

A Guide to the Sacrament of Reconciliation for Adults

Preparation – Make an Examination of Conscience

It is important to prepare for reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The penitent should spend adequate time (10-20 minutes) making an examination of conscience. Some like to use a piece of paper to write down the sins that come to mind during the examination. However, it is not necessary. Make sure to include the number of times for all mortal (serious) sin. It is a good idea after confession to either throw away or burn the piece of paper as a sign that both God and ourselves have now forgotten those sins.

Prayer Before Confession

O most merciful God! Prostrate at Your feet, I implore Your forgiveness. I sincerely desire to leave all my evil ways and to confess my sins with all sincerity to You and to Your priests. I am a sinner, have mercy on me, O Lord. Give me a lively faith and a firm hope in the Passion of my Redeemer. Give me for Your mercy's sake a sorrow for having offended so good a God. Mary, my mother, refuge of sinners, pray for me that I may make a good confession.

Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten Commandments

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me

Have I performed my duties towards God reluctantly or grudgingly? Have I been rebellious towards God and His commands? Have I murmured against God, at personal misfortune or at the prosperity of others? Have I believed or practiced any form of superstition, that is, anything that is of the occult: ouija boards, fortune tellers, séances, channeling or astrology?

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

Did I make use of God's name mockingly, jokingly, angrily or in any other irreverent manner? Did I make use of the Blessed Virgin Mary's name or the saints' names mockingly, jokingly, angrily or in any other irreverent manner? Did I tell a lie under oath? Did I break private or public vows? Have I angered others so far as to make them swear, or blaspheme God?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.

Have I missed Mass on Sundays or on Holy Days of obligation? Have I done or commanded servile work not of necessity on Sundays or Holy Days of obligation? Have I done anything to make the Lord's day unholy?

4. *Honor your father and your mother.*

Have I respected my parents and superiors as I should? If applicable, have I disobeyed them? Have I been arrogant and stubborn with them?

5. *You shall not kill*

Have I caused, desired, or hastened the death of anyone? Have I approved or assisted in an abortion? Have I been guilty of drug or alcohol abuse? Have I gotten angry or nurtured any resentments against others? Have I refused to forgive others? Was I an occasion for others to sin with my conversations, “off-color” jokes, way of dressing, invitation to attend certain shows, lending harmful books or magazines, etc? Did I try to repair the scandal done? Did I cause anyone harm with my words or actions? When someone offends me, do I desire revenge or harbor enmity, hatred or ill-feelings?

6 & 9. *You shall not commit adultery or covet your neighbor’s wife.*

Have I willfully entertained indecent thoughts? Have I engaged in impure conversations? Have I looked for forms of entertainment which put me in the proximate occasions for sin (immoral movies, plays, readings, music, etc.)? Have I led others to sins of impurity or immodesty? Have I masturbated? Have I had sexual intercourse outside of marriage?

For Married Couples

Have I used artificial contraception? Have I suggested the use of artificial contraception to others? Have I betrayed married fidelity in desire or in deed?

7 & 10. *You shall not steal and You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.*

Have I stole any object or money that did not belong to me? Have I ran into debt beyond my ability to pay it back or neglected to pay others back? Have I willfully damaged others’ property? Did I harm anyone by deception, fraud, or coercion in business contracts or transactions? Have I gotten envious or jealous of others goods? Do I get angry with God for giving more to others than myself? Do I give alms according to my capacity? Am I diligent in my work and studies or do I give in to laziness or love of comfort? Do U have an excessively materialistic view of life? Have I cheated to make life easier?

Social Sins

Have I tithed ten percent of my income, five percent to the parish and five percent to another charity? Do I help others in need when I have extra money or time? Have I volunteered my time for either the parish or the poor? Do I stand up for the rights of the weak of society (e.g. the unborn, elderly, etc.)? Am I ashamed of my faith and hide it from others? Do I fight against anti-Catholic propaganda (e.g. movies, pornography, etc.)?

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

Have I told any lies? Did I engage in gossip or back-biting? Have I made fun of others? Did I judge others in my thoughts or in conversations? Have I unjustly accused others? Have I sinned by detraction, that is, telling the faults of others without necessity? Have I lied about others? Did I reveal secrets without due cause?

In the Confessional

1. Entering -

In most parishes, the penitent has two choices for going to confession. He either goes face-to-face with the priest or behind a screen and the priest does not see him.

2. Beginning -

The priest will guide the penitent through the confession if he is unfamiliar with the sacrament. After the person is situated, the priest usually begins with a prayer or reading from Scripture asking for God's assistance.

3. After the opening prayer –

The penitent says: "Bless me, father, for I have sinned. It has been...(however long) since my last confession."

4. Confession of sins –

The penitent then begins to confess his sins. It is important to confess all serious sin since that time and even other mortal sin you forgot to confess in your previous confession. Make sure to include the number of times. This is where the piece of paper from the examination of conscience comes in handy.

5. Directions from the Priest –

After the penitent confesses his sins, the priest may give him some advice for avoiding sins. Then the priest will give the penitent a penance. For example, say three Our Fathers, pray the joyful mysteries of the rosary, visit a nursing home for half-hour, spend time with family, etc. Then the priest will ask him to make an act of contrition.

6. Act of Contrition –

The penitent then makes an act of contrition. Choose from the following two.

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing not to do good, I have sinned against You whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with Your help, 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. Amen.

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.

7. Absolution –

The priest will then grant the penitent absolution. There is a special prayer, which the priest will then say. It has longer and shorter versions. What is necessary is that the priest says, “I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

8. Exiting the Confessional –

After leaving the confessional make sure to give thanks to God for the Sacrament of Reconciliation just received. Then promptly and devoutly perform the penance. This may not be possible immediately if the penance is of a social nature, that is, visiting a nursing home, helping the poor, etc.

Sources for this Guide

Weinandy, Thomas, O.F.M. Cap., *Be Reconciled to God, A Family Guide to Confession*, The Word Among Us, Gaithersburg, MD, 1988.

The Vatican II Weekday Missal, Daughters of St. Paul, 1975.

The Holy Father’s Advice to Priest about Their Duty of Hearing Confessions.