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Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

On making a Perfect and Holy Confession



THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

This magnificent article is a reprint — with some editorial redactions — from Sacred Heart Traditional Catholic Church in Lawrence, MA. It is one of the best and most informative articles on the Traditional Catholic Sacrament of Holy Penance — or Holy Confession. It provides eminently readable instruction on what Holy Confession is, what is involved in making a good confession, what to do, and what to avoid. It is a masterpiece of authentic, traditional, Catholic teaching. It has been modified in part for greater clarity.

[Editor's Note: given the *extreme spiritual and moral laxity* in society today — and, alas, for sorrow — within the post-Vatican II Church itself in which we find only “**faults and failures**” ... but no “**sins**” — some of what appears below, especially the questions of the priest-confessor, may seem stern, rigorous, demanding, and even harsh. **To understand this correctly**, you must understand the contrast between the private and anonymous **Traditional Catholic “Confessional”** and what we encounter in today’s “**Reconciliation Rooms**” which resemble informal offices with comfortably cushioned armchairs, no kneelers, and **no privacy**: the priests *knows* exactly *who you are* and what *you* have done, for he is face-to-face with you. **This can be particularly uncomfortable for women, understandably — and it is uncomfortable for men as well**, and often for the same reason. What woman wants to confess her sexual sins face-to-face with a priest? Given the widespread homosexuality in the priesthood of the *Novus Ordo* (post-Vatican II) Church, what man is comfortable

confessing the sin, say, of masturbation to a priest who may be aroused by it? This is no mere speculation. Men *have been* shamefully propositioned by homosexual priests in today's cozy "Reconciliation Room". This is very likely reason for **the precipitous drop (to around 2%) in Confession.**

Equally to the point is that **the sole reason** that a Traditional Catholic Priest is often unstinting in knowing (in the privacy of a proper Confessional separating the priest from the penitent) the nature, number, and circumstances of our sins. How can he put us on the right path if he does not know the path we have travelled that led us to sin? ***This does not mean*** that each sin should be confessed in lurid detail! That is inappropriate! But if the priest-confessor gives you absolution of sins not fully disclosed or understood by either himself or you — in addition to the sins that you have *invalidly* or *incompletely* confessed — **not only do your sins remain when you leave the Confessional, but you ADD the very grave Mortal Sin of Sacrilege** — which is *greater* than any other sin you possibly could have confessed! The priest is not trying to "torture" you — as Pseudo-Pope Francis falsely claims in describing the Sacrament of Confession — ***he wants to help you get to Heaven*** and realizes that *you cannot possibly go there if you are in a state of sin, especially Mortal Sin. You absolutely must not conceal any sins* through a *misplaced sense of shame*. It is VITAL that you understand this!]

You must receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily!

You have been bound by sin, and now desire to be loosed from the chains of sin which bind you. When you feel the desire to be loosed from sin, God is calling you. If you wish to go to Him, raise up your heart in fervent prayer. **You must earnestly ask God's help.**

Many sacrilegious Confessions and Communion may be traced to the fact that a soul, **of itself**, presumes to approach the Tribunal of Penance *without the help of God*. Men and women come into the confessional without the least preparation, after having been engaged in useless conversation on the street up to the moment of entering the Church. Others spend their time idly gazing around the Church while awaiting their turn in the pews. This should *never* happen; and those who do so demonstrate that they do not realize **the utter sanctity** of the Sacrament of Penance.

The priest is the ambassador of Jesus Christ. Christ has placed in him the power of reconciliation. The priest is sent even as our Lord was sent, by the Father. How can he exercise that wonderful ministry of reconciliation if you neglect **to do your part** in seeking to be united to God in the Sacrament of Penance?

For this union you must:

- **Pray** (especially for the grace of *holy humility* to confess your sins, no matter how ashamed you may be. *Shame is personal* reproach and has no place in the Confessional. Shame has nothing to do with *sorrow*.)

- **Have genuine and heartfelt sorrow for your sins** (one good test is this: if you could go back in time, would you commit that same sin again)
 - **Examine your conscience** (were the things you had done, things **God** would have had you do? Did you **fail** to do what you *know* **God** would have had you do?)
 - **Confess your sins to the priest** (openly, honestly, sorrowfully, omitting no sin though a sense of guilt or worthless shame: **you are confessing to Christ Himself** in the person of His priest, no matter how unworthy the priest may be!)
 - **Make a firm resolution to sin no more.** Saint Peter was unsparing in his assessment of those who lacked firm resolution: **“The dog turns back to his own vomit again, and the pig that was washed goes back to wallowing in the mud.”** (2 St. Peter 2.22)
 - **Promise satisfaction** (doing the penance enjoined upon you by the priest in confession, repairing the scandal you may have brought to an individual, restoring property you may have stolen, and the good name to your neighbor if you have gossiped against her or unjustly defamed him.)
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PREPARATION WITH PRAYER

Try to start your confession with the Rosary, imploring that God may give you the grace to make a good, humble, sincere, and worthy confession. We never know when God may call us to account in the Particular Judgment following our death, and we must show our devotion to the Holy Trinity and a sober recognition of the state our souls are in by always making a good confession.

Always keep in mind that this life is a mere 70 - 80 years long at most. After that we are judged.

God wants all his children to go to Heaven, but all of us reject His love through sin at some point, and many of us unfortunately reject His forgiveness through the holy sacrament of Confession.

LIFE IS NOT ABOUT THIS WORLD, BUT THE NEXT

Remember — God does not put us in Hell, we put ourselves in Hell. God wants us to be in love with Him and out of His love, we then have the opportunity to return that love during our live by living the commandments God has given us, by our filial obedience to Him: **“If you love Me, keep My commandments”** (Saint John 14.15). If we choose to travel down the path God has provided, we can then live forever with Him in Heaven. It is difficult to be in this world and live for God, but anything worth doing should be hard, and nothing is more important than our eternal salvation. Living on faith is very intense, but Our Lord has given us the

tools to live a holy and virtuous life and the graces are there waiting for you. All you have to do is simply ask for them or receive them through the sacraments, like Confession and the Holy Eucharist.

CONTRITION

No matter how well you examine your conscience, how exactly you count your sins, how clearly you tell them, all will be useless, without a true sorrow of heart for having offended God.

You must have sorrow for your sins. As there is a difference between true joy and the pretense of joy — so, too, with sorrow; one is from the heart and the other a pretense. Sorrow of heart is necessary for the pardon of sins in Confession.

There are *two* kinds of sorrow. The first arises from a pure love of God. Knowing how good, how loving, how tender a Father we have offended by our sins; knowing all that He has done and suffered for us, we are grieved to the very heart that we have offended Him. This is **perfect contrition**.

Imperfect contrition arises from fear of God's judgment and from a knowledge of the baseness of sin and of its evil effects on the soul. This latter is true sorrow, but not perfect like the first. United with confession, with a determination to amend the past, and with the absolution of the priest, imperfect contrition will justify the sinner; but you should always endeavor to have perfect sorrow for your sins. This sorrow can be acquired by prayer and meditation. You must earnestly ask it of God, and make use of such meditations and considerations as will move you to it.

SORROW FOR SIN

The sinner, wishing to receive the Sacrament of Penance must have true and sincere sorrow for his sin; he must detest it, and turn away from it in order to be reconciled with God, who it offends.

Mere natural sorrow for sin because of the temporal evils which it causes is not sufficient. I may be sorry because sin has ruined my good name, or my wealth, or health, or honor or purity, but such motives are merely natural, and have no relation to God. The sinner in the Sacrament of Penance seeks reconciliation with God, and so the motives of his sorrow must have reference to God; they must be supernatural, founded on revelation and faith. Without faith no act can be of avail for salvation, as **“without faith it is impossible to please God.”**

The sinner must regard sin as the greatest of all evils, as it is. He must be prepared to do and suffer anything rather than commit sin again. Otherwise, he cannot be said to fulfill that greatest of all commandments, which bids us love God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind.

You must know that our Lord is most desirous of giving us His graces. He is the Good Shepherd who is anxiously seeking His poor lost sheep. He is the Father of the poor hungry, wretched child. You must also know that sin is the only enemy of God. **Sin crucified our Redeemer.** Sin blackens and defiles the soul, which is the temple of God. Sin robs the soul of its inheritance, the everlasting joys of Heaven, and precipitates so many into the eternal torments of Hell. A soul in grace is a spouse of Jesus Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost; **a soul in mortal sin, is a**

subject of Satan, a den of unclean spirits. A soul in grace is beautiful, like an angel; a soul in sin is poor, despoiled of all merit, a slave of the devil. **Remember, mortal sin kills the soul.** It is true that our souls are immortal.

The Scriptures mention a second death, which is the everlasting death of the soul in Hell. Now, that death is the sequel and issue of mortal sin, for mortal sin deprives the soul of the grace of God, which is the life of the soul. How hideous is the body a few days after life has departed! You could hardly find a man willing to stay a whole night with a decomposing corpse. Yet a soul in mortal sin is infinitely more horrible. One mortal sin changed the brightest angels of God into hideous demons; so ugly, that the sight of one deformed spirit would be enough to strike one dead. What, then, must be the terrible deformity of that man's soul who is guilty of many mortal sins! We read in the life of St. Catherine of Siena, that God permitted her to see a soul in sin; and she declared that, had she not been upheld and strengthened by God, she would instantly have died from fright and horror.

Sin is an infinite evil. God alone knows the enormity of sin. Hence to have true sorrow for sin, you must ask God to give it to you; and that you may be moved to greater fervor in doing so, meditate on the Passion of our Lord. For in the Victim of Calvary we see the enormity of sin that required such atonement; the justice of God that required such satisfaction; the love of our Lord Who endured so much for us; the ingratitude of men who hardly ever think of all that Jesus Christ suffered in order to save them from the punishment they deserve for their sins.

WHAT IS AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE?

During your conservations with God through prayer, you came to know your real self. He has given you strength and courage. The Holy Ghost has enlightened the soul. Reflect upon how you stand before God. Take account of your soul. Think about your sins since your last Confession. This is making an examination of conscience. *The neglect of examination of conscience is a source of sacrilegious Confessions.* It is owing to carelessness on the part of some, indifference on the part of others, and ignorance on the part of still more. Generally, those who hasten to the confessional without asking God to give them grace to make a good Confession, begin to accuse themselves without any previous examination. They never try to count their sins. **Many do not truthfully show themselves to the priest, as our Lord tells them. They either hide their guilty conscience, or they show themselves in false colors. They do not examine their conscience. They do not count their sins.** The following is an example of a confession made without an examination of conscience.

An example: Here is a man, for instance, who has been away from confession for five years:

Confessor (Priest) — When were you at confession last?

Penitent — A long time ago.

Confessor (Priest) — How long ago?

Penitent — Oh, several years.

Confessor (Priest) — Please tell me, as near as you can, how long it is.

Penitent —it's so long, Father, it's hard for me to tell.

Confessor — Is it one year, or two or five or ten years?

Penitent —Well, it's about five years.

Confessor (Priest) — What sins have you committed *since* then?

Penitent — A great many.

Confessor (Priest) — Have you cursed?

Penitent — I have.

Confessor (Priest) — How often, and what did you say?

Penitent — Oh, not very often.

Confessor (Priest) — About how many times a day did you take the Holy Name of Jesus in vain?

Penitent — Some days a good many times, and other days not at all.

Confessor (Priest) — Please, my child, tell the number of times you committed each sin, and do not keep me waiting.

Penitent — Well, I cursed and swore, told lies, missed Mass, had bad thoughts, and got angry sometimes; that's all, Father.

Such a Confession is not clear enough. It is too general. It is a most *imperfect* confession.

- How can the priest form a correct judgment of the state of such a man's soul? The priest must form a just judgment before he passes sentence, otherwise God will not ratify his decision.

- The penitent alone is the only accuser, the witness against himself. If he does not tell the truth, how can the priest rightly tell the condition of his soul? In the example given the penitent says, “I cursed,” but does not tell the whole truth. He does not say whether it was once, twice, ten or one hundred times a day. Again, he does not tell the curses he used. He does not say whether, in cursing, he invoked God, or Christ, or the sacred Name of Jesus.
- How, then, can the priest have any knowledge of the curses and oaths which that man has vomited forth, when he only hears, “Father, I cursed.”
- Then again he says, “Father, I missed Mass.” He does not tell the priest how often, whether it was once in a month or once in six months, whether he could help it or not.
- He says, too, that he has had bad thoughts, but he gives no intimation that he took pleasure in them; he does not tell how often that was the case, and so on.
- **If he absolves that man without a knowledge of his soul, he runs the danger of committing a terrible sacrilege himself.**

How are you to examine your conscience?

Examine your Conscience (reflect upon your sins) relative to:

The Ten Commandments of God

- I. I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.**
- II. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.**
- III. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S Day.**
- IV. Honor your father and your mother.**
- V. You shall not kill.**
- VI. You shall not commit adultery.**
- VII. You shall not steal.**
- VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**
- IX. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.**
- X. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods**

The Commandments of the Church.

The particular Duties of your State of Life.

The Seven Deadly Sins:

- **Pride**
- **Avarice (Greed)**
- **Envy**
- **Anger**
- **Lust**
- **Gluttony**
- **Sloth**

And consider **where, in, and how often**, you have offended God by **thought, word, deed, or omission**.

REMEMBER ALWAYS TO COUNT YOUR SINS.

There are certain words never to be used in the confessional. Never say *sometimes, a good many times, not often, very often*. Never use such expressions, because they are all vague, indefinite terms; they do not give the priest any idea of the exact number of one's sins. Tell the priest:

- **What you said, and**
- **How many times you said it.**
- **Tell what you did,**
- **And the number of times you did it.**

If you cannot give the exact number, give it as nearly as you can. Tell *about* how often. God does not require impossibilities. Doing the best you can, you need have no fear of telling a lie. To come as nearly as you can to the number is not lying. It is all you can do. But if you find this too difficult, because you have been absent from Confession a long time, then give an average number of the sins you have committed daily or weekly or monthly. Put **one day** or **one week** or **one month** with another, and see about how often in a day or in the week or in the month you have been in the habit of committing each sin.

Moreover, **have some system in examining yourself and in telling your sins.**

Follow the order of the Commandments.

- Separate your different sins,
- one kind from another,
- and count how many you have of each.
- **And remember — you must COUNT YOUR SINS before going to Confession.**

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

(reflecting upon your sins)

First Commandment

“I Am The Lord Thy God. Thou Shalt Not Have Strange gods Before Me.”

- *In counting your sins, if you cannot give the exact number, as nearly as you can, truthfully approximate how often you have committed each.*

I denied, or doubted my faith	_____ Times a week, or month.
I murmured against God	_____ Times a week, or month.
I despaired of His mercy	_____ Times a week, or month.
I missed my daily prayers	_____ Times a week, or month.
I went to places of false worship	_____ Times a week, or month.
I talked against the Church, priests, or faith	_____ Times a week, or month.
I went to fortune tellers	_____ Times a week, or month.
I was dealing with the occult — i.e. Ouija Board	_____ Times a week, or month.
I was guilty of superstitious practices	_____ Times a week, or month.
I was guilty of excessive materialism	_____ Times a week, or month.

I was guilty of malice (deliberate choice of evil) _____ Times a week, or month

I read books contrary to faith _____ Times a week, or month.

Second Commandment:

“Thou Shalt Not Take The Name of the Lord Thy God in Vain.”

I swore by name of God (Blasphemy) _____ Times a week, or month.

I swore by name of Jesus (Blasphemy) _____ Times a week, or month.

I cursed others by saying: God damn you _____ Times a week, or month.

I cursed my children and wife _____ Times a week, or month.

I cursed in the hearing of the young _____ Times a week, or month.

I perjured myself by swearing falsely in court _____ Times a week, or month.

I took rash and unnecessary oaths _____ Times a week, or month.

I provoked others to curse _____ Times a week, or month.

I did not prevent cursing _____ Times a week, or month.
when I could and should

I spoke against saints, holy _____ Times a week, or month.
things and pious practices.

Third Commandment:

“Remember Thou Keep Holy the Sabbath Day.”

I missed Mass on Sunday & Holydays _____ Times a week, or month.
through my fault

I spent a great part of these days in _____ Times a week, or month.
sinful occupations

I was late for Mass by my own fault _____ Times a week, or month.

I kept my wife, children or employees _____ Times a week, or month.
from Mass

I assisted at Mass with willful _____ Times a week, or month.
distractions

I engaged in servile works on Sunday _____ Times a week, or month.
and Holydays without necessity

Fourth Commandment:

“Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother.”

1. Duty of Children

I disobeyed my
parents/teachers/leaders in _____ Times a day, or week.
important matters

I caused them to be angry: I
grieved them _____ Times a day, or week.

I used insulting language to
them _____ Times a day, or week.

I kept or wasted my wages I
should have given to them _____ Times.

I did not support them _____ Times.

I incited my brothers and sisters
against them _____ Times.

I neglected to write them, or
send them help _____ Months _____ years.

I neglected them in sickness, in
death _____ Months _____ years

2. Duties of Husbands and Fathers

I grieved, abused,
struck my wife _____ Times

I accused her
wrongfully _____ Times

I neglected to provide
for my family _____ Times

I gave my children bad
example _____ Times

I failed to correct their
faults _____ Times

I neglected to instruct
them in religion _____ Times

I interfered with their
religious vocation _____ Times

3. Duties of Wives and Mothers

I disobeyed my husband _____ Times.

I caused my children to
disobey and dishonor him _____ Times.

I talked of his faults to my _____ Times.
children or neighbors

I neglected to correct my _____ Times.
children

I gave them bad example _____ Times.

I did not instruct them in their _____ Times.
religion

I interfered with their _____ Times.
religious vocation

- *(Under this commandment masters and mistresses, employers and employees should examine themselves on their respective duties.)*

Fifth Commandment:

“Thou shalt not kill”

I was angry _____ Times.

I caused others to become angry _____ Times.

I was quarreling or fighting _____ Times.

I desired the death of others _____ Times.

I cherished hatred to others _____ Times.

I've used or approved of artificial birth _____ Times.
control

I refused to speak or to be reconciled to
others _____ Times.

I caused the death of another by
negligence _____ Times.

I brought dishonor to family, school,
community, or the Church _____ Times.

I have been guilty of detraction (telling
an unkind truth about another) _____ Times.

I led others to commit sin, by word or
example _____ Times.

I Used illegal drugs _____ Times.

Sixth Commandment & Ninth Commandment:

“Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery” & “Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor’s Wife.”

Here the penitent must seriously consider past thoughts, words, and actions against these commandments. If one had the misfortune to break them, one must tell whether one is single or married; whether thoughts, words, desires, or acts referred to single or married persons or relatives.

I had premarital sex, including oral sex,
intercourse, impure touching of another _____ Persons _____ Times.

I took pleasure in impure thoughts _____ Times a day.

I had impure desires _____ Times a day

I spoke immodestly in the hearing of others _____ Persons _____ Times a day.

I boasted of sins of impurity _____ Times a day _____ a week.

I sang or listened to immodest songs _____ Times a day _____ a week.

I read immodest books, papers, or writings _____ Times.

I was guilty of immodest looks _____ Times a week

I kept, showed, looked at immodest
pictures/pornographic material _____ Times a week.

I went to immodest places of amusement _____ Times a week.

I was guilty of immodest acts
(See note above, and tell what these acts
were) _____ Times.

I committed homosexual actions with _____ Persons _____ Times.

I committed immodest acts alone _____ Times.

I was guilty of the sin of Onanism*
(masturbation, withdrawal method) _____ Times.

(* In the Book of Genesis, Onan was commanded by his father to impregnate the widow of his slain brother and to raise the offspring of the union. In order to avoid raising descendants for his late brother, however, Onan engaged in *coitus interruptus*.)

- *There are hidden sins known only to God and the sinner. These he must also tell, and the number of times.*

Seventh Commandment & Tenth Commandment:

“Thou Shalt Not Steal.” & “Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor’s Goods.”

I stole goods to
the amount of ... \$ _____, _____ Times.

I destroyed
property,
defrauded
insurance
companies \$ _____, _____ Times.

I took from my
employers \$ _____, _____ Times.

I stole \$ _____
worth, but
restored, though \$ _____ Worth
able to return all,
only

I wasted time for
which I was paid \$ _____, _____ Times.
work, value of ...

I injured others in
their employment \$ _____, _____ Times.
or goods

I neglected to pay
my bills, just
debts, amounting \$ _____, _____ Times.
to ...

I defrauded in
weights and \$ _____, _____ Times.
measures

I defrauded those
employed by me \$ _____, _____ Times.

I unjustly
deferred the \$ _____, _____ Times.

payment of their
wages
I desired to
possess unjustly _____Times.
my neighbor's
goods

Eighth Commandment:

“Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness Against Thy Neighbor.”

I told lies _____ Times.

I seriously injured my neighbor's
character, by publishing his secret faults _____Times.

I carried stories and caused trouble _____ Times.

I told a deliberate lie to the injury of my
neighbor _____ Times.

I spoke without necessity of the known
faults of others _____ Times.

I've broken promises deliberately _____ Times.

I am guilty of calumny — telling lies
about one another _____ Times.

I failed to defend my neighbor's
character _____ Times.

I encouraged detraction or calumny, or
listened to it with complacency _____ Times.

I failed to make reparation for sins of _____ Times.
tongue

Commandments of the Church (The 7 Precepts of the Church)

1. To hear Mass on Sundays and holydays of obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To confess at least once a year.
4. To receive the Holy Eucharist during the Easter time.
5. To contribute to the support of our pastors.
6. To refrain from eating meat on Fridays
- [7. Not to marry persons who are not Catholics, or who are related to us within the third degree of kindred, nor privately without witnesses, nor to solemnize marriage at forbidden times.]

I neglected my yearly confession and _____ Times.
Easter Communion

I attempted marriage contrary to the law _____ Times.
of the Church

I neglected, when able, to support the _____ Times.
Church

I ate meat on days of abstinence, _____ Times.
without permission or necessity

I caused others to eat meat on days of _____ Times.
abstinence

I broke the fasts of the Church _____ Times.

I caused others to break the fasts of the _____ Times.
Church

The Seven Deadly Sins

1. Pride

2. Lust

3. Gluttony

4. Greed

5. Sloth — Acedia

6. Wrath or Anger

7. Envy

I was guilty of gluttony _____ Times.

I was drunk _____ Times.

I caused others to be drunk _____ Times.
I gave liquor to those drunk _____ Times.
I was slothful in religious
exercises _____ Times.
I was lazy and idle _____ Times.
I was envious _____ Times.
I was yearning for impure
pleasures _____ Times.
I have had an immoderate
desire for earthly goods _____ Times.
I have had an inordinate
desire for revenge _____ Times.
I was proud _____ Times.

The Four Sins Crying to Heaven for Vengeance

Willful murder
(including abortion) _____ Times.
The sin of Sodom.
(unnatural sex) _____ Times.
Oppression of the
poor. _____ Times.

Defrauding laborers _____ Times.
of their wages.

The Six Sins against the Holy Ghost

Presumption of God's mercy-sinning and _____ Times.
saying God must forgive me

Despair — to believe that God will _____ Times.
refuse to forgive you

To attack as false or questioning the _____ Times.
known truth.

Envy at another's spiritual good _____ Times.

Obstinacy in sin — refusing to stop _____ Times.
known sinful behavior

Final impenitence — refusing to accept _____ Times.
God's mercy at moment of death

Nine Ways of being Accessory to Another's Sin

By counsel — talking one into sin _____ Times.

By command — telling one to sin _____ Times.

By consent — agreeing with the sin _____ Times.

By provocation — to pressure one _____ Times.
into sin

By praise or flattery
— congratulating the sin committed _____ Times.
by others

By concealment — covering up the _____ Times.
sin for another

By partaking — approving sin by _____ Times.
assisting in it

By silence — by not speaking up _____ Times.
against the sin

By defense of the ill done —
rationalizing the sin done or will be _____ Times.
done

Also, don't forget to always confess all Venial sins that you might have committed — i.e. ingratitude, reckless driving, selfishness, rudeness etc.

HOW TO GO TO CONFESSION

Having prepared yourself for Confession, go to your confessor with great humility and modesty, and remember that you are about to present yourself before Jesus Christ Himself, who sees the depths of your heart, and will one day judge you. If you are obliged to wait, renew your act of contrition. Regard yourself as a criminal bound with chains, who has been tried and convicted, and is called before the judge whom he has insulted and offended.

When at the feet of your confessor, kneel with the greatest reverence and humility, and consider that you are at the feet of Jesus crucified, who desires to hear from your own lips a sincere Confession of all your sins, and is ready to pardon them if you really repent, and to wash you in His own absolution. **Avoid all mention of your virtues or of the sins of others not pertaining to your own offences,** except when, through necessity, you seek direction and advice.

Never mention the names of others in the confessional. We enter the tribunal to accuse ourselves of our *own* sins, not to declare our virtues or to blame others.

Then **make the Sign of the Cross, saying, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.”**

Then humbly, and in a clear, intelligible voice, say how long it is since your last Confession, whether you received absolution, and whether you performed your penance. Confess your sins according to the Commandments; that is, tell first all the sins committed against the First Commandment, then those committed against the Second, and so on.

Say if you frequently fall back into these sins, or if you have any attachment or occupation which leads you into temptation. Mention, also, if you have neglected to fulfill any serious obligation; — tell your confessor everything with sincerity and as clearly as possible, both that he may be able to apply the proper remedy, and that you may avoid making a bad Confession, which is easily done by the slothful and careless.

If you desire to make really good Confessions, imagine each Confession to be the last one you will ever make, and that, immediately after, you will be judged by Almighty God. Think that on this Confession may depend your salvation or damnation. Endeavor so to confess that at the hour of your death your past Confessions may not be the cause of any disquietude to you, but rather of consolation.

Listen with silence, attention, and humility to the instructions of your confessor; remark carefully the penance enjoined; and while receiving absolution, renew with all your heart your act of contrition and purpose of amendment

On leaving the confessional, excite in your heart the liveliest sentiments of consolation and confidence, hoping and rejoicing that God has forgiven your sins. Perform your penance as soon as possible, and thank God for the great favor He has granted you.

After Confession go before our Divine Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, to make your thanksgiving for holy absolution. Spend at least a quarter of an hour in forming acts of praise, thanksgiving, and contrition. Our Lord delights to pour out His graces on the grateful soul. Many shamefully go home from Confession

without saying one act of thanksgiving.

BAD CONFESSIONS

It is a *sacrilege* to make a bad Confession. To receive absolution after having made an unworthy Confession, and consequently without having the right dispositions, is to incur the guilt of sacrilege; that is, the violation of a sacred thing. A bad Confession hinders and frustrates the instrumental action of the Sacrament of Penance, and he who is guilty of it may be said thus to destroy the efficacy of the Blood of Jesus Christ; for it is in the precious Blood of our Lord, shed long ago, that souls are cleansed from sin.

Our Lord, instituted the Sacraments as so many channels through which His Precious Blood may be applied to souls, quickening them with and sustaining them in, a new and higher life. In Baptism, for instance, when the water flows over the head of the child, and the words are pronounced, at the same moment, in virtue of the Blood of our Lord, its soul is cleansed from sin, and it is awakened to the new life of a child of God and heir of Heaven.

In like manner, in the sacred tribunal of Penance, when the penitent comes properly disposed, as soon as the priest raises his hand over him and pronounces the words of absolution, through the Divine agency of the Blood of our Lord, the soul is laved and purified of all its sins, **no matter how great they may be**; for Christ has said, “**Whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven.**” But if the penitent has not the proper disposition there is a sacrilege, for the Blood of our Lord is in a manner destroyed – rendered ineffectual in that case. And, **what is worse, a bad Confession is generally followed by a bad Communion. How great a crime is committed by unworthily receiving our Lord in Communion!** They who do so, as St. Paul says, are guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. You have heard, perhaps of the unnatural mother who took her lovely smiling babe and buried it alive. Oh, how much greater is the crime of the bad Catholic who will bury the living Son of God in a heart foul with every crime, worse than any grave, however horrible! How will such a wretch one day answer an enraged Father for what may be called the murder of His adorable Son?

What has been said was not to terrify or keep you away from the Sacraments. God forbid! The priest does not desire to frighten people away from the table of the Lord, but to press them to come to the Feast. You know, that if you do not approach and receive Holy Communion, “**you cannot have life in you;**” that is, the life of the soul, the life of the children of God. **Yes, go to Communion – go**

frequently! It will nourish and *strengthen* your soul. Our Lord will dwell in you; He will support you. *He will sustain you in your conflicts with the devil.* Remember that what has been said was only to guard you against that carelessness with which too many, alas, approach the Sacraments.

GENERAL CONFESSIONS

[Editor's Note: The term “General Confession” must not be mistaken for “Ordinary Confession”. **A General Confession is usually only required of those who have gone for a year or more without the Sacrament of Confession. A General Confession is often long and should not be attempted in the queue for ordinary Confession, since it would deprive the other waiting penitents the opportunity for their ordinary (and generally much shorter) Confession.** A General Confession involves the confessing of *all* ones sins that had been committed since one’s last Confession. Needless to say, one can accumulate quite a bit in the way of sin in one year, and substantially more when it has been longer.]

It is not necessary to make a General Confession. For some, it would be profitable, and there are some to whom a General Confession is absolutely

necessary; but there are others to whom it would be hurtful. First: a General Confession is useful to those who have been leading a tepid, careless life. To such persons it is often the beginning of a life of fervor. There are eight classes of persons who are under the necessity of making a General Confession:

1. All those who, in some past Confession, willfully concealed a mortal sin through shame, fear, or indifference.
2. Those who, instead of having used sufficient diligence, having been grossly negligent in the examination of their conscience.
3. Those who have lived in gross and culpable ignorance of the necessary points of faith and practice.
4. Those who have confessed without sincere repentance for the past, and a firm resolution of avoiding sin, and the occasions of sin, in the future.
5. Those who continue to go to Confession while they live in the immediate occasions of sin, which they can, but will not, avoid.
6. Those who have deliberately neglected restitution when they had the power and opportunity of making it.
7. Those who lived in vicious habits without earnestly trying to overcome them.
8. Those who have (after their Confessions the same as before) continued to live in enmity, hatred and malice.

Thirdly, scrupulous persons and those who have often made general Confessions should not attempt to make a general Confession. Such persons worry the priest. They say to themselves, “Well, if I am allowed to make a general Confession now, I shall be satisfied.” But if they are allowed to make it, they will be as dissatisfied as ever.

The best proof of true sorrow is a change of life. When a man immediately falls into the sins which he has just confessed, almost without a struggle to guard against such a fall, there is reason to fear that he had no true sorrow. But when a man carefully watches over himself, tries to shun the dangerous occasions of sin, and prays fervently for graces to keep from sinning, we can reasonably hope that his was true sorrow such as God accepts.

PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

There can be no true contrition, and therefore, no good Confession, unless there be a purpose of amendment. It is an act of the will by which you firmly resolve to commit sin no more, to change your lives, and to do penance for the past. If you

are really sorry for what you have done, you shall also be firmly resolved to avoid the same and other offenses in the future.

This purpose of amendment ought to be firm, that is, you must have a fixed will never again to commit sin, no matter what temptations may arise, no matter what you may have to endure in proving your fidelity to God; you must be determined to use the means necessary to avoid sin, such as shunning its occasions and following the directions of your confessor; it must extend not only to those mortal sins which you have committed, but to all mortal sins. In this respect, your purpose of amendment must be like your contrition. You should set no limit to it. You must hate and determine to avoid sin. You should have no pet sin held in reserve. Unless all be renounced, none will be forgiven: for the love of God cannot exist in the same heart with mortal sin, nor will God take up His dwelling in the same house with His enemy.

If you are weak, do not imagine that you cannot promise to be faithful. God is our strength. Grace will conquer nature and sin. **“I can do all things in Him who strengthens me,”** says St. Paul. Do not hesitate, therefore; your present will is what you must regard. Are you here and now determined, with God’s grace, to do all you can to avoid sin in the future? If so, take courage; God will strengthen you.

If you fall at the first attack, if you make no struggle against temptation, if you employ none of the means given you to avoid sin, then you may judge that you were not sincere. But if you cannot in any of these ways reproach yourself, only learn from your weakness, lessons of humility, and begin again. Oh, yes! no matter how often you fall, *never cease to trust in the mercy of God*, even while you keep before your eyes the strictness of His justice.

HABITUAL SINNERS AND SINS OF HABIT

It is easy to account for some who become slaves to their passions. In the first place, we are all, because of your fallen nature, prone to sin: **“The life of man upon earth is warfare,”** says holy Job. We must all fight, and no man, St. Paul declares, will be crowned “except he strive lawfully.” **“Strive,” says our Lord, “to enter by the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able,” because they do not strive hard.** Again, **“the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.”** One of the holy Fathers compares the heart to a rich garden. This garden, if neglected, is soon filled with noxious weeds. Foreign seeds will be carried there by the wind, and unless you

pluck up the young plants by the roots, you will soon have a forest to contend with. Another Father compares our passions to the lion's whelp. You can easily strangle it when young; but if you nourish it a little, it will become a wild beast, which will one day devour you. There was a time, when the miserable man who dies a victim of his intemperance could have said, "I can drink and I can let it alone." A little later he acquired the habit of drink, and could no longer let it alone. He fed the wild beast of his passion until it became strong enough to devour him. So it is with every other sin.

When passions become strong, or when bad habits have been fostered for a long time, it is hard to overcome them. When you indulge in any passion, it becomes strong, a second nature, and therefore very difficult to overcome. No matter how bad you may be, how long you may have been given to the worst kinds of sin, *if you do your part, God can and will lift you up and will break all the fetters that bind you.*

In order to break off bad habits, such as those cursing, drinking and impurity, you must be fully *determined* not to commit those sins again. Without that determination, your conversion would be a mockery. You must realize that your habit of cursing or drinking or impurity was formed by repeated acts.

You are bound to overcome such a habit. **Nor can you excuse yourself, as many do, by saying that you have the habit.** By willfully placing yourself in such a state you are responsible for the many crimes it leads you to commit. **A mere desire to do better is not sufficient. You must have a strong will to do better. You must then vigorously and watchfully labor to destroy your bad habits.** But how many show by their lives that they are never *in earnest*, that they never sincerely and courageously strive to overcome themselves! They are satisfied with *wishing* to change their lives, but they never make a *real effort* to do so. Hence you will often see people make the Mission, but alas! you will also see them in a few days returning to their old haunts of sin, committing the same crimes that but a short time before, they had solemnly promised God to abandon forever.

This happens because they are not fully determined to keep from falling into their old habits. When you have a firm will not to return to your former sins, you will endeavor to avoid the occasions of them. What would you think of a man who would throw a dry log into a burning furnace, and yet declare he did not wish the log to burn? If you say you do not wish to sin, and yet go into places, or associate with companions who, you know, will drag you back into sin, you are equally senseless. Oh, how true it is, “He that loveth danger shall perish in it!” **Not only must you have a firm resolution not to return to your old ways, not only must you avoid as far as you can every occasion of sin,** but you must also pray

earnestly to God for strength to keep your good resolutions. **“Ask and ye shall receive,”** says our Lord. Pray earnestly, fervently and constantly for grace to overcome your temptations.

You are tempted. Who is not? But, in the language of St. Paul, “God will make issue with temptations,” that you may overcome them. You must remember that our Lord knows your weakness. He shed His Blood for us. By its virtue the soul is cleansed and its wounds healed in Confession, and He gives Himself to us in Holy Communion to be our soul’s food and nourishment. Men are wounded, but they will not come to the Divine Physician. They are weak, but they will not come to the Divine Table to obtain strength! Is it not evident that they desire to remain slaves to their passions when they do not make use of the proper means to overcome them?

Remember what has been said: **“Let your Confession be supplemented by a firm resolution of never again offending God, and a strong determination of avoiding all occasions of sin.** Go to the Sacraments to obtain strength to keep those resolutions, and pray fervently to our Lord for grace, lest the enemy should overcome you.

Lastly, be devoted to our dear Immaculate Mother, the refuge of sinners, the help of Christians. Beg of her to shield you under the mantle of her protection from all

the fiery darts of your bitter enemy; and be assured that, no matter what may have been your habits, you will overcome them. God will one day crown you with victory.

PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

Most merciful God, Father in heaven, relying on Thy goodness and mercy, I come to Thee with filial confidence to confess my sins and to implore Thy forgiveness. Thou wilt not despise a contrite and humble heart. Bless me and receive me again into Thy favor; I acknowledge that I have been most ungrateful to Thee, but I sincerely repent and detest the wrong I have done, and I desire henceforth to walk in the way of perfection, in accordance with Thy holy will.

O Jesus, my Savior, my good Shepherd, I have strayed far from the path Thou hast marked out for me; I did not follow in Thy footsteps; I wandered into forbidden places. Repentant and sorrowful, I beg to be admitted again into the fold of Thy faithful followers. I want to confess my sins with perfect sincerity, as if I were at the point of death. My Jesus, I look to Thee with confidence for the grace to examine my conscience well.

O Holy Ghost, come in Thy mercy; enlighten my mind and strengthen my will that I may know my sins, humbly confess them, and sincerely amend my life.

Mary, my mother, immaculate spouse of the Holy Ghost, refuge to sinners, assist me in Thy intercessions.

Holy angels and saints of God, pray for me. Amen.

INVOCATION OF THE HOLY GHOST

O Holy Ghost, Source of all light, Spirit of wisdom, of understanding and of knowledge, come to my assistance and enable me to make a good confession.

Enlighten me, and help me now know my sins as one day I shall be forced to recognize them before Thy judgment seat. Bring to my mind the evil which I have done and the good which I have neglected. Permit me not to be blinded by self-love. Grant me, moreover, heartfelt sorrow for my transgressions, and the grace of a sincere confession, so that I may be forgiven and admitted into Thy friendship.

Amen.

ACT BEFORE CONFESSION

I thank Thee O my God! For having waited for me until now! I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of all my offenses against Thee! I am sorry for them, and repent of them with my whole heart, because by them I have lost heaven and have deserved hell; but, above all, I am grieved to my inmost soul, and hate and detest my sins more than all evils, because they have offended Thy infinite goodness. I purpose in future rather to die than to offend Thee any more. Amen.

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.

ACT AFTER CONFESSION

My dear Jesus! how much do I not owe Thee? By the merits of Thy blood I hope that I have this day been pardoned. I thank Thee above all things. I hope to

reach heaven, where I shall praise Thy mercies forever. My God, if I have hitherto lost Thee so often, I now desire to lose Thee no more. From this day forward I will change my life in earnest. Thou dost merit all my love; I will love Thee truly; I will no longer see myself separated from Thee. I have promised Thee this already; now I repeat my promise of being ready to die rather than offend Thee again. I promise also to avoid all occasions of sin, and to use such means as will prevent me from falling again. My Jesus, Thou knowest my weakness: give me grace to be faithful to Thee till death, and to have recourse to Thee when I am tempted. My most holy Mary, help me! Thou art the mother of perseverance; I place my hope in thee.

PRAYER OF PETITION

May this confession, O Lord, by the merits of Blessed Mary ever virgin, Thy Mother, and of all the saints, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight. Let Thy goodness and mercy supply for whatever has been wanting in my contrition, and in the purity and integrity of my confession. Deign Thou mercifully to regard me perfectly and entirely absolved in heaven; Who livest and reignest God, world without end. Amen.

PRAYER FOR PERSEVERANCE

O Almighty and most merciful God, Who, according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, hast vouchsafed once more to receive Thy prodigal child, after so many times going astray from Thee, and to admit me to this Sacrament of reconciliation; I give Thee thanks with all the powers of my soul for this and all other mercies, graces, and blessings bestowed on me; and prostrating myself at Thy sacred feet, I offer myself to be henceforth forever Thine. Oh! Let nothing in life or death ever separate me from Thee. I renounce with my whole soul all my treasons against Thee, and all thee abominations and sins of my past life. I renew my promises made in Baptism, and from this moment I dedicate myself eternally to Thy love and service. Oh! Grant that for the time to come I may abhor sin more than death itself, and avoid all such occasions and companies as have unhappily brought me to it. This I resolve to do, by the aid of Thy divine grace, without which I can do nothing. I beg Thy blessing upon these my resolutions, that they may not be ineffectual, like so many others I have formally made; for, O Lord, without Thee I am nothing but misery and sin. Give me grace to be now and always a true penitent, through the same Christ Thy Son. Amen.

THANKSGIVING AFTER CONFESSION

Eternal Father! I thank Thee, I bless Thee, for Thy goodness and mercy. Thou has had compassion on me, although in my folly I had wandered far away from Thee and offended Thee most grievously. With father love Thou has received me anew after so many relapses into sin and forgiven me my offenses through the holy sacrament of Penance. Blessed forever, O my God, be Thy loving-kindness, Thy infinite mercy! Never again will I grieve Thee by ingratitude, by disobedience to Thy holy will. All that I am, all that I have, all that I do shall be consecrated to Thy service and Thy glory. Amen.

“Heart of Jesus, I put my trust in Thee!”

Indulgence of 300 days. – Pius, June 27, 1906.

“Jesus, my God, I love Thee above all things.”

Indulgence of 300 days, each time. – S.P. Ap., July 28, 1932.

O Divine Spirit! penetrate my soul with true horror and loathing of sin. Grant that I may be more exact in the fulfillment of all my duties, and strengthen me by Thy grace, that I may not again yield to temptation.

“Sweet heart of Mary, by my salvation.”

Indulgence of 300 days, each time. – Pius IX, Sept. 30, 1852.

“O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to Thee.”

Indulgence of 300 days, each time. – Leo XIII, March 15, 1884; S.P. Ap., April 15, 1932

My queen! My mother! Remember that I am thine; keep me, guard me, as thy property and possession.

“O Mary, our hope, have pity on us!”

Indulgence of 300 days. – Pius X, January 8, 1906.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN, TO BE SAID
AFTER CONFESSION

Virgin Mother of God, most holy Mary safe refuge of sinners! to

thee, who art, after God, our hope and consolation in this place of exile, to thee I have recourse with sincere confidence, though most undeserving of thy patronage.

I know, one the one hand, how much I stand in need of being converted from my

very heart; yet, on the other, the heinousness of my crimes strikes me terror. To thee, then, I betake myself-to thee who art our sovereign mediator with thy dear Son Jesus, as He is with His eternal Father. To thee, after Jesus, must I look for my amendment. Vouchsafe then, O Mother of mercy, to obtain for me the grace of a true and lasting conversion. I wish to change my life entirely. In this I am sincere; but my evil habits and ill-use I have made of so many saving inspirations, the multitude and heinousness of my sins , and the bonds by which the world holds me, while they render amendment difficult, call for thy special assistance. Grant it to me in spite of my unworthiness. In thee I trust; do thou not reject me. Although deserving of eternal punishment, I throw myself at thy feet, sorrowful and repentant. My sins, I own, have taken from me the strength which grace imparts, have cast me out from among the adopted sons of God, have deprived me of the right to everlasting happiness, and drawn on me instead the wrath of heaven. Tell me what I must do to regain the friendship of thy Son, Jesus. Beg of Him, by His precious Blood, His bitter Passion, and cruel death on the cross, to pardon my offenses, and He will pardon them. Tell Him thy desire for my salvation, and He will save me. But as I can still fail into sin and lose the life of grace amid the dangers which encompass me, ever watch thou over me, and I shall surely triumph over the enemies who incessantly work for my ruin. Instill into my heart a lively faith, a firm hope, an ardent charity, and all the virtues suitable to my state of life;

and obtain for me constancy in good, and final perseverance. In fine, be thou my loving Mother here below, and my advocate at the hour of death, that I may be of the number of those to whom the divine Son shall say: **“Come , ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you.”** Amen.

An indulgence of 100 days, once a day; plenary once a month on the last day of the month, or within eight days, on the usual conditions — Pope Leo XII., Jan. 30, 1828.



The Death of Saint Dominic in Bologna in 1221
from a Dominican Missal printed in 1603.

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