

MAKING A GOOD CONFESSION

A Sacrament of Healing

{NOTE: This booklet does not argue theological reasons for confession – that discussion should be had with your minister.}

Did you know that what we call “confession” is formally called “Reconciliation of a Penitent?” The act of confession is about bringing you fully back into the fold of Christ. It gives you an opportunity to know for sure and certain that you have come clean with God about the sin in your life.

Not only is it called “Reconciliation of a Penitent,” but in our prayer book, it is the first in the section called “Rites of Healing.”

It is first and foremost a sacrament of healing: the healing of your soul, and your relationship with God, your neighbor, yourself, and all of creation.

WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN TO CONFESSION

Going to confession for the first time may seem a little daunting. What will the priest think of me? Will I ever be able to look him in the face after I confess? Will it be totally embarrassing? Is he gonna drill me about all the stuff I'm doing wrong? What is actually going to happen? What will I have to do?...

You've probably got other questions. Let's tackle some of them.

What will the priest think of me saying all my bad stuff?

A good first question to ask concerning your priest's reaction and to help set the framework for your preparation is this: have you ever looked down upon or thought negatively about anyone who confessed to you that they had done something wrong?

Most of us would say "absolutely not, in fact, I respected them the more for it."

It may help to know that your priest has A) been prepared to hear confessions and B) likely heard so many confessions that yours is not going to stand out in any tremendous way.

No matter what you might confess, and most of us have heard some pretty horrid things, your priest will be most excited that you have taken this step toward healing. Please don't let you're your priest's reaction be a concern.

OK, SO WHAT DO I DO?

Let's start at the beginning. After you have decided to go to confession, it is best to prepare by doing some self-analysis. As you confess more often, this process may become fairly quick for you, but the first time it is helpful to use some guide for reflecting on those places where sin may have a hold in your life. Many people may go through the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes. There is a guide based on both of these later on in this booklet.

Plan on taking some significant time preparing for your first confession. Get a notebook and pen and then begin by sitting quietly with the Lord and ask him to bring to mind anything that he wants to deal with in your life. Sit there in silence for a moment. Write down anything that you feel the Lord is bringing to your mind.

Then spend a moment reflecting on your life in perhaps 5 year increments. The goal is not to try to come up with every little thing but to focus on the big things or the little things that have become big from so many years of keeping them hidden. Write them down.

After your first confession, you will probably review your life in one month intervals since your last confession.

As you are writing things down, you only need to say what it was that was sinful and how often you engaged in the activity. You don't need to give the full story.

If you feel you need to justify your action, then it's not a confession.

But do pay attention to sins that have attached themselves

to other sins. For instance, “I started sleeping around when I was 16 and did so regularly through high-school and college” may be sufficient. But there may be other sinful motivations that became attached to your actions at some point (for example, you started sleeping around in order to make someone jealous or to spite an ex).

So, after you have your notes of things that you want to confess, it’s time to go find a priest and set a time for confession.

DO YOU HAVE TO CONFESS TO A PRIEST?

There are a variety of responses to this question. Let me hit a few. We’ll start with a theological response.

The power of the Confessional is due solely to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who conquered sin, put death to flight, and opened the way for us to everlasting life. It is Jesus who provides healing from sin and it is Jesus who provides the power and authority to forgive sin.

Jesus most certainly gave to the Church this authority, His authority, to absolve sins. Some people may say that authority extends to all Christians and some might say it is only to the formally ordained ministers. Guess who falls into both categories? Priests. So, you’re covered either way.

Secondly, who would you rather go to if you need stitches in your arm, a seamstress or an ER doctor? Both could probably do the job, but one has spent a lot of time focusing on exactly this type of job. A priest should have experience with hearing confessions and with helping you to confess everything so that you walk away feeling fully clean.

Additionally, priests have probably heard it all and aren't going to be scandalized or shocked at whatever you may tell them.

And finally, a priest could lose his job and all future clergy jobs if he gossips about the things you confess. That's a very worldly but legitimate insurance policy safeguarding your confidentiality.

WHAT IF YOU CAN'T FIND A PRIEST?

A deacon is the next best bet and then someone who has some experience in spiritual guidance and counsel. Elvis said, if you can't find a partner grab a wooden chair, but I wouldn't advise that with confession. Sadly, some people may use the information of your confession in a poor manner: gossip, blackmail, slander, etc.

If you cannot find someone in your own tradition, there are many ministers of other traditions that will likely be willing to hear your confession as well.

FINALLY!, YOU'RE AT CONFESSION... WITH A PRIEST, WHAT NOW?

You may end up thinking that it's pretty uneventful actually.

You'll ask for a blessing. The priest will pray for you. You'll pray a prayer of confession and bring out your list and add

your specific sins to the general ones in the prayer of confession. The priest may ask you some questions. He may offer some counsel. He may suggest an action to help you to combat the sin in the future.

Then, he'll pray for you some more, absolving you of your sins (i.e. removing them from you as far as the east is from the west). Then you leave.

That's it. Oh, except for the part where, when you leave, you breathe a huge sigh of relief that all those things are now out in the open and there is nothing more to hide. That's the good stuff.

Here is a general example of what will transpire:

The Penitent begins

Bless me, for I have sinned.

The Priest says

The Lord be in your heart and upon your lips that you may truly and humbly confess your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Penitent

I confess to Almighty God, to his Church, and to you, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially... *{here you will confess your specific sins}*.

For these and all other sins that I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly beg forgiveness of God and his Church, and ask you for counsel, direction, and absolution.

Here the Priest may offer counsel, direction, and comfort.

The Priest then declares

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive you all your offenses; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve you from all your sins: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Lord has put away all your sins.

Penitent Thanks be to God.

The following prayer may also be said

O most loving Father, by your mercy you put away the sins of those who truly repent, and remember their sins no more. Restore and renew in your servant whatever has been corrupted by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by *his* own selfish will and weakness. Preserve and protect *him* within the fellowship of the Church; hear *his* prayers and relieve *his* pain; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Priest concludes

Go (or abide) in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.

... and then you will leave. Simple enough?

Now it's time to get ready. On the following pages are the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and then some questions to help you discern areas of sin in your life.

May the Lord, indeed, be in your heart as you prepare to truly and humbly confess your sins.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

And God spoke all these words, saying,

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Exodus 20:1-17 English Standard Version

THE BEATITUDES

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:1-11 English Standard Version

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU
PREPARE FOR CONFESSION

YOU AND GOD

Do I believe in God the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit?

Do I trust myself at all times to the providence of God, or do I become discouraged and show a lack of faith?

At times of affliction, illness, or personal trials, do I grumble against God and lose faith and courage?

Do I use psychics, card readers, astrologers, horoscopes, or other ungodly means of prediction or power? Have I advised others to take refuge in these?

Do I believe in superstitions or bad omens?

Do I pray in the morning, in the evening, and at meal times? Am I embarrassed to do so in public?

Do I regularly spend time reading Holy Scripture?

Do I attend church every Sunday?

Do I arrive on time and stay throughout the service?

Do I know the service and participate as I am able?

Do I prepare myself appropriately to receive Holy Communion?

Do I dress reverently for worship?

Do I swear or have I made promises to God that I have not kept?

Do I joke about sacred things?

Do I fast as my health allows?

Do I give generously of my income to the Church?

YOU AND OTHERS

Do I harbor a grudge or hatred towards someone who has treated me badly or insulted me?

Am I suspicious of others, their thoughts, or their intentions about me?

Do I get jealous about the progress, the happiness, the beauty, or the good of others?

Am I unmoved or apathetic toward the misfortune or needs of my neighbor?

Do I give to the poor, the parentless, the elderly, or struggling families that I know?

Am I honest, straightforward, sincere, and upright in my every day dealings with everyone?

Have I slandered or accused another? Have I spoken sarcastically about the devout Christian life of another person?

Have I joked about those who have spiritual or physical weaknesses?

Do I pass on gossip, perhaps pretending to disguise it as

relaying important information?

Have I cursed another person or even myself and my existence?

Have I verbally sent people “to hell” or used insulting hand gestures?

Do I respect my parents and care for them and have patience with their elderly weaknesses if they have any?

Do I help them with their physical and spiritual needs?

Have I deserted them or treated them with indifference?

Have I verbally or physically assaulted anyone?

Do I carry on my work with integrity?

Do I steal or cover up the sins of others?

Do I take liberties in order to avoid paying taxes?

Am I thankless to God or to those that are good to me?

Do I have any sinful relationships?

Have I committed forgery or taken advantage of the public or the government?

Have I borrowed objects or money and failed to return them?

Have I ever committed murder in any way?

Do I involve myself in the private life of others, their work, or their family, causing arguments?

YOURSELF

Have I been attached to material things and worldly goods?

Have I been stingy or a lover of money?

Have I been greedy?

Do I give freely?

Have I been or acted conceited?

Do I like to show off (clothes, wealth, success, my child's success)?

Do I crave admiration from those around me or desire too much the praises of man?

Do I get upset when someone points out my mistakes or my faults, or do I feel hurt when reprimanded or corrected by my superiors?

Am I stubborn, obstinate, egotistical, selfish, or self-centered?

Do I engage in useless activities in order to “just kill time”?

Am I overly concerned with the latest news or my social media accounts?

Do I entertain lustful thoughts or spend time looking at images that provoke lustful thoughts?

Have I looked at obscene books or magazines?

Have I ever considered suicide?

Have I been gluttonous, eating when I am already full?

Have I used obscene, insulting, or improper words for the sake of being comical, or to insult or humiliate another person?

Have I been lazy, insolent, or negligent in any way?

Do I truly have a spirit of self-denial trying to live my life in such a way that, with God's help, I may cultivate such a spirit in my heart?

Do I truly work to quickly expel from my mind any bad thoughts that come into it?

Do I truly control my eyes so that they don't curiously examine provocative pictures or people?

Do I truly control what goes into my ears?

Do I listen to music that moves me toward God, truth, and beauty rather than music that promotes hatred, violence, lust, crudeness, bigotry or other ungodly things?

Do I dress simply and modestly?

Do I drink too much or otherwise pollute my body?

FOR COUPLES

Am I loyal to my spouse in my body as well as in my thoughts?

Have I offended or saddened my spouse in the presence of others or privately?

Have I encouraged my spouse to follow passing passions, to pursue luxurious living, or to waste our time partying?

Am I sensitive to the struggles of my spouse both inside and outside of our home?

Do I make an effort to recognize and support my spouse in their struggles, thus providing comfort psychologically, emotionally, and physically?

Have I been overly demanding with my husband or wife?

Have I in any way discouraged my husband or wife from going to church, praying, or reading or listening to Christian materials?

Do I honor and love the parents and relatives of my spouse?

Have I ever allowed my parents to interfere in our home life, and become a source of dissension between me and my spouse?

FOR PARENTS

Do I raise my children with the teachings and in the way of the Lord?

Do I put their physical or academic pursuits ahead of their spiritual well-being?

Do I take my children to church and to Sunday school?

Do I set an example for them in worship, prayer, and Christian virtue?

Do I teach them to pray with seriousness and devotion?

Do I safeguard what my children do and watch as is appropriate for their age?

Do I teach them humility by my own example?

Am I loving toward my children even when I am tired or they are aggravating?

Do I ever decide to spend time making “a little more” money rather than being with my children?

Have I been harsh with my children?

Have I been unjust with my children in the distribution of property?

Do I interfere in the home life of my adult children?



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