

AN INTRODUCTION AND GUIDE TO THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION FOR ADULTS

Introduction

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to save all people from the power of Satan, sin, and its consequence, death. The purpose of his ministry was our reconciliation with God the Father. In a special way, his death on the cross brought about the possibility of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation.

On the evening of his resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared to his Apostles and gave them the power and authority to forgive sins in his name. "Breathing upon them, he said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you retain anyone's sins, they are retained.'" (Jn. 20:22) Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops and priests of the Church receive the ability to act in the person of Jesus Christ himself to forgive sins. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as Penance or Confession), Christ forgives our sins.

In order to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation worthily, the penitent (the repentant sinner) must be sorry for his or her sins. Sorrow for sins is called contrition. We should always be striving for perfect contrition, which is sorrow for our sins motivated by our love for God. Contrition must also include a firm purpose of amendment. This is a solid resolution that we will avoid sin in the future as well as those persons, places, and things that lead us into sin in the first place (known as the near occasions of sin). Often, God gives us this gift when we think about Jesus' agony on the cross and realize that it is our sins that caused his suffering.

Types of Sin

Mortal sin is the direct, conscious and free violation of God's Law in a serious matter. Mortal sin (also known as grave or deadly sin) destroys the life of grace in our souls. God's grace begins to draw the sinner back to Him through sorrow for sin. He is brought back to life when he confesses his sins to a priest and receives absolution (sacramental forgiveness).

The Church also tells us that we should confess our **venial sins** which are less serious violations of God's law which do not necessarily sever our relationship with God, but weaken. If you are not sure whether your sins are mortal or venial, the confessor (the priest to whom you confess) will help you. Do not be afraid to ask questions and seek guidance.

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Examination of Conscience

When we come to confession, we must first examine our conscience by prayerfully reviewing our lives to see how we have offended God since our last confession. When we do this humbly, we grow in self-knowledge and walk the road to true holiness through Christ. Here is a simple format for the examination of conscience based on the Ten Commandments:

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no false gods before Me.
 - Do I seek to love God with my whole heart and soul? Does He truly hold the first place in my life?
 - Have I been involved in the occult or superstition (psychics / mediums)?
 - Have I ever received Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?
 - Have I ever lied in confession or withheld a mortal sin?

2. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.
 - Have I insulted or used God's Name carelessly?
 - Have I wished evil on anyone?

3. Keep holy the Lord's Day.
 - Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sunday or Holy Days of obligation?
 - Do I try to keep Sunday as a day for rest, family and prayer?

4. Honor your Father and Mother.
 - Do I honor and obey my parents, and care for them in their old age?
 - Have I neglected family responsibilities to spouse or children?
 - Is my family centered on Christ?

5. You shall not kill.
 - Have I murdered or harmed anyone?
 - Have I had an abortion or helped someone else to have one?
 - Have I abused drugs or alcohol?
 - Have I mutilated myself through any form of voluntary sterilization or encouraged others to do so?
 - Have I harbored hatred or resentment in my heart?
 - Have I scandalized others or led them to sin by my behavior?

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6. You shall not commit adultery.
 - Have I been unfaithful to my marriage vows in thought or action?
 - Have I practiced any form of artificial contraception in my marriage?
 - Have I engaged in any sexual activity with anyone outside of the context of the sacrament of marriage?
 - Have I masturbated?
 - Have I indulged in any pornography?
 - Am I pure in thought, words and deeds? Do I dress and act modestly?

7. You shall not steal.
 - Have I taken what is not mine?
 - Am I honest with my employer / employees?
 - Do I gamble excessively?
 - Do I waste too much time on the computer or with television?
 - Do I share with the poor?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
 - Have I lied, gossiped or spoken about someone behind their back?
 - Have I ruined anyone's good name?
 - Am I sincere with others?
 - Do I reveal what should be kept confidential?

9. You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.
 - Am I envious of another person's spouse or family?
 - Do I give in to impure thoughts?
 - Am I irresponsible with the books I read or the movies and shows I watch?

10. You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.
 - Am I envious of other's possessions?
 - Am I resentful of my position in life?

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Guide to the Sacrament

1. This sacrament can be celebrated anywhere and anytime between a priest and penitent. You may receive the sacrament face-to-face or anonymously (behind a screen).
2. Begin with the Sign of the Cross: "In the name of the Father, etc." and then say: "It has been (how long?) since my last confession."
3. Honestly confess your sins.
4. Listen to the priest's advice. He will give you a penance to fulfill (a prayer or good deed to show that you wish to make up for your sins).
5. Make an act of contrition (example): "O my God, I am heartfully sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishment, but most of all because I have offended Thee my God, Who is all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more, and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen."
6. The priest will absolve you from your sins and you may go in peace.