

TO MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION

Procedure in the Confessional

Begin by saying:

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I confess to Almighty God, and to you, Father. It is (how long) since my last confession. Since then I have ... (tell your sins).

When you have finished telling your sins, you should say: *"For these and all the sins of my past life especially for my sins of _____, I am truly sorry."*

Listen to what the Priest says; answer all questions. Pay particular attention to the Penance he gives you. While the Priest recites the words of absolution, say the Act of Contrition. *Make this Confession as though it were your last.*

What is the Sacrament of Penance?

Penance is a Sacrament in which the sins committed after Baptism are forgiven.

What is Confession?

Confession is the telling of our sins to a duly authorized Priest for the purpose of obtaining forgiveness.

Why should we go to Confession frequently?

Frequent Confession greatly helps us to overcome temptations, to keep in the state of grace and to grow in virtue.

What is necessary to make a Good Confession?

Five things are necessary for a good Confession.

1. Prayer to the Holy Ghost for grace and light .

2. Examination of conscience.

We should make an earnest effort to call to mind all the sins we have committed since our last worthy Confession.

3. Sorrow for sins with a firm resolution never more to offend God.

We should have sorrow for our sins because sin is the greatest of all evils, gravely offends God and mortal sin shuts us out of heaven and condemns us to the eternal pains of hell.

We must resolve not only to avoid sin but also the persons, places and things that may easily lead us into sin.

4. Confess our sins to a Priest.

We must tell all our mortal sins to a priest, their kind and the number of times we have committed each one.

5. Say the penance which the priest gives us.

The Priest gives us a penance that we may make some atonement to God for our sins, receive help to avoid them in the future and make some satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to them.

Prayer Before Confession

O Holy Ghost, source of all light, come to my assistance and enable me to make a good confession. Enlighten me, and help me to know my sins as one day I shall be forced to recognize them before Christ's judgment-seat. Bring to my mind the evil which I have done and the good which I have neglected. Grant me, moreover, heartfelt sorrow for my sins, and the grace of a sincere confession, so that I may be forgiven and admitted into Thy everlasting friendship. Mary, my Mother help me to make a good confession. (Hail Mary, 3 times.)

Prayer Before a Crucifix

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Thy face I humbly kneel, and, with burning soul, pray and beseech Thee to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment; while I contemplate, with great love and tender pity, Thy five most precious wounds, pondering over them within me calling to mind the words which David, Thy Prophet, said of Thee, my Jesus: "They have pierced My hands and My feet, they have numbered all My bones." (Ps. TM 17,18.)

For the recitation of the above prayer before a Crucifix: Plenary Indulgence under die usual conditions.

Acts of Thanksgiving

O my God, from the bottom of my heart, I thank Thee for having thus forgiven me. Mary, my Mother, and all ye holy angels and Saints, join with me in giving thanks to God for His boundless mercy in thus washing away my sins.

Praise, honor and glory, be given to Thy Holy Name, O Lord, who has showed Thy mercy to so wretched, so ungrateful a sinner as myself. . . I have deserved infinite punishment but in Thy goodness and mercy Thou inspirest me with a confident hope of salvation. Truly, thou art the God of all consolation, the true comfort of sinners, who from the shades of eternal death guideth them to the possession of peace and joy . . . may all the world know Thy goodness, may all feel Thy mercy, that all may praise Thee, O God, as Thou deservest.

Prayer to the Sacred Heart

O most holy Heart of Jesus, source of all blessings, I adore Thee and love Thee, and with a lively sorrow for my sins, I offer this poor heart of mine to Thee. Make it humble, patient, pure and conformed to Thy will in all things. Grant, good Jesus, that I will live in Thee and for Thee. Protect me in dangers, console me in my afflictions, grant me health of body, assistance in my material needs, Thy blessing in all my undertakings and the grace of a holy death.

Indulgence of 500 days. (S. P. Ap., Nov. 8, 1934.)

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Many of these sins are mortal and the Eucharist is forbidden until a good confession is made to a priest. If in doubt whether a sin is mortal or venial, consult a good catechism or priest very loyal to the Holy Father and Rome's teachings. A mortal sin involves a serious matter, there is sufficient reflection and it is committed with full consent of the will.

- Did I deny or doubt God's existence? Did I refuse to believe God's revelation?
- Did I believe in horoscopes, fortune telling, dreams, good luck charms or reincarnation?
- Did I deny that I was a Catholic? Did I leave the Catholic faith?
- Did I despair of or presume on God's mercy?
- Did I neglect prayer for a long time? Did I fail to pray daily?
- Did I blaspheme God or take God's name in vain, curse or break an oath or vow?
- Did I miss Mass on Sunday or Holyday of Obligation through my own fault?
- Am I always reverent in the presence of the most Blessed Sacrament?
- Was I inattentive at Mass? Did I come to Mass late? How late? Did I leave Mass early?
- Did I do unnecessary physical work on Sunday?
- Did I disobey or disrespect my parents or legitimate superiors?
- Did I neglect my duties to my husband, wife, children, or parents?
- Did I fail to actively take an interest in the religious education and formation of my children?
- Have I failed to educate myself on the true teachings of the Church?
- Did I give a full day's work in return for my full day's pay?
- Did I give scandal by what I said or did, especially to the young? Was I the cause of anyone leaving the faith?
- Did I give a fair wage to my employee?
- Was I impatient, angry, envious, unkind, proud, jealous, revengeful, hateful toward others, lazy?
- Did I give bad example, abuse drugs, drink alcohol to excess, fight or quarrel?
- Did I physically injure or kill anyone? Have or advise for an abortion? Regarding abortion, check with your priest to see if you were automatically excommunicated and this has to be lifted first.
- Did I participate in or approve of the grave evil known as "mercy killing"?
- Did I attempt suicide? Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts and desires? Did I dress immodestly?
- Did I use impure or suggestive words? Tell impure stories? Or listen to them? Did I deliberately look at impure TV, plays, pictures or movies? Or deliberately read impure material?
- Did I perform impure acts by myself or with others? Which ones? Note: in the area of deliberate sexual sins, all are mortal if there is sufficient reflection and full consent of the will.
- Did I marry or advise another to marry outside the Church?
- Did I abuse my marriage rights? Was I unfaithful to my marriage vows?
- Have kept company with someone else's spouse?
- Did I practice artificial birth control or was I or my spouse sterilized?
- Did I steal, cheat, help or encourage others to steal, or keep stolen goods? Have I made restitution for stolen goods?
- Did I fulfill my contracts; give or accept bribes; pay my bills; rashly gamble or speculate; deprive my family of necessities of life?
- Did I tell lies? Deliberately to deceive; or injure others by lies? Did I commit perjury? Was I uncharitable in word or deed, gossip or reveal others faults and sins? Fail to keep secrets I should have?
- Did I eat meat on the Fridays of Lent or Ash Wednesday? Did I fast as required on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?
- Did I fail to receive Holy Communion during the Easter time? Fail to confess at least once a year?
- Did I go to Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin? Without fasting (water and medicine permitted) for one hour or more from food and drink?
- Did I make a bad confession? Did I fail to contribute to the support of the Church?

Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, not only because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art so 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

FURTHER NOTES

1. **Prayer to the Holy Ghost for grace and light.**

2. **Examination of conscience**

- take your time – the longer you haven't been to confession, the more time you have to take in order to rightly remember your faults committed during this time. (E.g. someone who goes to confession every month will be able to examine his conscience properly within ten minutes' time; someone who hasn't been to confession for six months or more, may need to take half an hour or more to cover the whole time)
- Make two separate lists for mortal sins and venial sins.
It is your responsibility to make it clear to the priest, which of your sins would have been mortal sins (i.e. serious sins, committed, both knowingly, willingly, and in a serious matter). You must not expect the priest to ask you with regard to this.
Above all, remember that mortal sins need to be confessed with their exact (as exact as possible) number, and also various circumstances that might change the importance of that sin (e.g.: someone who confesses "I have injured someone" – if he has injured his dog, the matter may be rather unimportant; but if he has injured his parents, this increases the malice of his sin!)
- Use a questionnaire, at least from time to time; otherwise you might through routine end up forgetting certain categories of sins.

3. **Sorrow for sins and firm resolution never more to offend God.**

- Contrition is the most important part of your confession, since only sins regretted can be forgiven.
- A true contrition includes the firm resolution not to commit again any serious sin, and to avoid the proximate occasion of those sins.
- Perfect contrition is better (i.e. to regret your sins for the love of God...), because it takes away the sins already; but imperfect contrition (i.e. to regret your sins for fear of being punished with Hell) is sufficient for confession, since the sacramental absolution replaces what is lacking in your contrition.

4. **Confess our sins to a Priest.**

- To confess one's sins means accusing oneself. The sacrament of Penance (=Confession) is a process, a tribunal; and you are the accuser, and the one to be judged. So, don't confess saying "Lying, stealing, cheating..." but: "I have lied; I have stolen..." This means confessing your sins humbly and sincerely.
- If you are uncertain if a sin is mortal or venial, mention this to your confessor! This will put your conscience at peace, instead of leaving you with a doubt.
- Listen to the priest's counsels, admonitions, answer his questions simply and truthfully. The priest does not ask unnecessary questions, or out of curiosity, but because he needs to judge 'your case', and to do so, he needs a clear picture of the state of your soul and conscience.
- If you do not hear or understand what the priest is saying, in particular with regards to the penance imposed, tell him immediately. – You will be in fault if you cannot say your penance because you did not hear or understand!
- Remember that, whatever you say in confession, is sealed under the toughest secret that exists on earth: the seal of confession. The priest, or any other person, who might have heard what was being said in confession, may never reveal anything that concerns your sins, or any other circumstance that could bother or annoy you. Priests have died for the sake of not violating the confessional seal. – Be careful not to confront a priest with things said by him or by another priest in confession. It is impossible for him to give you an answer. If you want, outside the confessional, counseling on matters concerned with your confession, you will first have to give permission to the priest to talk about this confession; or he may ask you to briefly tell him again what the particular problem was, since normally by then he has forgotten what you had said in confession. – The penitent may talk about his own confession, and about the priest's words; but remember carefully, that quoting a priest's counsels etc. *out of context*, can easily mislead people to whom you pass them on, since they don't know which sins you have committed, and thus, why you have been given such and such counsel!
- If the priest does not speak the people's language, and there is no other means of communication (in writing...), he may recur to use the services of an *interpreter*. The interpreter should be a reliable and serious person, no close relative of the penitent, and should usually be of the same sex as the penitent. He also is held to keep absolute secrecy with regards to everything said in confession.

5. **Say the penance which the priest gives us.**

- The penance must be said / done in the exact terms indicated by the priest. You cannot alter the penance (e.g. if you cannot find the prayer you are demanded to say...), but you need to go back to the priest, and ask him, reminding that your question is concerning confession, and you allow him to talk about things related to this confession (see above).
- It needs to be fulfilled as soon as possible.
- If you did not fulfil a penance, you are bound to do so in discovering the fact. Penance does not 'expire'. You owe them to Divine Justice, which has pardoned you in the tribunal of confession.

