

Confession Guide for Adults



“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17).

Why go to confession?

Jesus gave us the sacrament of Confession (or Reconciliation) when he breathed on the Apostles saying, *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”* (Jn 20:22-23). This authority to forgive sins has been passed on from the apostles to the priests of our own time through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Confession is the only ordinary means of forgiveness for mortal sins committed after baptism. Though other extraordinary means are possible, they are never guaranteed and shouldn’t be presumed upon. As all sacraments do, it also bestows an increase of grace.

How do I make a good confession?

Essential to a good confession is **contrition**. Contrition means “turning away” from past sin with a resolve to sin no more (see Ezek 33:11; Jn 8:11). Since contrition implies a knowledge of one’s own sins, we should **examine our conscience** before confession (see page 2). During confession, we should state our sins humbly and frankly, avoiding any details that go beyond the nature of the sin or the circumstances affecting its gravity.

What do I need to confess?

All known mortal sins must be confessed. This includes the number of times they were committed (at least approximately). Venial sins, strictly speaking, do not need to be confessed, but it is spiritually beneficial for us to do so. For a sin to be mortal it must meet three conditions: It must be (1) **grave** (i.e. serious) and it must be committed with (2) **full knowledge** and (3) **deliberate consent**. Just as a sick person must be willing to show his wound to the doctor to be healed, so must we be willing to confess any and all mortal sins we are conscious of to be forgiven. Though confessing our sins can sometimes be difficult, it is reassuring to remember that a good confession is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience.

What if I forget a sin?

If a mortal sin is unintentionally forgotten, it is forgiven, but it must still be confessed at one’s next confession. If one is uncertain whether a mortal sin was already confessed in the past, there is no obligation to confess that sin. Nonetheless, it may be wise and prudent to do so.

Will the priest tell my sins to anyone?

The priest is **never** allowed to disclose the sins of a penitent for any reason.

Examination of Conscience for Adults

Ask yourself these questions to prepare for confession.

I. I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.

Have I...

- Deliberately concealed a mortal sin in a previous confession?
- Received Holy Communion unworthily (i.e., while consciously aware of being in the state of mortal sin)?
- Put wealth, honor, pleasure, or anything else ahead of God in my life?
- Rejected any Catholic teachings? Put faith in non-Christian doctrines such as reincarnation, karma, etc.?
- Put my faith in danger through the reading of questionable material?
- Not shown appropriate respect to the Church and Church leaders?
- Engaged in occult or superstitious practices such as witchcraft, Ouija boards, horoscopes, crystals, good luck charms, etc.?
- Neglected the habit of daily prayer?

II. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. *Have I...*

- Used the name of God disrespectfully or even blasphemously?
- Broken an oath or a promise to God?

III. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S Day. *Have I...*

- Missed Mass on Sunday or holy days of obligation? (e.g., illness and unsafe weather excuse; sports do not.)
- Arrived at Mass late or left early on purpose?
- Observed the one-hour fast before receiving Communion?
- Showed proper reverence during Mass? Dressed appropriately for Mass? Chewed gum during Mass?
- Fasted and abstained from meat when the Church asks?
- Allowed unnecessary work to interfere with Sunday as a day for worship, rest, and family?

IV. Honor your father and your mother. *Have I...*

- Respected my parents? Neglected them, especially in advanced age?
- Obeyed my lawful superiors? Broken any just laws?
- Treated my children well? Been too lax or too strict in discipline?
- Been diligent about educating my children in the faith? Delayed having my children baptized more than a few weeks after birth?
- Been diligent about protecting my children from moral and spiritual harm (e.g., by permitting bad company, allowing unrestricted/unmonitored internet access, permitting bad movies/television, etc.)?

V. You shall not kill. *Have I...*

- Deliberately harmed anyone?
- Deliberately wished death upon another? Desired hell for another?
- Had an abortion or encouraged one? Taken lightly the lives of unborn children when voting? Supported euthanasia?
- Sought out *in vitro* fertilization? (IVF normally entails the discarding of human embryos.)
- Lost my temper? Nurtured hatred or a desire for revenge toward anyone?

- Been racist or prejudiced in thoughts, words, or actions?
- Refused forgiveness to someone?
- Recklessly endangered my own life or the lives of others?
- Gotten drunk or used illicit drugs? Enabled another's addiction?
- Mistreated my body/health through gluttony, excessive tobacco, etc.?
- Attempted suicide? Seriously entertained thoughts of it?
- Scandalized the faith of another?

VI. You shall not commit adultery. *Have I...*

- Been unfaithful to my spouse? Had sexual relations with another's spouse?
- Had sexual intercourse outside of marriage? Cohabitated?
- Viewed pornographic images or videos? Read pornographic books?
- Sought out or engaged in prostitution? Visited "adult entertainment" clubs?
- Worn clothes that are immodest, revealing, or too tight? Dressed intentionally to arouse lust?
- Committed rape? Sexually harassed another?
- Used lewd or vulgar language?
- Engaged in impure actions with myself (i.e., masturbated)?
- Engaged in other unnatural sexual activity? (e.g., homosexual acts, incest, bestiality, etc.)
- Used artificial birth control/contraception? Been sterilized?
- Gotten married outside of the Catholic Church without dispensation?

VII. You shall not steal. *Have I...*

- Stolen or damaged another's property? Pirated copyrighted material?
- Defrauded workers of their wages? Wasted my employer's money?
- Lived wastefully or in an excessively luxurious manner?
- Gambled rashly? Taken on irresponsible debts?
- Not paid my taxes honestly?
- Squandered my time through excessive TV, internet, news, etc.?
- Neglected responsible stewardship of the environment and its resources?
- Failed to care for the poor?
- Failed to contribute to the needs and mission of the Church?

VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. *Have I...*

- Lied? Cheated? Committed perjury? Wrongfully broken confidentiality?
- Judged another? Insulted another? Engaged in gossip?
- Harmed the reputation of another by lies (calumny) or by disclosing his/her faults without an appropriate reason (detraction)?
- Cooperated in another's sin through cover-up, flattery, or silence?

IX. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. *Have I...*

- Deliberately entertained impure/unchaste thoughts?
- Sought the affections of another's spouse?
- Guarded my eyes against immodest or inappropriate looks?

X. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods. *Have I...*

- Fostered thoughts of envy towards another's good qualities, success, status, or possessions?
- Given in to greed?

How to go to Confession

After you enter the confessional, begin with the Sign of the Cross saying,
“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

The priest may say aloud a prayer or a selection of scripture.

You say,

“Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been _____ (number of weeks/months/years) since my last confession. These are my sins...”

Confess your sins. Include the number of times you committed each sin or at least its general frequency (e.g., about 3 times per week). For mortal sins, the number or frequency is required.

When finished say,

“For these and all the sins of my past life, I am sorry.”

The priest gives you a penance and invites you to say an Act of Contrition:

An Act of Contrition

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 all 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.

The priest says the prayer of absolution. Listen especially for the words, “I absolve you from your sins.”

(If the priest says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,” you respond, “His mercy endures forever.”)

The priest concludes, “...Go in peace.” You respond,

“Thanks be to God.”

Nihil Obstat:

Rev. George Welzbacher, Censor liborum

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+ Bernard A. Hebda, Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis, September 2020

This guide with an alternative act of contrition is available at frethewordarchives.org

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