

**HOW TO EXAMINE YOUR CONSCIENCE:
FIVE STEPS TO PREPARE TO CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**

Our soul needs a regular checkup just like our body does. Avoiding either one risks letting a small fault become a deadly illness. It is a good idea to hold ourselves accountable at the end of every day. We can look back over the day, recognize God's presence in our day and thank Him for it. At the same time, we can look back and see the choices we made and admit when we sinned by what we did, said and thought and by what we failed to do.

I. The first and easiest step in an examination of conscience is to look at the most important relationships in your daily life: spouse, children, parents, friends, superiors, co-workers. Identify anything that is wrong or lacking in those relationships.

II. Next, **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**, given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai provide a starting point for thinking about the most important areas where we make choices in life.

[1] I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me. Do I give God time every day in prayer? Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart? Have I been involved with superstitious practices? Do I seek to understand and accept the teaching of the Church? Have I ever received Communion in a state of mortal sin? Have I ever deliberately told a lie in confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in confession?

[2] You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Have I used God's name in vain: lightly or carelessly? Have I been angry with God? Have I wished evil upon another person? Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object?

[3] Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day. Have I deliberately missed the Liturgy on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation? Have I tried to observe Sunday as a family day and a day of rest? Do I do needless work on Sunday?

[4] Honor your Father and your Mother. Do I honor and obey my parents appropriately to my age and theirs? Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children? Have I given my family good religious example? Do I try to bring peace into my home life? Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?

[5] You shall not kill. Have I had an abortion or encouraged anyone to have an abortion? Have I physically harmed anyone? Have I abused alcohol or drugs? Did I lead anyone into sin by my bad example? Have I been angry or resentful? Have I harbored hatred in my heart? Have I mutilated myself through any form of sterilization? Have I encouraged or condoned sterilization?

[6] You shall not commit adultery. Have I been faithful to my marriage vows in thought and action? Have I engaged in any sexual activity outside of marriage? Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control in my marriage? Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life? Have I been guilty of masturbation? Have I sought to control my thoughts? Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other people as objects? Have I been guilty of any homosexual activity? Do I seek to be chaste in my thoughts, words and actions? Am I careful to dress modestly?

[7] You shall not steal. Have I stolen what is not mine? Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen? Do I waste time at work, school or at home? Do I gamble excessively, thereby denying my family of their needs? Do I pay my debts promptly? Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?

[8] You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Have I lied? Have I gossiped? Have I spoken behind someone else's back? Am I sincere in my dealings with others? Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my thoughts of others? Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?

[9] You shall not desire your neighbor's wife. Have I given in to impure thoughts? Have I used pornography or chosen to enjoy sexually explicit books, films or conversations? Do I seek to control my imagination? Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations?

[10] You shall not desire your neighbor's goods. Am I jealous of what other people have? Do I envy the families or possessions of others? Am I greedy or selfish? Are material things too important in my life? Do I trust in God?

III. You could also consider **THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS**, a traditional list of serious vices. Tradition also proposes **SEVEN VIRTUES**, we should strive for until they become habitual.

PRIDE: Am I arrogant? Contemptuous or judgmental of others? Unwilling to take correction or follow instructions from others? Can I admit when I am wrong? Do I blame others to avoid blame myself? Am I hypocritical? Am I grateful to God for what He has given me? Do I realize that I depend on God's grace? The opposite virtue is **HUMILITY**.

COVETOUSNESS: is covered in the 9th and 10th commandments. Its opposite virtue is **CHARITY**.

LUST: is covered in the 6th and 9th commandments. Its opposite virtue is **CHASTITY**.

ANGER: Do I insist on having my own way? Do I allow myself to lose my temper easily? Am I prone to quarreling, abusive language, bullying, mockery, threats, and "paybacks"? Do I entertain thoughts of revenge? Do I refuse forgiveness? Do I hold grudges? The opposite virtue is **PATIENCE**.

GLUTTONY: Do I use food, drink, tobacco, or drugs to make myself happy when I am feeling badly? Do I eat or drink beyond what is good for my health? Do I consume things snobbishly, as a way of making myself look more important, refined or successful? Am I selfish in meeting my own desires? Do I give generously to help those who are in real need? The opposite virtue is **MODERATION**.

ENVY: Does the success of others bother me? Do I try to bring people down by talking badly about them? Do I take pleasure in other people's troubles? Do I tend to think of myself as a victim and of all my problems as other people's faults? The opposite virtue is **KINDNESS**.

SLOTH: Have I developed my own talents and abilities? Am I indifferent? Cynical? Do I participate in social, political, cultural and religious activities? Do I try to avoid taking on any responsibility? Am I careless in performing my duties? Do I spend a lot of time being passively entertained? Have I given up on my own personal and spiritual improvement? The opposite virtue is **DILIGENCE**.

IV. Since the Middle Ages, the Church has commanded that all Catholics observe **THE SIX PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH**, which assure that we stay united with Jesus Christ by living a sacramental life as committed Catholics:

- 1) To participate in the Liturgy every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation;¹ to use these as days of rest and renewal; to avoid unnecessary labor and commerce.
- 2) To make a sacramental confession at least once a year; and to receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the seasons of Lent and Pascha.
- 3) To study and learn our faith to the best of our ability.
- 4) To obey the laws of the Church concerning Matrimony and that includes her teachings on birth control, abortion, and other marital affairs); to provide religious training and an example of sanctity to one's children and grandchildren; and to avail oneself of the facilities provided by the parish to advance their and one's own religious education.
- 5) To fast (reduce intake of food) and abstain (give up certain foods) at the appointed times. We are required to do Penance of some kind EVERY Friday of the year (except the "Free Fridays"²). If we do not abstain from meat on these Fridays we must choose some other penance. We are required to fast AND abstain on the first day of Lent (Clean Monday) and on Good Friday. We are encouraged to observe whole seasons of fasting.³ We are encouraged to fast on the vigils of major feasts⁴ and on a few other days.⁵ All of these dates and seasons are clearly indicated on the Church Calendar.
- 6) To contribute to the support of the Church. In addition to financial support (and/or volunteer labor) this means supporting the Church by speaking out to defend her; by witnessing to others who are not Catholic; by supporting missionary and educational activities to bring the Catholic Church to those who have not yet received her.

¹ January 6 (Theophany), Ascension Thursday, June 29 (Sts Peter and Paul), August 15 (Dormition of Mary), December 25 (Christmas).

² Friday of Bright Week, Friday after Pentecost, Friday of the Pharisee and Publican, Fridays between Christmas and January 6.

³ Great Lent, Filipovka (Nov 15-Dec 24), Spasovka (August 1-14) and the Apostles' Fast (before Ss. Peter and Paul (June 29).

⁴ Christmas Eve, Theophany Eve, Holy Saturday.

⁵ Holy Cross—September 14; Beheading of John the Baptist—August 29.

HOW TO CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Your examination of conscience will reveal what you need to confess. The most important thing is your attitude: you need to really desire to make progress in avoiding sin in the future and you need to be sincerely sorry that sin has damaged your relationship with God. There are customary formulas that help you express these attitudes and these traditional prayers are valuable. More important than getting the words right, however, is getting the attitude right.

Confessions will be heard before an icon of our Lord, and/or a Holy Gospel and Cross. The Gospel expresses the ideal we strive for and the standard against which God will judge us. Jesus death on the Cross in sacrifice for all the sins of humanity is what makes confession and forgiveness possible. You make your confession to God. The priest's job is to listen in, to help you confess everything you need to and to speak for God in promising you forgiveness.

As a good preparation for confession you could pray Psalm 51 (50 in older books)

When you approach for confession, venerate the Gospel and Cross or the Icon, and say:

I confess to God, one in the Holy Trinity, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to all the angels and saints and to you, Father, all my sins.

Say how long it has been since your last confession. Then list your sins simply, clearly, honestly and by name, without excuses, digressions or long explanations.

When you have confessed all your sins, say:

For these and all my other sins which I cannot call to mind I am sincerely sorry that I have offended my good God. I promise with the help of God to better my life.

The priest may offer some advice or encouragement, especially to prayer and fasting. The fasting days and seasons are when we perform penance to better our lives.

The priest will pronounce the prayer of absolution, placing his epitrachelion on your head as a physical sign of God's forgiving touch. We believe that God forgives and forgets everything we have sincerely confessed:

May our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, because he is good and loves mankind, forgive all your sins. And I his priest, unworthy as I am, by his power given to me, I forgive you and absolve you, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Venerate the Gospel, Cross or Icon before leaving. A good prayer after confession is Psalm 32.