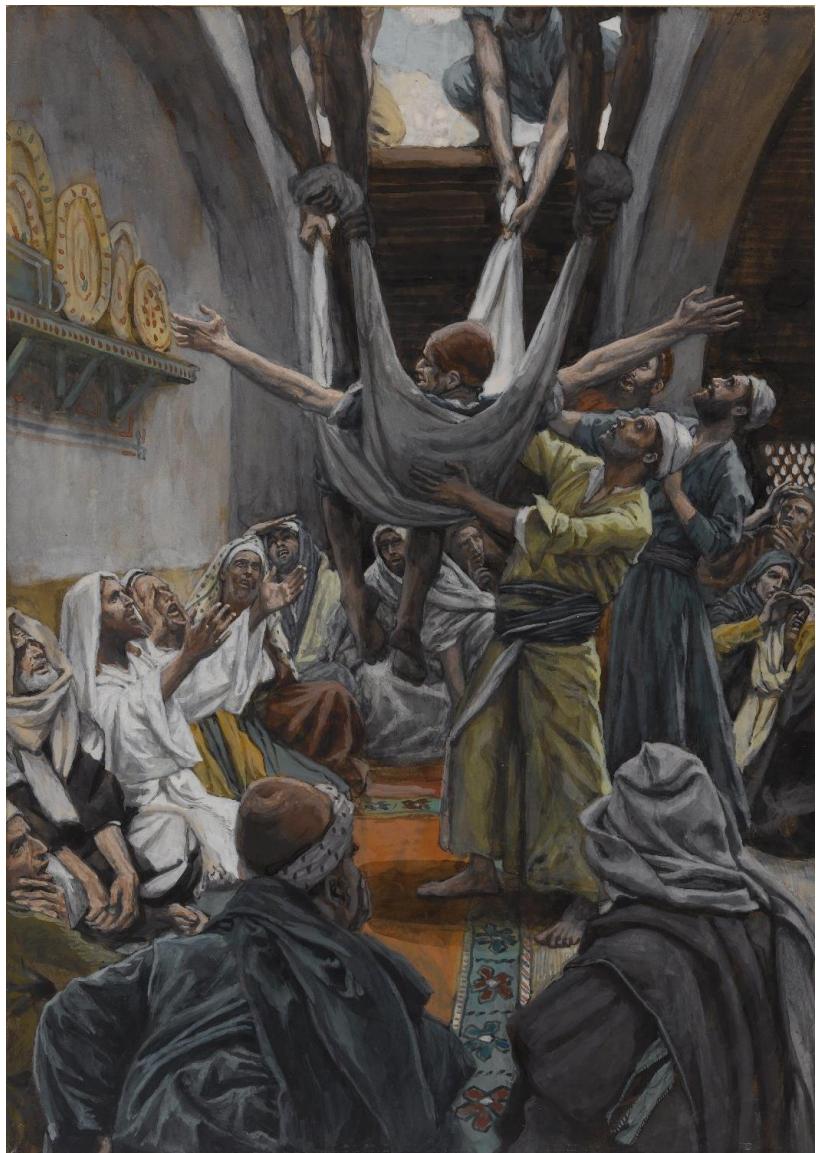
Christ forgave sins (Luke 5:18-24) and passed this power on to Peter, who was to act as his representative: “Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven” (Matt 16: 13-19). Jesus also gave the power of absolution to the apostles as a whole: “Whose sins you shall forgive, they shall be forgiven, and whose sins you shall retain, they shall be retained” (John 20:23). We also have the testimony of two saints, James and John: “Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16; 1 John 1:8-9). Jesus gave us the sacrament of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. He also gave us the sacrament of reconciliation for sins that we commit after baptism. Why not use the gifts he gave us to experience his Mercy?

Preparing for Confession

The Sacrament of Penance is a wonderful sacrament for forgiveness and mercy. All we need to do is be sorry for our sins. But in order to know what we have done wrong, we have to examine our conscience and really reflect how well we have kept God’s commandments of love. Take a few moments to go over the following 10 Commandments, the Beatitudes of Jesus, and the Precepts of the Church. It will help you to know what sins you have committed and confess them properly in Confession.

What is a sin?

Very simply, sin is an offense against God. Sins may be minor (**venial**) or major (**mortal**). While we are obliged to confess all mortal sins (in number and kind), we are urged to do the same with venial sins insofar as we are aware of them. Three conditions must exist for a sin to be mortal (spiritually deadly):
1. The offense must be a SERIOUS MATTER.
2. We must be aware of its seriousness (KNOW THAT IT IS WRONG).
3. There must be FULL CONSENT of the will (freely and fully intend to do it).



“Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” —Luke 5:23-24

“To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God’s merciful love means remaining separated from Him forever by our own free choice. The state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called ‘hell.’” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1033; see also #1861).

If any one of the above conditions is absent, the sin in question is venial, and we are not obliged to confess it. One hastens to add, however, that even venial sin is an affront to God, and, as such, we are urged not to take such offenses lightly. It could be good to confess them. All too often, when we do not aim for perfection as Christ recommended (“Be perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect” [Matt 5:48]), we find ourselves sliding in the opposite direction.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

(Based on the Ten Commandments)

First Commandment: 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 God with my whole heart? – Do I practice some form of idolatry, putting something that is not God at the center of my life and “worshipping it” by spending all of my time, energy, and resources on it (e.g. sports money, career, entertainment, social life, technology, etc.)? – Do I place other people or things before God? – Did I seriously doubt my faith or put myself in danger of losing my faith through readings or videos hostile to Catholic teachings or involvement in non-Catholic sects? – Have I dabbled in non-Christian religious practices? – Have I made use of: superstitious practices, palm reading, fortune telling, horoscopes, mediums, new age practices (reiki, crystals, etc), “spiritual healers”, Ouija boards, witchcraft, satanism, or any form of the occult? – Have I received Holy Communion when I was conscious of being in the state of mortal sin? – Have I deliberately told a lie in Confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?

Second Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Have I used the name of God or Jesus in vain—lightly or carelessly? – Have I wished evil upon another person/cursed them? – Have I persisted in being angry with God? – Have I insulted a sacred/consecrated person or abused a sacred object? – Have I made or listened to jokes that treat God, Jesus, Mary, or any of the saints with irreverence?

Third Commandment: Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day. Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation (this means intentionally “blowing off” going to Mass – serious illness, being homebound, caring for sick family members are all legitimate reasons for missing Mass. Also note that the Mass obligation has been temporarily suspended during the Pandemic)? – Have I tried to observe Sunday as a day for rest, prayer, and family? – Have I done unnecessary work, shopping, etc. on Sundays? – When travelling do I seek to find a church where I can attend Mass on Sunday if possible?

Fourth Commandment: Honor your father and your mother. Do I honor and obey my parents? – Do

I disrespect them and talk back? – Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children? – Do I spend time with them? – Have I given my family good religious example? – Do I bring peace into my home life? – Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?

Fifth Commandment: You shall not kill. Have I had an abortion or encouraged or helped anyone to have an abortion? (to do this when you know that it is a grave sin also brings excommunication—so please bring this up in the confessional to the priest for absolution). – Have I assisted anyone in euthanasia (assisted suicide)? – Have I attempted suicide? – Have I physically harmed myself or anyone else? – Have I been guilty of acts of violence? Rape? – Have I failed to take care of my body and my physical/mental health? – Have I abused alcohol or drugs? – Have I drunk to excess (a sin of gluttony, impairing one’s God-given use of reason, opening one up to further sin, etc.). – Have I endangered myself or others while driving (impaired by alcohol or drugs or while texting, etc) ?– Did I give scandal to anyone (did anyone see my sin and did this harm their view of the Christian life or the Church? Scandal can “kill” another’s faith)? – Have I held on to or acted out in excessive anger? – Have I harbored resentment and refused to forgive anyone? – Have I harbored hatred in my heart? – Have I persisted in racist thoughts and hatred? – Have I mutilated myself through any form of sterilization (e.g. a vasectomy or a tubal ligation, changing a part of my body so that I would not have to be open to life)?

Sixth Commandment: You shall not commit adultery. & Ninth Commandment: You shall not desire your neighbor’s wife.

Have I committed adultery (sex when at least one person is married to someone else)? [NOTE: A Catholic can contract a true and valid marriage only in the presence of an authorized priest or deacon and two witnesses, unless a dispensation from the Bishop is sought and granted]. – Have I attempted marriage outside the Church? – Am I still living in a second civil marriage outside of the Church? (please talk to a trusted priest about what should be the next step to resolve the situation before you receive the sacrament of Reconciliation and receive Holy Communion-do not be discouraged-a good priest will help you.) – Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thoughts and actions? – Have I

engaged in any sexual activity outside of a Church-sanctioned marriage (fornication)? – Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control? –



Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life (if not, have my spouse and I considered moral options such as Natural Family Planning?)? – Have I withheld marital intimacy from my spouse when there was no just reason (Have I

communicated with my spouse about this)? – Have I used immoral means of procreation (e.g. the process of in vitro fertilization)? – Have I viewed pornography or any other materials that incite lust? – Have I viewed impure materials through reading, movies, TV, internet surfing? – Have I sent or received impure images electronically (“sexting”)? – Have I willingly entertained impure thoughts? Do I pray at once for God to gently banish impure thoughts and temptations? – Have I been guilty of self-abuse/masturbation? – Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other persons as objects (lust)? – Did I engage in impure jokes or conversations? – Have I committed homosexual acts (remember, inclination is not a sin, but actions are—if you have same-sex attraction please talk to a trusted priest spiritual director who can help you on your path as a disciple of Jesus)? – Do I seek to be chaste in my thoughts, words, and actions? – Have I done actions with another or had communications that are lustful or impure? – Am I

careful to dress modestly? – Do I seek to love my spouse with a sacrificial love, or am I selfish? – Do I try to serve my spouse and help him/her know God’s love and get prepared for heaven? – Do I respect the leadership that the husband exercises as head of the household? – Am I kind, patient?

Seventh Commandment: You shall not steal.

Have I stolen what is not mine? – Have I made restitution for what I have stolen? – Have I been honest in all my business relations? – Have I cheated on my taxes? – Have I failed to give an honest day’s work for an honest day’s wage? – Do I gamble excessively, thereby depriving my family of its needs? – Do I pay my debts promptly as I am able? – Do I seek to share what I have with the poor? – Have I obeyed the precept to provide for the material needs of the Church as I am able?

Eighth Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Have I told lies? – Did I tell lies about another person in order to harm their reputation (calumny/slander)? – Have I spoken of someone’s sins or shortcomings when not necessary (gossip/detraction)? – Have I freely listened to such speech and encouraged it? – Have I written false things about another person (libel)? – Have I tried to repair the damage that I caused to another’s reputation? – How many persons listened to my derogatory remarks? – Did I judge others rashly in serious matters [NOTE: we must judge whether actions are good or bad, but we should not judge the soul/motivations/interior disposition of the persons who does those actions]? – Am I sincere in my dealings with others? – Am I excessively critical, negative, or uncharitable in my thoughts/speech concerning others? – Do I keep secret what should be held confidential?

Tenth Commandment: You shall not desire your neighbor’s goods.

Am I jealous of what other people have? – Do I envy other people’s families or possessions or spiritual gifts? – 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?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

The Precepts of the Church:

1. Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation;

2. Confess any serious sins at least once a year;
3. Receive Holy Communion at least once a year, during the Easter Season;
4. Observe the prescribed days of fasting (Ash Wednesday, Good Friday) and abstinence (Fridays of Lent);
5. Observe laws of Church concerning marriage;
6. Provide for the material needs of the Church as you are able.

The Seven Capital Sins: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth

*Think not only of what you have done (sins of commission), but also of what you have failed to do (sins of omission).

RITE OF CONFESSION

Begin by making **the sign of the cross** and say:

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

Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been _____ (approximate weeks, months, years)
since my last confession.

Then begin: **These are my sins....** [Confess all that you remember. For mortal sins say the kind of sin that it was and the approximate number of times that you did it – if not sure of the exact number, say “a couple times” or “a few times” or “many times”]

When you are finished, say something to indicate to the priest that you are have finished confessing, for example: **“I am sorry for these sins and all the sins of my past life.”**

The priest will give you a **penance** (for example, some prayers to say) and possibly some spiritual advice and will then ask you to pray an **Act of Contrition**. There are different Acts of Contrition that you can use, here is a traditional one:

“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.”

Then the priest will give you **absolution** (the forgiveness of your sins). Make the sign of the cross when he blesses you and say “Amen.”

Conclusion: the priest may say **“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.”**

To which you respond: **“His mercy endures forever.”** Then the priest says: “The Lord has freed you from your sins, go in peace.”

