

Guide for a Holy Confession

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” -1 John 1:8-10

The Mercy of God in Christ

God knows and loves you and desires to share His life with you. Sin alienates us from God, others, and ourselves. “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Rm 7:19). Jesus, true God and true man, ransomed us from sin by His cross and resurrection and the Church communicates to us what Christ alone merited for us: grace. Sin wounds or kills this life of grace.

The Sacrament of Confession

Original Sin is the inherited state of alienation from God and can only be remedied by Baptism. Actual sins are our willful disobedience to God and can only be remedied by personal repentance. Confession is the sacrament by which the sins committed after Baptism are forgiven. There are two types of actual sin: Mortal and Venial (1 Jn. 5:17). Mortal sin kills the life of God in us, whereas venial sins make our souls sick. Those who die with unrepentant mortal sin are eternally separated from God. For a sin to be mortal it must be grave matter (seriously evil), you must know it is gravely wrong (full knowledge), and you freely chose to commit it (deliberate consent). Even if you have mortal/grave sins, know that God’s love in Christ is greater than any sins. Repent and come home to Him.

What NOT to Do

Do not confess other people’s sins, give needless details, or lengthy backstory. Do not mumble, hide, or be vague about the serious ones. Do not confess old sins already forgiven in prior confessions. Do not treat temptations like sins. If you are nervous, do not be too proud to ask the priest for guidance.

Confessing Mortal Sins: “Species and Number”

Be specific in the type of grave sin you committed and the number of times you committed it. Do not hide out of fear, for how can the Divine Physician heal the wounds you refuse to show? If you honestly forget, know you are still forgiven. Catholics must confess grave sins at least once a year, but not venial sins. Many acts absolve venial sins: saying the Confiteor, receiving Communion, etc. Only sacramental confession and/or perfect contrition absolves mortal sins.

Temptations and Occasions

Christ was tempted but did not sin. Temptations become sins only when you consent to them or knowingly put yourself in an occasion where you will be strongly tempted to sin. Therefore, temptations without your consent are not to be confessed as sins but celebrated as hard-fought victories. If you struggle with habitual sins, then be aware of occasions (places, circumstances, people, etc.) that lead you to sin and avoid those as much as possible.

ADVICE: Keep it short, simple, clear, and direct

Try confessing each mortal sin in just one sentence. It can help eliminate excuse-making and blame-shifting. Own your sins! Remember, this is Confession, not counseling, so the priest will be brief in his advice. You may require additional help outside the confessional from therapists, loved ones, and others to conquer your habitual sins. Be brave and seek help if you need it!

A Worthy Confession

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| 1. I must find out my sins | (Examination of Conscience) |
| 2. Be sorry for my sins | (repentance, sorrow, contrition) |
| 3. Resolve to not sin again | (reject and renounce) |
| 4. Tell my sins to the priest | (confession) |
| 5. Do the penance soon after | (penance, satisfaction) |

How To Go To Confession

1. Make the Sign of the Cross and say: “Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been ___ months/years, since my last Confession.”
2. Tell the priest your vocation (single, married, etc.) to provide context.
3. Confess bluntly all mortal sins – in number and kind – then venial sins.
4. Listen to his advice and remember the penance he gives.
5. Say the Act of Contrition so that the priest can hear you.
6. Make the Sign of the Cross during Absolution with a grateful heart.
7. Priest will say, “Go in peace.” Respond: “Thanks be to God!”
8. Leave the confessional and do your penance as soon as possible.

ACT OF CONTRITION

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against You, Whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with the help of Your grace, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In His name, my God, have mercy.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to illuminate my memory and reason that I may, with sober judgment, know myself, account my sins, and truly repent.

I. “I am the Lord, thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before Me.”

Have popularity, money, career, pleasure, etc. replaced God as my highest priority? Have I sinned against Religion by seriously believing in New Age, Scientology, Astrology, Horoscopes, Fortune-telling, Superstition or engaging in the Occult? Did I endanger my Catholic Faith or cause scandal by associating with anti-Catholic groups & associations? Have I neglected my daily prayers?

II. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

Have I committed blasphemy by using the name of God and Jesus Christ to swear rather than to praise? Have I committed sacrilege by showing disrespect to holy objects (crucifix, rosary) or contempt for religious persons (bishop, priests, deacons, women religious) or for sacred places (in Church). Have I committed sacrilege by going to Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin without first going to Confession e.g., after missing Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation? Did I violate the one-hour fast before Communion? Did I break the laws of fast and abstinence during Lent? Did I neglect my Easter duty to receive Holy Communion at least once? Have I neglected to support the Church and the poor by sharing my time, talent and treasure?

III. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

Did I miss Mass on any Sunday or Holyday of Obligation? (Bad weather and being mildly sick do not count.) Have I arrived at Mass late? Have I shown disrespect by leaving Mass early, not paying attention, or not joining in the prayers? Did I do unnecessary work on Sunday which could have been done the day before? Have I been stingy in my support for the Church? Do I give of my time & talent? Have I received the Eucharist in the state of mortal sin?

IV. Honor thy Father and Mother.

Parents: Have I set a bad example for my children by casually missing Mass, neglecting prayer, or ignore my responsibility to provide a Catholic education by either sending my children to parochial school or to C.C.D. (Religious Education Program)? Do I show little or no interest in my children’s faith and practice of it? Have I showed disrespect for those in authority, government, or church? Have I not expressed my moral values to them?

Children: Have I been disobedient and/or disrespectful to my parents or guardians? Did I neglect to help them with household chores? Have I caused them unnecessary worry and anxiety by my attitude, behavior, moods, etc.?

V. Thou shalt not kill.

Did I consent, recommend, advise, approve, support, or have an abortion? Did I realize that there is an excommunication for anyone who procures an abortion? Did I actively or passively cooperate with an act of euthanasia whereby ordinary means were stopped or means taken to directly end the life of an elderly or sick person? Have I committed an act of violence or abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal)? Have I endangered the lives of others by reckless driving or by driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Do I show contempt for my body by neglecting to take care of my own health? Have I been mean or unjust to anyone? Have I held a grudge or sought revenge against someone who wronged me? Do I point out others’ faults and mistakes while ignoring my own? Do I complain more than I compliment? Am I ungrateful for what other people do for me? Do I tear people down rather than encourage them? Am I prejudiced against people because of their color, language, or ethnic-religious background?

VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery / IX. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife.

Did I have any sex before or outside of marriage? Do I view pornographic material (websites, social media, apps, or hot lines)? Have I gone to “adult” stores, clubs, or parlors? Did I commit the sin of masturbation (with self or another person)? Did I use contraception? Have I not avoided the occasions of sin (persons or places) which would tempt me to infidelity to spouse, or lust? Do I encourage and entertain impure thoughts and desires? Do I tell or listen to dirty jokes? Have I committed fornication or adultery? Am I married outside the Church? (Speak to the priest about this last one.)

VII. Thou shalt not steal / X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods.

Have I stolen any object, committed any shoplifting or cheated anyone of their money? Did I knowingly deceive someone in business or commit fraud? Have I shown disrespect or even contempt for other people’s property? Have I done any acts of vandalism? Am I greedy or envious of another’s goods? Do I let financial and material concerns or the desire for comfort override my duty to God, to Church, to my family or my own spiritual well-being?

VIII. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Have I told a lie in order to deceive someone? Have I told the truth with the purpose and intention of ruining someone’s reputation (sin of detraction)? Have I told a lie or spread rumors which may ruin someone’s reputation (sin of calumny or slander)? Did I commit perjury by false swearing an oath on the Bible? Am I a busybody or do I love to spread gossip and secrets about others? Do I love to hear bad news about my enemies?

-From Fr. John Trigilio, EWTN.com prayer library