

A Guide for Confession

Returning to the Sacrament of Confession after being away for awhile can cause us to be anxious. However, you need not be afraid. It is our hope that this guide will help remove some of that fear and give you encouragement to receive Jesus' forgiveness in this great sacrament. Keep in mind that during your confession, if you need help – especially if you have been away for some time – simply ask the priest and he will help you by "walking" you through the confession.

The basic requirement for a good confession is to have the intention of returning to God like the "prodigal son" and to acknowledge our sins with true sorrow before the priest.

Sin in my Life

In some ways, modern society has lost a sense of sin. As a Catholic follower of Christ, I must make an effort to recognize sin in my daily thoughts, actions, words and omissions. We are all sinners, but Jesus loves sinners. As He said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." So, we need not be afraid to recognize and admit our sin.

The Gospels show how deeply Jesus wishes to forgive us and how important is the forgiveness of our sins. Lives of saints prove that the person who grows in holiness has a stronger sense of sin, sorrow for sins, and a need for the Sacrament of Penance or Confession.



The Differences in Sins

As a result of Original Sin, human nature is weakened. Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, takes away Original Sin, and turns us back toward God. The consequences of this weakness and the inclination to evil persist, and we often commit personal or actual sin.

Actual sin is sin which people commit. There are two kinds of actual sin, mortal and venial.

Mortal sin is a deadly offense against God, so serious that it destroys the life of grace in the soul. Three simultaneous conditions must be fulfilled for a mortal sin: 1) the act must be something very serious; 2) the person must have sufficient understanding of what is being done; 3) the person must have sufficient freedom of the will.

Before Confession

Be truly sorry for your sins. The essential act of Penance, on the part of the penitent, is contrition, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit it again, out of the love one has for God. The resolution to avoid committing these sins in the future (amendment) is a sure sign that your sorrow is genuine and authentic. This does not mean that a promise never to fall again into sin is necessary. A resolution to try to avoid the near occasions of sin suffices for true repentance. God's grace in cooperation with the intention to rectify your life will give you the strength to make progress in resisting and overcoming temptation in the future.

Examination of Conscience

Before going to Confession you should make a review of mortal and venial sins since your last sacramental confession, and should express sorrow for sins and a firm resolution not to sin again. Here is an examination of conscience to help you review your life. It is based on the Commandments of God:

- 1. I am Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.**
Have I loved God with my whole heart and soul? Do I pray to God daily? Have God and the pursuit of sanctity in Christ been the goal of my life? Have I denied my faith? Have I lost trust in God's forgiveness and goodness to me? Did I despair of God's mercy? Have I placed my trust in false teachings or substitutes for God? Have I rejected any teaching of the Catholic Church?
- 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.**
Have I used God's name profanely in my speech? Is my speech unbecoming of a Christian person?
- 3. You shall keep holy the Lord's Day.**
Have I honored every Sunday by avoiding unnecessary work and going to Mass, including Holy Days of Obligation? Do I observe the one-hour fast before Holy Communion? Have I received Jesus in the Eucharist with serious sin on my soul?

4. You shall honor your father and mother.

Do I give due honor to my parents? Have I shown Christ-like respect to my spouse, family members and legitimate authorities? Am I patient with my family members and do I forgive them? Have I been attentive to the religious education and formation of my children?

5. You shall not kill.

Has my anger harmed others? Have I shown sacred respect for human life, especially to the innocent? Have I treated my body and others as a temple of the Holy Spirit? Have I violated God's gift of fertility by an act of sterilization, such as a vasectomy or tubal ligation? Did I abuse drugs or alcohol? Have I supported in any way abortion or "mercy killing"? Have I attempted suicide? Have I wished ill on another?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

Do I show appreciation and gratitude for my spouse? Have I been faithful to my spouse in my heart and in my relations with others? Have I been chaste in thought and word? Have I used any form of artificial contraception? Have I engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage? Have I viewed pornography? Have I committed impure acts by myself? Did I deliberately look at impure TV, pictures, reading? Have I married or advised another to marry outside the Church?

7. You shall not steal.

Have I stolen anything from another, from my employer, from the government? If so, am I ready to repay it? Have I been lazy in my work? Have I paid my employees a just wage? Did I fulfill my contracts? Have I vandalized or destroyed another's property? Did I rashly gamble, depriving my family of necessities? Have I contributed to the support of the Church and the poor and needy by giving a fair share of my time, talent and finances?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Have I lied? Have I gossiped? Have I cheated? Have I destroyed or defamed someone's name or reputation? Have I discriminated against others because of race or other reasons? Have I spoken ill of any other person? Have I rashly judged others? Have I kept appropriate secrets and confidences?

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

Do I respect the sacredness of marriage by respecting another's spouse? Am I a jealous person?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Am I envious of the abilities, gifts or possessions of others? Am I materialistic? Am I greedy or selfish with this world's goods? Am I grateful for who I am and what I have?

During Confession

After examining your conscience and telling God of your sorrow, go into the confessional. You may kneel at the screen or sit to talk face-to-face with the priest. Do not be afraid.

Begin your confession with the sign of the cross, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. My last confession was _____ weeks (months, years) ago."

The priest may read a passage from holy Scripture.

Say the sins that you remember. Start with the one(s) that is most difficult to say. In order to make a good confession the faithful must confess all mortal sins. After confessing all the sins you remember since your last good confession, you may conclude by saying, "I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."

Listen to the words of the priest. He will assign you some penance. When invited, express some prayer of sorrow or Act of Contrition such as:

An Act of Contrition

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 I have offended 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.

At the End of Confession

Listen to the words of absolution; it is Jesus' forgiveness to you through His priest. As you listen to the words of forgiveness, believe that you are forgiven and make the sign of the cross with the priest.

After Confession

Give thanks to God for forgiving you. Do your assigned Penance.

Finally be resolved to return to the Sacrament of Reconciliation often. We Catholics are fortunate to have the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is the ordinary way for us to have our sins forgiven. This sacrament is a powerful help to get rid of our weaknesses, grow in holiness, and lead a balanced and virtuous life.