

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION

Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance to accomplish the forgiveness of sins, healing for our souls, reconciliation with God, and interior peace. **All of these things depend on our making a good confession.** In this catechesis, I want to offer teaching on making a good confession; this will be a lot of information, **but it is important we know these things as we strive to become saints.** What is a good confession? **When we say “good confession”, we mean “integral”** – having every necessary part to be valid, i.e., effective. There are several required elements for a confession to be integral in order to receive the absolution of sins by God through the person of His sacred minister. These necessary elements, found in Canon 959 of the Code of Canon Law, are **confession, sorrow, a firm purpose of amendment, and absolution.**

For the sacrament to be valid (meaning that it actually forgives sin), two elements are required: **the acts of the penitent, and the action of God through His minister.** The *Catechism* states that the acts of the penitent are:

1. **CONTRITION**, or sorrow and hatred for sin together with the resolution not to sin again.
2. **CONFESSION**, telling one's sins to a priest or bishop.
3. **SATISFACTION**, also called penance, an act by which the sinner makes amends for sin (*Catechism*, 1450-1460).

For God's part, the essential element is the extension of His forgiveness (**absolution**) through the sacred minister of His Church, who determines the penance to be performed, prays for the sinner, and even offers personal penance on his or her behalf. **When the essential elements are all present, the sinner is forgiven, healed, and restored to communion with God and His Church. This is what makes for an integral, valid, good confession.**

One is **obliged to confess all mortal sins in kind (name the specific sin) and number (how many times did you do it?) committed after baptism, that have not yet been forgiven or acknowledged in individual confession;** one is also encouraged to confess venial sins (Can. 988). After reaching the age of reason (age 7), every Catholic is **obliged to confess faithfully in the Sacrament of Penance his or her grave sins at least once a year** (Can. 989). Of course, if one falls into mortal sin he should confess as soon as reasonably possible, because one who dies in a state of mortal sin goes to Hell. **Jesus gives us the Sacrament of Penance because He loves us** and knows our weakness and doesn't want us to go to Hell; confession rescues us from that state. **Mortal sins must be confessed, and unconfessed, deliberately withheld mortal sin is the only thing that can stand in the way of our salvation.** After making a thorough examination of conscience, **if the penitent intentionally withholds confessing a grave, mortal sin, the confession is invalid and he is not absolved, even if the priest offers absolution,** as priests cannot (usually!) read souls. **Nothing is forgiven in this instance, even the confessed sins.** If a mortal sin is withheld, **the sin of making a deceptive, sacrilegious confession has been committed.** If a Catholic intentionally makes a sacrilegious confession, in order to receive absolution, the penitent must return to confession, confess his sins once more (including the sin(s) he withheld), and in addition he must confess having made a sacrilegious confession.

It is important that we make a good examination of conscience before receiving the sacrament, and that our consciences are formed by the teaching of the Catholic Church, which Jesus established and gave His Holy Spirit to guide us in faith and morals. It is a truth of our faith, based on Scripture and Tradition, that **individual and integral confession and absolution remain the only ordinary means by which a member of the faithful, conscious of grave sin, is reconciled with God and the Church** (Canon 960). In other words, **confession is absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of mortal sin.** In ordinary circumstances, nothing else forgives mortal sins: **the penitential act at Mass doesn't forgive mortal sin; even receiving the Eucharist doesn't forgive mortal sin, because the Eucharist is food for the living – mortal sin kills the life of the soul, and dead things cannot eat. St. Paul warns us against receiving the Eucharist unworthily (1 Cor 11:27).** It is a mortal sin to receive communion while in a state of mortal sin, and one should go to confession before receiving Holy Communion if in a state of mortal sin, even on a day one is obliged to attend Mass.

I know this may be a hard teaching, but the more knowledge we have of our faith the better we can love God. There is much confusion about sin today; confusion is the devil's playground, but **I love you and don't want you to be confused about what is necessary for your salvation.** Confession is such a beautiful gift, because this sacrament is the Sacred Emergency Room where Jesus raises our souls when they are dead in sin, and heals the wounds of our sins. To help you make a good confession, there is a thorough **examination of conscience on the reverse side of this page.** Take it to prayer, ask the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Mother to guide you, and beg God to illuminate your heart, mind, and soul, and invite Him into all those places that are in need of His healing, life-saving mercy. **Make a good confession, and let peace be with you.**

This list is meant to highlight sins against the 10 Commandments and the Precepts of the Catholic Church. It is highly recommended that you go over this list patiently and diligently, and perhaps write down the specific sins you need to confess. **Do not bring this list into confession and try to confess from it in the moment,** as you could overlook something or get nervous looking at all of these things. **Be humble, place your faith and hope in God, and bring to Him the sins for which He has come to save you.** God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. He gives the grace to overcome our sins, even if it is hard. **Trust Him.**

FIRST COMMANDMENT

I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve. Have I...

- Reserved or harbored hatred for God?
- Disobeyed the commandments of God or the Church?
- Refused to accept what God has revealed as true, or what the Catholic Church proclaims for belief?
- Neglected to nourish and protect my faith?
- Neglected to reject everything opposed to a sound faith?
- Deliberately misled others about doctrine or the faith?
- Rejected the Catholic faith, joined another Christian denomination, or joined or practiced another religion?
- Joined a group forbidden to Catholics (Masons, communists, etc.)?
- Despaired about my salvation or the forgiveness of my sins?
- Presumed God's mercy? (Committing a sin "knowing He'll forgive me")
- Loved someone or something more than God (money, power, sex, ambition, etc.)?
- Engaged in superstitious practices? (Incl. horoscopes, fortune tellers, etc.)
- Been involved in the occult or occult practices? (Séances, Ouija board, worship of Satan, etc.)
- Hidden a serious sin or told a lie in Confession?

SECOND COMMANDMENT

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

- Used the name of God in cursing or blasphemy?
- Failed to keep vows, promises, or resolutions that I have made to God? [specify in the confessional which one; the Priest has authority to remove the obligations of promises and resolutions if they are too rash or unjust]
- Spoken about the Faith, the Church, the saints, or sacred things with irreverence, hatred or defiance?
- Watched television or movies, or listened to music that treated God, the Church, the saints, or sacred things irreverently?
- Used vulgar, suggestive or obscene speech? Belittled others in my speech? Behaved disrespectfully in the church building (e.g., talking immoderately in church before, during, after holy Mass)?
- Misused places or things set apart for the worship of God?
- Committed perjury? (Breaking an oath or lying under oath.)

THIRD COMMANDMENT

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. Have I...

- Blamed God for my failings?
- Missed Mass on Sunday or Holy Days (through my own fault w/o legitimate reason)?
- Neglected to set time aside each day for personal prayer to God?

- Committed a sacrilege against the Blessed Sacrament (thrown Him away; brought Him home; treated Him carelessly, etc.)?
- Received any sacrament while in the state of mortal sin?
- Habitually come late to/left early from Mass?
- Shop, labor, practice sports or do business unnecessarily on Sunday or other Holy Days of Obligation?
- Not attended to taking my children to Mass?
- Not provided proper instruction in the Faith to my children?
- Knowingly eaten meat on a forbidden day (or not fasted on a fast day)?

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

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

- Eaten or drunken within one hour of receiving Communion (other than medical need)?
- (If still under my parents' care) Obeyed all that my parents reasonably asked of me?
- Shown disregard for my parents' wishes, displayed contempt of their demands, and/or disdained their very being?
- Neglected the needs of my parents in their old age or in their time of need?
- Harbored hatred for my parents? Or shamed them?
- (If still in school) Obeyed the reasonable demands of my teachers?
- Disrespected my teachers?
- Neglected to give my children what they need? (If I have children)
- Provided for the religious education of my children for while they are under my care?
- Ensured that my children still under my care regularly frequent the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion?
- Educated my children in a way that corresponds to Catholic religious disciplines?
- Provided my children with a positive, prudent and personalized education in the Catholic teaching on human sexuality?
- Been to my children a good example of how to live the Catholic Faith?
- Prayed with and for my children?
- (For everyone) Lived in humble obedience to those who legitimately exercise authority over me?
- Broken any just law?
- Supported or voted for a politician whose positions are opposed to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic Church?
- Failed to pray for the deceased members of my family ... the Poor Souls of Purgatory included?

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not murder. Have I...

- Unjustly and intentionally killed a human being (murder)?

- Have I been guilty, through negligence and/or lacking of intention, of the death of another (killing)?
- Been involved in an abortion, directly or indirectly (through advice, encouragement, providing money, or facilitating it in any other way)?
- Seriously considered or attempted suicide?
- Supported, promoted, or encouraged the practice of assisted suicide or mercy killing(euthanasia)?
- Deliberately desired to kill an innocent human being?
- Unjustly inflicted bodily harm on another person?
- Unjustly threatened another person with bodily harm?
- Verbally or emotionally abused another person?
- Gossiped, slandered, detracted, calumniated?
- Hated another person, or wished him/her evil?
- Been prejudiced, or unjustly discriminated against others because of their race, color, nationality, sex or religion?
- Joined a hate group?
- Purposely provoked another by teasing or nagging?
- Recklessly endangered my life or health, or that of another, by my actions?
- Driven recklessly or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?
- Abused alcohol or other drugs? Gotten drunk or high?
- Sold or given drugs to others to use for non-therapeutic purposes?
- Used tobacco immoderately?
- Over-eaten?
- Encouraged others to sin by giving scandal?
- Helped another to commit a mortal sin (through advice, driving them somewhere, dressing and/or acting immodestly, etc.)?
- Caused serious injury of another by criminal neglect?
- Indulged in unjust anger?
- Refused to control my temper?
- Been hateful to, quarreled with, or willfully hurt someone?
- Been unforgiving of others, especially when mercy or pardon was requested?
- Sought revenge or hoped something bad would happen to someone?
- Delighted to see someone else get hurt or suffer?

SIXTH & NINTH COMMANDMENTS

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. Have I...

- Treated animals cruelly, causing them to suffer or die needlessly?
- Neglected to practice and grow in chastity?
- Given in to lust? (The desire for sexual pleasure unrelated to spousal love in marriage.)
- Used an artificial means of birth control (including withdrawal)?
- Refused to be open to conception, without just cause? (Catechism, 2368)

- Participated in immoral techniques such as in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination?
- Sterilized my sex organs for contraceptive purposes?
- Deprived my spouse of the marital debt, without just cause?
- Claimed my own marital right without concern for my spouse?
- Deliberately caused male climax outside of normal sexual intercourse?
- Masturbated? (Deliberate stimulation of one's own sexual organs for sexual pleasure outside of the conjugal act.) (Catechism, 2366)
- Engaged in anal or oral sex?
- Willfully entertained impure thoughts?
- Purchased, viewed, produced, or made use of pornography?
- Watched or promoted movies and television that involve sex and nudity?
- Listened to music or jokes that are harmful to purity? Read books that are immoral?
- Committed adultery? (Sexual relations with someone who is married, or with someone other than my spouse.)
- Committed incest? (Sexual relations with a relative closer than the 3rd degree or an in-law.)
- Committed fornication? (Sexual relations with someone of the opposite sex when the two are not married to one another or any others.)
- Engaged in homosexual activity? (Sexual activity with someone of the same sex)
- Committed rape?
- Engaged in sexual foreplay (e.g., "petting", or excessive touching) reserved for marriage?
- Preyed upon children or youth for my sexual pleasure (pedophilia)?
- Engaged in unnatural sexual activities (anything that is not inherently natural to the sexual act; e.g., sex toys, even in the context of marriage)?
- Engaged in prostitution, or paid for the services of a prostitute?
- Seduced someone, or allowed myself to be seduced?
- Made uninvited and unwelcome sexual advances toward another?
- Purposely dressed immodestly?

SEVENTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS

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

- Stolen?
- Envied others on account of their possessions?
- Neglected to live in a spirit of Gospel poverty and simplicity?
- Neglected to give generously to others in need?
- Not considered that God has provided me with money so that I might use it to benefit others, as well as for my own legitimate needs?

- Allowed myself to be conformed to a consumer mentality?
- Neglected to practice the corporal works of mercy?
- Deliberately defaced, destroyed or lost another's property?
- Cheated on a test, taxes, games, or in business?
- Squandered money in compulsive gambling?
- Make a false claim to an insurance company?
- Paid my employees a living wage, or failed to give a full day's work for a full day's pay?
- Failed to honor my part of a contract?
- Failed to make good on a debt?
- Overcharged someone, especially to take advantage of another's hardship or ignorance?
- Misused natural resources?

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

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

- Lied?
- Knowingly and willfully deceived another?
- Perjured myself under oath?
- Gossiped?
- Committed detraction? (Destroying a person's reputation by telling others about his faults for no good reason.)
- Committed slander or calumny? (Telling lies about another person in order to destroy his reputation.)
- Committed libel? (Writing lies about another person in order to destroy his reputation. Libel is different from slander because the written word has a longer "life" of damage)
- Been guilty of rash judgment? (Assuming the worst of another person based on circumstantial evidence.)
- Failed to make reparation for a lie I told, or for harm done to a person's reputation?
- Failed to speak out in defense of the Catholic Faith, the Church, or of another person?
- Betrayed another's confidence through speech, deed, or in writing?

PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

1. *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation and rest from servile labor.*
2. *You shall confess your sins (to a Priest) at least once a year.*
3. *You shall humbly receive your Creator in Holy Communion at least once during the Easter season.*
4. *You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.*
5. *You shall contribute to the support of the Church.*
6. *You shall observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage.**

Have I...

- Made a good Confession of my mortal sins at least once a year?
- Purposely omitted telling my mortal sins in my last Confession?
- Neglected to perform the penance I was given?

- Neglected to make reparation for any harm I have done to others?
- Neglected to fulfill my Easter duty to receive Holy Communion at least once between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday?
- Received Holy Communion while in the state of mortal sin?
- Failed to fast for at least one hour before receiving Holy Communion?
- Received Holy Communion more than twice in one day?
- Neglected to do penance **every Friday** of the year, if not abstaining from meat?
- Neglected to abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent (if I am 14 years of age and/or older)?
- Neglected to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (if I am between
- Participated in frivolity on days of penance (e.g Ash Wednesday & Good Friday)?
- Neglected to spend time in prayer, do spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and practice self-denial?
- Neglected to contribute a just amount of my time, talents and money to support my parish and the work of the Church?
- Neglected to support the Church by not trying to become a saint or by not striving to make sincere progress each day in sanctity?
- Been living in an invalid and/or illicit marriage according to the laws of the Catholic Church?
- Abandoned my spouse and/or family by separation or divorce?
- Kept company with someone whom I cannot marry in the Catholic Church?
- Given scandal by living with a member of the opposite sex without the benefit of a marriage blessed by the Catholic Church?
- Entered into marriage with more than one person at the same time?
- Failed to embrace the teachings given by the Catholic Church, which are supported by the Natural Law: that marriage can only exist between one man and one woman, and that no other union (i.e., between members of the same sex) can be a valid marriage? [If one holds that same sex unions can be valid marriages he must recant and repent before he can make a valid confession.]
- Supported pro same-sex union politicians?
- Publicly stated that the Church's teaching on marriage is wrong and taught others to reject it?

** The Catechism of the Catholic Church officially lists 5 Precepts. However, this additional precept is counted among those teachings that are so fundamental to Catholicism that they must be observed in order to consider oneself a faithful and practicing Catholic.*