

INSTRUCTION AND PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

Instruction on the Sacrament of Penance

Penance is a Sacrament instituted by Jesus Christ, in which, by the ministry of the Priest, actual sins are forgiven, and the conscience is released from the bonds by which it may be bound. In this Sacrament, also, the eternal punishment due to sin is remitted, and a part or the whole of the temporal punishment, according to the disposition of the penitent. This holy and salutary institution is grounded on the words of Jesus Christ: Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven (Matt. XVIII, 18), and, 'As the Father hath sent me I also send you.'

When He had said this, He breathed on them, and He said to them; 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained (John XX, 21, etc.). In these words Jesus Christ gave to His Apostles, and to their lawful successors, power and authority to absolve from all sin those who sincerely repent of their offences.

Hence we see the great necessity of this Sacrament; and the Council of Trent has decreed that it is not less necessary for salvation to

those who have fallen into mortal sin after Baptism, than Baptism to those who have never been baptized. And although Penance may, at first sight, and in itself, seem to be a bitter and painful thing, yet, viewed in its fruits and consequences, it is full of consolation; and every Christian, as soon as he is conscious that he has fallen into a mortal sin, ought at once to have recourse to this fount of divine mercy.

The evil consequences of delay are manifold.

1. In the state of mortal sin, every other mortal sin committed renders our hearts still more hardened.
2. The commission of one mortal sin makes a second easier, and this leads to a third, and so on.
3. In the state of mortal sin we lose the value of all the good works that we may do. They avail nothing for everlasting life. Neither alms, nor prayers, nor fasts, nor even martyrdom itself, can profit us, if we have not repented of our sins.
4. Sin, continued in, closes by degrees the door of divine mercy, until at last scarce any hope is left of obtaining pardon from God. Lastly, just as the longer a stain remains upon a garment, the more difficult it is to remove, so the longer the soul neglects to purify itself by Confession, the more difficult the work becomes, and the more intricate, on account of the number of sins and anxiety of mind, until at last even an experienced Confession may be unable to extricate the soul from its miserable state.

Considerations to excite Contrition

1. Place before yourself, as distinctly as you can, the sins which have come to your remembrance, and their circumstances.

2. **Consider WHO GOD IS**, against Whom you have sinned, how great, how good, how gracious to you; that He made you, that He gave His Only Son to die for you, that He made you His child in Baptism, that He has loaded you with blessings and prepared heaven for you. Consider how patient He has been with you -- how longsuffering in calling you and moving you to repent: Say, *O most loving God, Infinite Goodness, I repent of having offended Thee; behold me at Thy feet. O my Father, my Creator, my Benefactor, grant me the grace of a true repentance, and the blessing of a pardon, for Thy dear Son's sake.*

3. **Consider the infinite wickedness of sin:** Say, *O my Saviour, I behold Thee on the Cross, torn and wounded, Thy sacred Body streaming with Blood; this is the work of my sin. In Thy Wounds, O my Saviour, I read the greatness of the guilt and malice of my sins. By the greatness of Thy pains and sorrows, O my loving Redeemer, I measure the hatefulness of my offences.*

4. Consider the consequences of one mortal sin: that you might justly be now banished from God's presence for ever for one single unrepented, deadly sin, how many have you not committed! Say, *O my God, how much do I owe Thee for not cutting me off in the midst of my sins. Before I fell into sin, heaven was my home, my inheritance, my country, my blessed resting-place; by sin, I have given up*

my title to the glory of the Blessed. For the sake of sin I have lost the love of Jesus, the sight of Mary, the communion with the Blessed Saints and with the Angels. O my God, would that I had never offended Thee, would that I had never consented to sin. In pity behold me now at Thy feet, full of sorrow and compunction. I hate sin, which is accursed of Thee; I renounce all that would draw me away from Thee; I most bitterly repent of my sin and folly, which would have deprived me forever of heaven if Thou hadst not mercifully brought me to repentance. I grieve that I have sinned against Thee, O my God, Who art all-good, all-bountiful, all-worthy of love. O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us sinners, who have recourse to thee.

ACT OF FAITH

I BELIEVE in Thee, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, my Creator, my Redeemer, and my Sanctifier; I believe that Thou art all-holy, just and merciful. I believe that Thou art willing to pardon and to save me, if I repent and forsake my sins.

O MY GOD, strengthen and increase my faith, and grant me the grace of a true repentance, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

ACT OF HOPE

I HOPE in Thee, O my God, because Thou art almighty, faithful, and longsuffering. I humbly trust that Thou wilt pardon my sins for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, Who suffered and died for me upon the Cross; and that Thou wilt cleanse my sinful soul in His precious Blood, and make me holy, and bring me safe to everlasting life.

O Lord, in Thee have I hoped, let me never be confounded. Amen.

ACT OF CHARITY

I LOVE Thee, O my God, above all things, because Thou hast been so good, so patient, so loving to me, notwithstanding all the sins by which I have so grievously offended Thee. I love Thee, O Blessed Jesus, my Saviour, because Thou didst suffer so much for love of me, an ungrateful sinner, and didst die on the Cross for my salvation. O make me love Thee more and more, and show my love to Thee by faithfully keeping Thy Commandments all the days of my life. Amen.

O MARY Immaculate, Mother of Fair Love: obtain for me that love of God, which is so necessary for true contrition. Amen.

Prayers before Confession

Accept my confession, O most loving, most gracious Lord Jesus Christ, on Whom alone my soul trusts for salvation. Grant me, I beseech Thee, contrition of heart, and give tears to my eyes, that I may sorrow deeply for all my sins with humility and sincerity of heart.

O good Jesus, Saviour of the world, Who gavest Thyself to the death of the Cross to save sinners, look on me, a miserable sinner who calls upon Thy name. Spare me, Thou that art my Saviour, and pity my sinful soul; loose its chains, heal its sores. Lord Jesus, I desire Thee, I seek Thee, I long for Thee; show me the light of Thy countenance, and I shall be

saved; send forth Thy light and Thy truth into my soul, to show me fully all the sins and shortcomings which I must still confess, and to aid and teach me to lay them bare without reserve and with a contrite heart; O Thou Who livest and reignest with God the Father, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, One God, world without end. Amen.

O most gracious Virgin Mary, beloved Mother of Jesus Christ, my Redeemer, intercede for me with Him. Obtain for me the full remission of my sins, and perfect amendment of life, to the salvation of my soul and the glory of His name. Amen. I implore the same grace of thee, O my Angel Guardian; of you, my holy Patrons, N.N.; of you, O blessed Peter and Holy Magdalen, and of all the Saints of God. Intercede for me a sinner, repenting of my sins, firmly resolving to confess them, and to avoid them for the future. Amen.

Let your confession be ENTIRE.

Let your confession be TRUTHFUL.

Let your confession be HUMBLE.

To implore the Divine assistance in order to make a good Confession.

O Almighty and most merciful God, Who hast made me out of nothing, and redeemed me by the Precious Blood of Thine Only Son; Who hast with so much patience borne with me to this day, notwithstanding all my sins and ingratitude; ever calling after me to return to Thee from the ways of vanity and iniquity, in which I have been quite wearied out in the

pursuit of empty toys and mere shadows; seeking in vain to satisfy my thirst in unclean waters, and my hunger with husks of swine: behold, O most gracious Lord, I now sincerely desire to leave all these my evil ways, to forsake the region of death where I have so long lost myself, and to return to Thee, the Fountain of Life. I desire, like the prodigal son, to enter seriously into myself, and with the like reception from His most tender mercy. But, O my God, though I can go astray from Thee myself, yet I cannot make one step towards returning to Thee, unless Thy divine grace move and assist me. This grace, therefore, I most humbly implore, prostrate in spirit before the throne of Thy mercy; I beg it for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who died upon the Cross for my sins; I know that Thou desirest not the death of a sinner, but that he may be converted and live; I know Thy mercies are above all Thy works; and I most confidently hope that as in Thy mercy Thou hast spared me so long, and hast now given me this desire of returning to Thee, so Thou wilt finish the work which Thou hast begun, and bring me to a perfect reconciliation with Thee.

Prayer before the examination of conscience

O Almighty God, Maker of heaven and earth, King of kings, and Lord of lords, who hast made me out of nothing in Thine image and likeness, and hast redeemed me with Thine own Blood; whom I a sinner am not worthy to name, or call upon, or think of: I humbly pray Thee, I earnestly beseech Thee, to look mercifully on me, Thy wicked servant. Thou Who hadst mercy on the woman of Chanaan and Mary Magdalen; Thou Who didst spare the publican and the thief upon the cross, have mercy upon me. Thou art my hope and trust; my guide and my succour; my comfort and my strength; my defence and my deliverance; my life, my health, and my resurrection; my light and my longing; my help and my protection. I pray and entreat Thee, help me and I shall be safe; direct me and defend me; strengthen me and comfort me; confirm me and gladden me; enlighten me and come unto me. Raise me from the dead; I am Thy creature, and the work of Thy hands. Despise me not, O Lord, nor regard my iniquities; but according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies have mercy upon me, the chief of sinners, and be gracious unto me. Turn Thou unto me, O Lord and be not angry with me. I implore Thee, most compassionate Father, I pray Thee meekly, of Thy great mercy, to bring me to a holy death, and to true penance, to a perfect confession, and to worthy satisfaction for all my sins. Amen.

O Lord God, who enlightenest every man who cometh into this world, enlighten my heart, I pray

Thee, with the light of Thy grace, that I may fully know my sins, shortcomings, and negligences, and may confess them with that true sorrow and contrition of heart which I so much need. I desire to make full amends for all my sins, and to avoid them for the future to Thy honour and glory, and to the salvation of my soul, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers After Confession

A prayer for the Priest

O Lord Jesus Christ, Bless, I beseech Thee, Thy servant who has now ministered to me in Thy name. Help me to remember his good counsel and advice, and to perform duly what he has rightly laid upon me. And grant him the abundance of Thy grace and favour, that his own soul may be refreshed and strengthened for Thy perfect service, and that he may come at last to the joy of Thy heavenly kingdom. Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thanksgiving after Confession

O most merciful God, who according to the multitude of Thy mercies does so put away the sins of those who truly repent, that Thou rememberest them no more; look graciously upon me, Thine unworthy servant, and accept my confession for Thy mercy's sake; receive my humble thanks, most loving Father, that of Thy great goodness Thou hast given me pardon for all my sins. O may Thy love and pity supply whatsoever has been wanting in the sufficiency of my contrition, and the fullness of my confession. And do Thou,

O Lord, vouchsafe to grant me the help of Thy grace, that I may diligently amend my life and persevere in Thy service unto the end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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The Examination of conscience

1) This is a detailed examination of conscience.

If you have not been to confession for a long time (many months or years), go through it slowly. You can bring this list in the confessional with you.

If you come to confession regularly (every week, fortnight or month), you need not go through the whole list each time. Pay more attention to your weaker points and habitual sins.

2) For each mortal sin, one must give: a) the exact number of times or at least the frequency (eg, once a month for 2 years), b) the circumstances which can change the nature of the sin (eg. to steal in a church.). For venial sins, it is good to give an approximate number of times.

A) MY FORMER CONFESSIONS

- I have made bad confessions (lack of preparation, of contrition, or of a firm purpose of amendment) ... times
- I have concealed some mortal sins because I was embarrassed... at what age?
- How many bad confessions? How many resultant bad communions? Have I corrected those confessions?... When?... How often...?
- I have forgotten to confess some mortal sins in subsequent confessions. How often? What were those sins? How often?
- I have gone to Communion without fasting... voluntarily or involuntarily?

B) THE COMMANDMENTS

FIRST COMMANDMENT

- **Sins which detract from the honour and worship due to God;** such as: Neglect of Prayer; Superstitious practices; Divination; Consulting fortune-tellers; Attaching undue importance to dreams, omens; Tempting God by exposing one's self to danger of soul, life or health, without grave cause; Sacrilege; Profane or superstitious use of blessed objects; Profanation of places or things consecrated to God; Receiving the Sacraments in a state of mortal sin.
- **Those against Faith,** such as: Wilful doubt of any article of Faith; Reading or circulating books or writings against Catholic Belief or practice; Joining in schismatical or heretical worship; Denying one's religion; Neglecting means of religious instruction.
- **Those against Hope;** Despair of God's mercy, or want of confidence in the power of His Grace to support us in trouble or temptation; Murmuring against God's providence; Presuming on God's mercy, or on the supposed efficacy of certain pious practices, in order to continue in sin.
- **Those against Charity,** such as: Wilfully rebellious thoughts against God: Boasting of sin; Violating God's Law, or omitting good works, through human respect.

SECOND COMMANDMENT

- **All irreverence towards God's most Holy Name;** such as: Cursing and profane swearing; False, unlawful, and unnecessary oaths; Membership in societies condemned by the Church; Breaking or deferring lawful vows; Irreverence in Divine Service, and in churches and holy places even when service is not going on.

THIRD COMMANDMENT

- Neglect to hear Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation; Working or making others work without necessity on such days (2 hours' work is considered 'serious matter')

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

- **For Children:** _Obstinacy, tantrums, rudeness, disrespect, disobedience, ashamed of parents, hating them, not helping them in need, answering back.

- **For Parents:** Hating their children; Cursing them; Giving scandal to them by cursing, drinking, etc.; Allowing them to grow up in ignorance, idleness, or sin; Showing habitual partiality; Deferring their children's Baptism; Neglecting to watch over their bodily health, their religious instructions, the company they keep, the books they read, etc.; Failing to correct them when needful; Being harsh or cruel in correction; Sending children without sufficient reason and safeguards to Public, Protestant or Modernist schools. Neglecting to oversee their education.
- **For Husbands and Wives:** Ill-usage; Putting obstacles in the fulfilment of religious duties; Want of gentleness and consideration in regard to each other's faults; Unreasonable jealousy; Neglect of household duties; Sulkiness; Injurious words.
- **For Employers:** Not allowing one's employees reasonable time for religious duties and instruction; Giving bad example to them, or allowing others to do so; Withholding their lawful wages; Not caring for them in sickness; Dismissing them arbitrarily and without cause.
- **For Employees:** Disrespect to employers; Want of obedience in matters wherein one has bound one's self to obey; Waste of time; Neglect of work; Waste of employer's property, by dishonesty, carelessness, or neglect.
- **For Professional Men and Public Officials:** Culpable lack of the knowledge relating to duties of office or profession; Neglect in discharging those duties; Injustice or partiality; Exorbitant fees.
- **For Teachers:** Neglecting the progress of those confided to their care; Unjust, indiscreet, or excessive punishment; Partiality; Bad example, loose and false maxims.
- **For all:** Contempt for the laws of our State and Country, as well as of the Church; Disobedience to lawful authority.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

- Unjust taking of human life (and hence, indirectly and implicitly, violence in thought, word, or act which may lead thereto); Exposing life or limb to danger without reasonable cause; Carelessness in leaving about poisons, dangerous drugs, weapons, etc.;
- Desires of revenge; Quarrels; Fights;
- Showing aversion or contempt for others; Refusing to speak to them, when addressed; Ignoring offers of reconciliation, especially between relatives; Cherishing and unforgiving spirit;
- Raillery and ridicule; Insults; Irritating words and actions; Sadness at another's prosperity; Rejoicing over another's misfortune; Jealousy at attentions shown to others;
- Tyrannical behaviour; Inducing others to sin by word or example; Gluttony; Drunkenness; Rash use of opiates; Injury to health by over-indulgence; Giving drink to others, knowing that they will abuse it.

SIXTH AND NINTH COMMANDMENTS

Two things must be remembered here especially: 1. the difference between to be tempted and to consent; 2. the three elements required for a sin to become mortal: grievous matter, sufficient reflection and full consent of the will. One must also tell the number or frequency (for ex. "twice a month for six months") of the sins committed.

- Sins in thought or desire; in looks: bad magazines, movies; in words: jokes, songs; in actions, alone or with another (willing or unwilling, man or woman): immodest dress, self-abuse, impure touches, fornication, adultery.
- Any other type of impurity must be mentioned, as well as any circumstance that would aggravate the sins, eg: with others, use of contraceptives.

SEVENTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS

- Stealing (What value? What damage done to property or interests?); Possession of ill-gotten goods; Exorbitant prices; False weights and measures; Cheating; Adulteration of goods; Careless or malicious injury to the property of others; Cheating at play;
- Keeping what is lent or found, without reasonable pains to return it, or to find its owner; Concealment of fraud, theft, or damage, when duty bound to give information; Petty thefts;
- Culpable delay in paying lawful debts, or of making restitution, when able to make it; Neglect to make reasonable efforts and sacrifices in this matter, eg. by gradually laying up the amount required.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

- Lying; Perjury; Frauds, public and private, such as at elections, etc.; Malicious falsehoods; Lies for unjust or bad ends; Lies against character, especially if told publicly; Revealing secrets;

- Publishing discreditable secrets about others, even if true; Refusing or delaying to restore the good name we have blackened; Slander or detraction, and encouraging these in others; Baseless accusations, groundless suspicions, rash judgements of others, in our own mind.

C) THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

- Have I neglected, without good cause, to hear Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation, and to keep those days holy by avoiding all servile work?
- Have I failed to fast or abstain, without sufficient reason, on those days commanded to be so observed by the Church?
- Have I omitted to confess my mortal sins at least once a year, or to make my Easter duty?
- Have I refused to contribute to the support of my church or school, according to my means? Gone to Mass Sunday after Sunday, without giving anything, or only a pittance to the collections?
- Have I entered into marriage, or aided any one else to do so, without seeing a priest, or before a State official or a Protestant minister; or without dispensation within the forbidden degree or kindred; or with any other known impediment? Encouraged someone to separate or seek annulment?

D) THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

- Pride I have been proud, vain, puffed up with my own importance... I have boasted to win praise... I have worked for applause and to gain notice...
- Avarice Through my love of money I have refused a charity...
- Envy Was jealous... Was sad at others' success... Rejoiced at their failure or suffering...
- Gluttony Ate too much... Got drunk... Injured my health by abuse of tobacco... Squandered my money... Drugs...
- Sloth Too lazy to fulfil my religious duties... Too lazy to fulfil my civic duties... (chores, lessons)
- Lust. Anger

Note: If you have any sins not mentioned here, tell your confessor. Also, don't hesitate to ask if you have a doubt or a question.

How to make one's Confession

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

I confess to God Almighty and to you, Father.

It has been _____ (days, weeks, months, years) since my last confession.

(You may add: I have received absolution and performed my penance.)

Then you tell your sins. When you have finished, add:

For these and all the sins that I can't remember, and all the sins of my past life (you can, if you wish, specify one or another), I ask pardon of God and penance and absolution of you, Father.

The priest then may give you some words of advice and he gives you a penance. Then you say your act of contrition:

An act of Contrition

Eg.

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee 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 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.

Before leaving, wait for the priest to finish the words of absolution, and say:

Thank you, Father.

Then quietly leave and give some time of thanksgiving to God for the great grace of forgiveness, before you say your penance. Do this as soon as possible lest you forget. Ave Maria!