

# A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE SACRAMENT

## OF RECONCILIATION/PENANCE

The sacrament of God's loving forgiveness

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### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

If we say we are free of the guilt of sin we deceive ourselves; the truth is not to be found in us. But if we acknowledge our sins, he who is just can be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrong. If we say we have never sinned we make him a liar and his word finds no place in us. My little ones, I am writing this to keep you from sin. But if anyone should sin, we have in the presence of the Father, Jesus Christ, an intercessor who is just. He is an offering for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for those of the whole world. (1 John 1:8 - 2:2).

Reminder: Individual confession is the only ordinary way to be reconciled with God for serious sin (barring a serious hindrance).

### EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

1. Roughly how long is it since my last confession? (Only sins committed since then need be confessed.)

2. Have I committed any mortal sins? These must be confessed by type and approximate number. A mortal sin is one which involves serious matter, full consent of the will, and full awareness that the act is seriously sinful. Some examples of objectively serious sins (mortal if the other two criteria are present):

- Missed Sunday Mass (or Holyday Mass) without a serious reason
- Received the Eucharist in the state of mortal sin
- Committed impure acts with self (masturbation)
- Committed adultery, or fornication (sexual intercourse outside marriage)
- Kissed or touched someone passionately for arousal (unmarried)
- Committed a homosexual act
- Practiced contraception
- Dwelled on impure thoughts (sexual fantasies for arousal)
- (Note: sexual sins are ordinarily not the worst serious sins but they are quite common.)*
- Had an abortion or paid for one
- Promoted abortion rights
- Withheld a mortal sin in confession
- Took or sold cocaine or other dangerous drug for recreation.
- Got drunk
- Refused to help any of God's poor or needy when able

3. Some sins which are ordinarily venial but a few could be serious depending on the stakes.

- Lied, or cheated
- Stole \_\_\_\_\_ (must be returned)
- Used the Lord's name in vain or cursed ("Damn \_\_\_\_, etc.) or used foul language
- Fought with others
- Did unnecessary work on Sunday
- Was selfish or lazy or proud
- Spoke unkindly to others
- Told harmful lies about others
- Told harmful truths about others without serious reason to do so
- Was excessively critical about others
- Became unreasonably angry
- Willfully delayed forgiving
- Failed to accept God's forgiveness
- Dressed immodestly
- Was late for Mass or left early without a serious reason

- Was disrespectful to parents
- Failed to fulfill duties of own state in life (specify which duties)
- Gave scandal to children or others
- Was irreverent in Church
- Ate or drank too much
- Willfully angered others
- Watched TV shows or movies which promoted immoral sex or violence
- Watched excessive TV or wasted time
- Drove car too fast or carelessly
- Violated (a just) law (specify which law)
- Failed to care for own health

**4. Smaller sins/imperfections for mention by the spiritually advanced:**

- Failed to pray enough
- Failed to make God first always
- Had unkind or prideful thoughts
- Failed to be loving or kind to others
- Failed to trust in God always

### CONFESSION OF SINS

After the greeting, and Scripture reading (if any), tell the priest how long it has been since your last confession and confess your sins. All mortal sins must be confessed by type and number to be reconciled to the Lord (and receive the sacrament validly).

Although venial sins need not be confessed, we are encouraged "also to make use of the sacrament of Penance for venial sins alone." (John Paul II). If you have only venial sins to confess, for the sake of brevity mention only those few which are most significant.

**NOTE:** If you need help confessing, simply say, "Father, I need your help confessing."

### SORROW FOR SINS and FIRM PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

In order to be forgiven, the penitent must express sorrow and sincerely intend not to sin again.

The Act of Contrition should be said slowly, reverently:

### ACT OF CONTRITION

**O my God, I am deeply sorry for having offended You, and I despise all my sins because of Your just punishments; 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 sin no more and avoid the near occasion of sin.**

After the penitent says the act of contrition, the priest gives absolution while the penitent makes the sign of the cross.

### PRAISE OF GOD AND DISMISSAL

**Priest:** Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.

**Penitent:** His mercy endures forever.

The penitent is dismissed and goes to perform his penance in the spirit of love for God.

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