

# A Short Guide for Confession

## I. What is Confession?

Confession is a sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ in His love and mercy to offer sinners forgiveness for offenses committed against God. At the same time sinners reconcile with the Church, because the Church also is wounded by our sins.

This is good news for all of us, because we all are sinners and in need of God's forgiveness. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we meet Christ in the person of the priest, ready and eager to absolve us and restore us to new life. We confess our sins to God through His minister, the priest, who absolves us in the name of Christ.

For forgiveness of sins, three acts are required from the penitent as parts of the sacrament. These are contrition, confession and satisfaction.

- **Contrition** - or sincere sorrow for having offended God, is the most important act of the penitent. There can be no forgiveness of sin if we do not have sorrow and a firm resolve not to repeat our sin.
- **Confession** - confronting our sins in a profound way to God, by speaking about them - aloud - to the priest.
- **Satisfaction** - an important part of our healing is the "penance" the priest imposes on the penitent in reparation for one's sins.

## II. How to Make a Good Confession

Confession is not difficult, but it does require preparation. We should begin with prayer, placing ourselves in the presence of God, our loving Father. We seek healing and forgiveness through repentance and a resolve to sin no more. Then we review our lives since our last confession, searching our thoughts, words and actions that did not conform to God's love, to His law or to the laws of the Church. This is called an **examination of conscience**.

To make an **examination of conscience**, one should:

- Begin with a prayer asking for God's help.
- Review your life with the help of some questions (*see the following*).
- Tell God you are truly sorry for your sins.
- Make a firm resolution not to sin again.

## III. Examination of Conscience

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

- Do I pray to God every day? Have I thanked God for His gifts to me?
- Did I put my faith in danger through readings hostile to Catholic teachings or involvement in non-Catholic sects? Did I engage in superstitious practices: palm-reading or fortune telling?
- Did I take the name of God in vain? Did I curse, or take a false oath?
- Did I miss Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation through my own fault? Am I attentive at Mass? Did I keep fast and abstinence on the prescribed days?

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- Did I disobey my parents and lawful superiors in important matters?
- Did I hate or quarrel with anyone, or desire revenge? Did I refuse to forgive? Was I disrespectful?
- Did I get drunk? Did I take illicit drugs? Did I consent to, recommend, advise or actively take part in an abortion?
- Did I willfully look at indecent photographs or watch immoral movies? Did I read immoral books or magazines? Did I engage in impure jokes or conversations? Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts or commit impure acts, alone or with others? Did I use artificial means to prevent conception?
- Did I steal or damage another's property? Have I been honest in my business relations?
- Did I tell lies? Did I sin by calumny, or detraction, of others? Did I judge others rashly in serious matters?
- Have I envied other people?

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## 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 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*

## IV. Rite of Reconciliation

Begin your confession by making the sign of the cross and greeting the priest:  
*"Bless me father, for I have sinned."*

The priest gives you a blessing and you respond in words similar to St. Peter's words to Christ: *"Lord you know all things; you know that I love you."*  
You then continue: *"My last confession was..."* (how many weeks, months, or years?)

Confess all of your sins to the priest.

The priest will help you make a good confession. If you are unsure about how to confess or you feel uneasy, just ask him to help you. Answer his questions without hiding anything out of fear or shame. Place your trust in God, a merciful Father who wants to forgive you.

Following your confession of sins, say: *"I am sorry for these and all of my sins."*

The priest will assign you a penance and offer advice to help you be a better Catholic.

You will then say an Act of Contrition, expressing your sorrow for your sins. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, will then absolve you from your sins.



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