

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION

Everyone count, everyone say “when was the last time I went to Confession?” And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good. Jesus is there, and Jesus is more benevolent than priests,

Jesus receives you, He receives you with so much love. Be courageous and go to Confession!

— Pope Francis, General Audience, Feb. 19, 2014.

○ God of compassion, You alone can justify me, and You will never reject me when I, contrite, approach Your Merciful Heart, where no one has ever been refused, even if he were the greatest sinner

(*Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, 1730*).

Why go to Confession?

The Church commands, “You shall confess your sins at least once a year” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2042*). The saints of the Church have often recommended frequent Confession. For instance, St. John Paul II led by example, going to Confession at least weekly.

Why does the Church take this Sacrament so seriously?

Saint Faustina records in her *Diary* the following words of Jesus:

✠ [I]n the Tribunal of Mercy [the Sacrament of Reconciliation] ... the greatest miracles take place [and] are incessantly repeated (1448).

✠ Here the misery of the soul meets the God of mercy (1602).

✠ I Myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest ... I Myself act in your soul (1602).

✠ [M]ake your confession before Me. The person of the priest is, for Me, only a screen. Never analyze what sort of a priest it is that I am

making use of; open your soul in confession as you would to Me, and I will fill it with My light (1725).

✠ Were a soul like a decaying corpse, so that from a human standpoint, there would be no [hope of] restoration and everything would already be lost, it is not so with God. The miracle of Divine Mercy restores that soul in full. Oh, how miserable are those who do not take advantage of the miracle of God’s mercy! (1448).

Biblical theologian Dr. Scott Hahn speaks of the absolution given in the Sacrament of Confession as a greater miracle than Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, because Lazarus would die again someday. In the Sacrament, however, we are raised back up to life eternal.

What if I live a respectable life and haven’t committed any sins?

It’s not good enough to be well-respected and well-liked; we are to be holy as God is holy (see Mt 5:48; 1 Pt 1:15-16), which means blazing brightly with divine charity, afire with the Holy Spirit. The halos on images of the saints and angels aren’t just a

decorative touch — we are meant to be a light to the nations (see Acts 13:47; 1 Pt 2:9). It is impossible for us on our own strength, but not impossible with God (see Mt 19:26; Mk 10:27). We all need the graces of Confession and the Eucharist to become what we are called to be by virtue of our Baptisms.

If you find yourself thinking you have no sins to confess and it’s been some time since your last Confession, we recommend you carefully use the Examination of Conscience in this pamphlet. If you still think yourself without sin, we recommend you ask those who know you and love you what sins they think you struggle with, what temptations or which of the deadly sins you wrestle with the most. Scripture tells us:

✠ If we say, “We are without sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, “We have not sinned,” we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. — 1 Jn 1:8-10.

What if I’m afraid of going to Confession? My priest is strict — he may scold me in the confessional. How can I face him after he knows all my sins?

Yes, it can be very uncomfortable to voluntarily tell another human being the worst secrets of your soul. Yes, it can be difficult to expose your inner darkness in the light of day, even in the most confidential of circumstances, and especially when you’re confessing to a priest in a pew with the long line of your fellow penitents seemingly so near at hand. Yes, it can be mortifying; it can be crucifying; and so it can be life-giving. Scripture promises us, “For there is nothing

hidden that will not become visible, and nothing secret that will not be known and come to light” (Lk 8:17). God already knows all our sins. He was there. He loves us still, remembers us still, waits for us to repent, and turn again, and be saved.

Remember the seal of the confessional! The *Catechism* states, “... [I]t is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason” (2490). The laity are also bound to maintain secrecy about anything they may overhear during someone else’s Confession.

Why do I have to confess to a priest? Why can’t I just confess my sins directly to God?

Because Jesus has delegated the priests and bishops of His Church to forgive sins:

✠ [Jesus] said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” — Jn 20:21-23.

✠ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed — Jas 5:16.

Jesus wishes to exercise His mercy through human beings — through priests and bishops in the Sacraments, but also through every single one of us in the works of mercy. (See the Examination of Conscience for the full list.)

Must I confess to my parish priest?

No. You may choose which priest you confess to.

However, if there aren’t many options and you’ve been avoiding the Sacrament because you don’t want to confess to the only priest available, committing to Confession, even if you have to go to the priest you’ve been avoiding.

By virtue of their ordination, priests are delegated by Jesus the power to bind and loose sins (see Mt 20:23). Since God is the ultimate authority, He is also capable of delegating that authority. When a priest absolves us of our sins, we can be assured our sins are truly forgiven (see CCC, 976, 982-986-987).

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

In order to make a good Confession, you need to make an Examination of Conscience first. Recall the sins you have committed since your Baptism or your last Confession, whichever is most recent.

Have I violated the Ten Commandments?

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have other gods before Me.

Do I love with all my heart the Lord who loves and cares for me? Do I seek His presence, pray daily, and trust in Him, or have I failed to place Him first, or even betrayed Him through occult practices?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Do I revere God’s name, or have I taken it lightly, carelessly, or blasphemously, even wishing evil on others? Have I received Him worthily in Holy Communion, or did I receive Him in a state of mortal sin*?

3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

Do I worship the Lord by taking part in Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, or have I been indifferent?

Eucharist, to Christ's redeeming love, preferring hly goods for my family and self by deliberately sing Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation? unday my day of rest?

. Honor your father and your mother.

re I loved, respected, and obeyed my parents who e me life? Do I care for them when they are in d or in old age? Do I forgive them when they are ult? In difficulties, am I patient with them?

. You shall not kill.

re I loved my neighbor, or have I physically ned or hastened the death of another through ence, abortion, euthanasia, drugs, hatred, the rning-after pill, or abuse? Have I practiced s of life that are harmful to my family self — spiritually and physically? Do I eat or k immoderately?

. and 9. You shall not commit adultery; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

re I been pure and holy in thoughts, words, and ons, or have I been unfaithful to my spouse or rous of another? Have I been sexually active ide of marriage, or with another of the same sex? re I indulged in pornography, masturbation, con- eption, and other sexual sins? Have I acted nst my conscience and led others into sexual sin?

. and 10. You shall not steal; you shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

I respect others' goods, or have I been envious greedy, even taking what belongs to another? re I neglected to return stolen goods or make al restitution? Have I paid my debts? Have isted time at work, at school, or at home? Have I ndered my resources on non-essentials or on

gambling? Have I failed to work for justice, or to support the poor and the Church in its mission? Have money or possessions become my god?

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

Have I been honest, or have I lied, gossiped, given false testimony, ruined the good name of another, broken confidentiality, or denied the truth out of pride or hypocrisy? Have I shown mercy to others? Am I ashamed to confess a mortal sin?

**Mortal sin: grave matter, full knowledge, and full consent of the will.*

Have I succumbed to one of the Seven Deadly Sins?

- 1. Lust; 2. Gluttony; 3. Greed; 4. Sloth; 5. Wrath; 6. Envy; 7. Pride.

Am I obedient to the precepts of the Church?

- 1. To attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and rest from unnecessary work on these days.
- 2. To observe the days of abstinence and fasting.
- 3. To confess our sins to a priest, at least once a year.
- 4. To receive the Eucharist at least once a year during the Easter Season.
- 5. To contribute to the support of the Church.

Do I love my neighbor by performing at least one of the works of mercy on a regular basis?

- CORPORAL WORKS:** 1. Feed the hungry; 2. Give drink to the thirsty; 3. Clothe the naked; 4. Shelter the homeless; 5. Comfort the prisoners; 6. Visit the sick; 7. Bury the dead.

SPIRITUAL WORKS:

- 1. Teach the ignorant; 2. Pray for the living and dead; 3. Correct sinners; 4. Counsel those in doubt; 5. Console the sorrowful; 6. Bear wrongs patiently; 7. Forgive wrongs willingly.



HOW TO CONFESS

1. Make an Examination of Conscience.

Try to be thorough, but don't be terrified of forgetting a sin. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind

you of anything you're forgetting. Remember that grave/mortal sins *must* be confessed. Venial sins *should* be confessed, especially if they have become habitual or there are a great many.

2. Go to Confession.

Confessions may be held in confessionals in churches, in pews or on chairs in the church, outside, or wherever some measure of privacy is possible. Often, you will have the choice to either confess to the priest face-to-face or from behind a screen. If both options are available, it is your choice which to use.

3. When you are in the confessional, say,

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last Confession was” If you cannot remember when your last Confession was, just be honest. Give an estimate. The priest is glad you have come to Confession now — he's not going to judge you for how long (or how short!) it's been since your last Confession.

4. Confess your sins in number and in kind, to the best of your recollection.

If you cannot remember, give an estimate, or indicate when something was committed more than once.

5. Conclude with,

“For these sins and all others I have forgotten or did not discern, I am truly sorry.”

6. The priest will give you a penance and ask you to make an Act of Contrition.

You can use the following:

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, You 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.

7. The priest will say the words of absolution.

You have been absolved so long as a validly ordained priest prays at least these words over you: “I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Trust in Jesus — your sins have truly been forgiven and washed away.

8. Go and perform your penance.

With Ecclesiastical Approval

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The Sacrament of Reconciliation

When you approach the confessional, know this, that I Myself am waiting there for you. I am only hidden by the priest, but I Myself act in your soul.

— Jesus speaking to St. Faustina
(Diary of Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, 1602)