

THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE: AFTER REVIEWING A THOROUGH CHECK LIST, CONSULT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many are the "examinations of conscience."

The best one comes through the Holy Spirit. He illuminates. It thus comes through prayer. If you pray, He will give you an "illumination of conscience," in one form or another, in His timing. This is a better way than through drastic events.

"The *Examination of Conscience* is one of the fundamental means of furthering personal sanctification. For Catholics, the most common use of examination of conscience is in the preparation for Confession. For all Christians, examination of conscience can be an effective means to greater holiness through fostering obedience to God and conformity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. To that end, and through the application of an objective measurement of how well we conformed to the will of God, the examination of conscience helps us avoid the self-deception of thinking that our behavior, thoughts, and motives are not sinful when they actually are, as well as avoiding scrupulosity, which is seeing sin where there is none.

"There are two basic types of examinations of conscience.



"The '*General*' examination is useful for measuring our behavior in light of God's commandments and is well suited to preparation for Confession. The general examination of conscience is most effective when it is practiced daily and once it becomes habitual, does not take more than a few minutes. Saint Ignatius in his *Spiritual Exercises* suggests five points for the examination of conscience.

1. An act of gratitude to God for all His benefits. (This will dispose the soul to the correct attitude for contrition.)
2. A petition for grace to know and detest one's sins.
3. An accurate examination of one's actions, thoughts, and motives throughout the hours of the day.
4. An Act of Contrition and an appeal for pardon, the principal point of the whole exercise.
5. A resolution to amend, a petition for God's assisting grace, and finally an *Our Father*.

"The '*Particular*' examination of conscience is a specific method employed to assist in acquisition of one particular virtue or in the elimination of one particular vice. As such, it is very useful for anyone who wants to grow in holiness.

"On rising in the morning we resolve to avoid during the day the specific fault with which we have habitually struggled, or to perform certain acts of a particular virtue in which we would like to grow.

"About noon we **consider how often** we have committed that fault, or practiced that virtue and **record the number** so that we can keep track of our progress or decline. We then renew our resolution for the rest of the day. At night we examine and mark again, and make resolutions for the following day. In doing so, we act like careful businessmen who track a particular portion of their business for profit or loss. St. Ignatius further suggests that we impose upon ourselves some penance for every one of the faults committed and that we **compare the numbers** marked each time with those of the preceding day, the total sum at the end of the week with that of the preceding week, etcetera. *'The general examination is a weapon of defense. The particular, of attack. The first is the shield. The second, the sword,'* said Saint Josemaria Escriva."

Hugely important are sins that have to do with pride, as well as lack of charity.

Instead of thinking negatively about someone -- instead of reviewing in our mind or with words their faults -- did we **take the time to pray for them?** **Did we pray evil not enter them?**

We are held accountable for helping others. In the afterlife we will be amazed at the effect of prayer (from the heart).

Do we truly *feel* for those who suffer (or just give lip service: "*Poor dear*")?

As a most helpful booklet called [*The Seven Capital Sins*](#) points out, "Pride was the first sin committed. It was the sin of Lucifer. It was also the root of the Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve. Pride is the greatest of sins because it is the summit of self-love and is directly opposed to submission to God. 'From pride all perdition took its beginning' (*Tobit* 4:14)." See also Gloria Polo's startling book *Struck By Lightning*. Or, *The Secrets of Purgatory*.

We are often blinded to our own shortcomings. This is the time of year to rectify that! The veil is thin.

Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth. We all need a "reality check" (and soul searching). And not just during Lent.

But it's a good time to start or heighten this endeavor.

And with that in mind, another examination of conscience offered by the Church goes as follows:

Daily General Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten Commandments

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT: *“I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me.”*

- Have I performed my duties toward God reluctantly or grudgingly?
- Did I neglect my prayer life? Did I recite my usual prayers?
- Did I receive Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin or without the necessary preparation?
- Did I violate the one-hour Eucharistic fast?
- Did I fail to mention some grave sin in my previous Confession?
- Did I seriously believe in something superstitious or engage in a superstitious practice such as palm reading or fortune-telling?
- Did I seriously doubt a matter of faith?
- Did I put my faith in danger -- without a good reason -- by reading a book, pamphlet, or magazine that contains material contrary to Catholic faith or morals?
- Did I endanger my faith by joining or attending meetings of organizations opposed to the Catholic faith such as non-Catholic services, Freemasonry, New Age cults, or other pagan-like religions (see: yoga)? Did I take part in any of its activities?
- Have I committed the sin of sacrilege such as profanation of a sacred person, place, or thing?

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT: *“You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.”*

- Did I fail to try my best to fulfill the promises and resolutions that I made to God?
- Did I take the Name of 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 another saint's name mockingly, jokingly, angrily, or in any other irreverent manner?
- Have I been a sponsor in baptism or participated actively in other ceremonies outside the Catholic Church?
- Did I tell a lie under oath?
- Did I break public or private vows?

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT:

"Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day."



- Did I miss Mass on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation?
- Did I fail to dress appropriately for Mass?
- Did I allow myself to be distracted during Mass, by not paying attention, by looking around out of curiosity, etcetera?
- Have I performed any work or business activity that would inhibit the worship due to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, or the appropriate relaxation of mind and the body, on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation?
- Did I fail to generously help the church in her necessities to the extent that I am able?
- Did I fail to fast or abstain on a day prescribed by the Church?

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT: *"Honor your father and your mother."*

For parents:

- Have I neglected to teach my children their prayers, send them to church or give them a Christian education?
- Have I given them a bad example?
- Have I neglected to watch over my children, to monitor their companions, the books they read, the movies and TV shows they watch?
- Have I failed to see to it that my child made his first Confession and first Communion?
- Have I failed to see to it that my children have received the sacrament of Confirmation?

For children:

- Was I disobedient toward my parents?
- Did I neglect to help my parents when my help was needed?
- Did I treat my parents with little affection or respect?
- Did I react proudly when I was corrected by my parents?
- Did I have a disordered desire for independence?
- Did I do my chores?

For adults with parents:

- Have I supported my parents in times of need to the extent that I am able?
- Have I ensured that my parents are adequately cared for in terms of food, clothing, and shelter?
- Have I spoken to my parents respectfully and been tolerant of their shortcomings?
- Have I listened to their advice patiently and humbly, with an eye toward learning from their experience?
- Have I made an effort to visit my parents and to allow them time to visit with grandchildren?

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *"You shall not kill."*

- Did I easily get angry or lose my temper?
- Was I envious or jealous of others?
- Did I injure or take the life of anyone?
- Was I reckless in driving? Did I drive "under the influence"?
- Was I reckless in the operation of mechanical equipment, chemicals, or other potentially dangerous items?
- Was I reckless in the use of firearms? Did I fail to keep firearms secured so that others, including children, could not access them?

- Was I an occasion of sin for others by way of conversation; the telling of jokes which are religiously, racially or sexually offensive; dressing; inviting somebody to attend certain shows; lending of harmful books or magazines; helping someone to steal, etcetera? Did I try to repair the scandal done (at least through prayer)?
- How many persons did I lead to sin? What sins were involved?
- Did I neglect my health?
- Did I attempt to take my life?
- Did I get drunk or use prohibited drugs?
- Did I eat or drink more than a sufficient amount, allowing myself to get carried away by gluttony?
- Did I participate in any form of physical violence?
- Did I consent to or actively take part in direct sterilization such as tubal ligation, vasectomy, etcetera? Do I realize that this will have a permanent effect on my married life and that I will have to answer to God for its consequences?
- Did I consent to, advise someone about, or actively take part in an abortion? Was I aware that the Church punishes with automatic excommunication those who procure and achieve abortion? Do I realize that this is a very grave crime?
- Did I cause harm to anyone with my words or actions?
- Did I desire revenge or harbor enmity, hatred, or ill feelings when someone offended me?
- Did I ask pardon whenever I offended anyone?
- Did I insult or offensively tease others?
- Did I quarrel with one of my brothers or sisters? Did I always forgive?

THE SIXTH AND NINTH COMMANDMENTS: “*You shall not commit adultery*” and “*You shall not covet your neighbors wife.*”

- Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts?
- Did I consent to evil desires against the virtue of purity, even though I may not have carried them out? Were there any circumstances that aggravated the sin: affinity

(relationship by marriage), consanguinity (blood relationship), either the married state or the consecration to God of a person involved?

- Did I engage in impure conversations? Did I start them?
- Did I look for fun in forms of entertainment that placed me in proximate occasion of sin, such as certain dances, movies, shows, or books with immoral content? Did I frequent houses of ill repute or keep bad company?
- Did I realize that I might already have been committing a sin by placing myself in a proximate occasion of sin, such as sharing a room with a person I find sexually attractive, or being alone with such a person in circumstances that could lead to sin?
- Did I fail to take care of those details of modesty and decency that are the safeguards of purity?
- Did I fail, before going to a show or reading a book, to find out its moral implications, so as not to put myself in immediate danger of sinning in order to avoid distorting my conscience?
- Did I willfully look at an indecent picture or can an immodest look upon myself or another? Did I willfully desire to commit such a sin?
- Did I lead others to sins of impurity or immodesty? What sin?
- Did I commit an impure act? By myself, through masturbation (which is objectively a mortal sin)? With someone else? How many times? With someone of the same or opposite sex? Was there any circumstance of relationship (such as affinity) that could have given the sin special gravity? Did this illicit relationship result in pregnancy? Did I do anything to prevent or end that pregnancy?
- Did I have friendships that are habitual occasions of sexual sin? Am I prepared to end them?
- In courtship, is true love my fundamental reason for wanting to be with the other person? Do I live the constant and cheerful sacrifice of not putting the person I love in danger of sinning? Do I degrade human love by confusing it with selfishness or mere pleasure?
- Did I engage in acts such as "petting," "necking," passionate kisses or prolonged embraces?

For married people:

- Did I, without serious reason, deprive my spouse of the marital right? Did I claim my own rights in a way that showed no concern for my spouse's state of mind or health? Did I betray conjugal fidelity in desire or in deed?
- Did I take the "pill" or use any other artificial birth-control device before or after new life had already been conceived? **(Just confess; God will forgive.)**
- Did I suggest to another person the use of birth-control pills or another artificial method of preventing pregnancy (like condoms)?
- Did I have a hand in contributing to the contraceptive mentality by my advice, jokes, or attitudes?

THE SEVENTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS: *"You shall not steal" and "You shall not covet your neighbors goods."*

- Did I steal? How much money or how much was the object worth? Did I give it back or at least have the intention of doing so?
- Have I done or caused damage to another person's property? To what extent?
- Did I harm anyone by deception, fraud, or coercion in business contracts or transactions?
- Did I unnecessarily spend beyond my means? Do I spend too much money because of vanity or caprice?
- Do I give alms according to my capacity?
- Was I envious of my neighbor's goods?
- Did I neglect to pay my debts? My taxes?
- Did I knowingly accept stolen goods?
- Did I desire to steal?
- Did I give in to laziness or love of comfort rather than diligent work or study?
- Was I greedy? Do I have an excessively materialistic view of life? (Very important.)

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."*

- Did I tell lies? Did I repair any damage that may have resulted as a consequence of this?
- Did I unjustly accuse others?
- Did I sin by detraction, that is, by telling the faults of another person without necessity?
- Did I sin by calumny, that is by telling derogatory lies about another person?
- Did I engage in gossip, backbiting, or tale-telling?
- Did I reveal a secret without due cause?

If you remember other serious sins besides those indicated here, include them also in your Confession.

Shorter Daily General Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten (some a repeat)

Commandments

- When was my last good Confession? Did I receive communion or other sacraments while in the state of mortal sin? Did I intentionally fail to confess some mortal sin in my previous confession?
- Did I willfully and seriously doubt my faith, or put myself in danger of losing it by reading literature hostile to Catholic teachings or by getting involved with non-Catholic sects?
- Did I engage in superstitious activities such as palm-reading and fortune-telling?
- Did I take the Name of God in vain? Did I curse or take a false oath? Did I use bad language? Do I listen to negativity about others?
- Did I miss Mass on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation through my own fault, without any serious reason? Did I fast and abstain on the prescribed days?
- Did I disobey my parents or lawful superiors in important matters?
- Was I selfish in how I treated others, especially my spouse, my brothers and sisters, my relatives, or my friends?
- Did I hatefully quarrel with anyone or desire revenge?

- Did I refuse to forgive?
- Did I cause physical injury or even death?
- Did I get drunk?
- Did I take illicit drugs?
- Did I consent to, advise someone about, or actively take part in an abortion?
- Did I willfully look at indecent pictures or watch immoral movies? Did I read immoral books or magazines?
- Did I engage in impure jokes or conversations?
- Did I willfully entertain impure thoughts or feelings?
- Did I commit impure acts, alone or with others?
- Did I take contraceptive or abortifacient pills, or use other artificial means in order to prevent contraception?
- Did I steal or damage another's property? How much was it worth? Have I made reparation for the damages done?
- Have I been honest in my business relations?
- Did I tell lies?
- Did I sin by slander?
- Did I sin by detraction -- telling unknown grave faults of others without necessity?
- Did I judge others rashly in serious matters? (Did I say something complimentary while thinking the opposite?)
- Have I tried to make restitution for any damages of reputation that I have caused?

If you remember other serious sins besides those indicated here, include them also in your Confession. Mainly, know this: even when *we* lack mercy, God never does; He forgives all (look at the thief on Calvary) who, in humility, seek His forgiveness! He turns into white even scarlet sins.

<http://www.spiritdaily.com/examination.htm>