

THE "HOW-TO" OF CONFESSION

Each of us desires to live a virtuous life. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "A virtue is a habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but also to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions." (1803) Hence, confession and reconciliation helps us to return to the virtuous life.

Going to confession is not difficult, and the priest can help you if you forget something, or are nervous. Here are the basics: to begin your confession, say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It is (state the time since your last confession) since my last confession. Since that time, I have" and tell your sins humbly, clearly and entirely. (Be bold, be brief, and be gone.) As you are concluding your confession, say to the priest, "For these sins, and those I truly do not remember, I ask for your forgiveness, advice, and absolution." Then the priest may give advice or helpful words to resist those sins in the future. Next, the priest will give your penance. The priest will ask you to say an Act of Contrition. There are many different versions, but here is one you may use: "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."

Finally, the priest will pray the beautiful words of the Prayer of Absolution. After your confession, kneel before the Blessed Sacrament, then perform your penance according to the direction of your confessor, and thank God in your own words for His mercy.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Some people have trouble recalling their sins. Calmly and honestly consider what you have done, with full knowledge and full consent against God and His commandments. Here are some questions that may help:

1. I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other Gods besides me.

Did I fail to love God, to make God first in my life, to thank Him, trust Him, love Him, as He deserves? Have I simply not cared about God in my everyday life—instead worshipping TV, work, power, or sex by spending most of my time and energy on them? Did I fail to pray? Was I careless in saying my prayers? Do I try to give God time every day in prayer? Have I doubted or denied my faith? Are there things that I placed in importance before the honor due to God, such as seeking the esteem of others or wealth? Have I rejected the teachings of Jesus and His Church because they were not in agreement with what I wanted to do? Have I ever chosen not to express my faith in the home, at work, or with friends, for fear of ridicule? Have I been involved with magic, horoscopes, Ouija boards, or fortune telling? Have I willingly put myself in a near occasion of sin?

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

Did I curse or swear? Did I use God's name in vain, lightly, carelessly, or with blasphemy? Have I spoken disrespectfully and behind the backs of our Bishops and Priests? Have I used foul language or jokes? In conversation, have I passively listened to slander or to jokes demeaning to the Church or God's authority?

3. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Have I deliberately missed Mass on the Lord's Day or Holy Days of Obligation? Have I made a sincere effort to attend Mass, even when on vacation? Did I leave Mass early without a good reason? Have I skipped Mass to please my spouse or children? Have I failed to insist that my children attend Mass, even when they are at a friend's house or sports tournament weekend? Did I receive Holy Communion in the state of serious sin? Have I become such a slave to my work and chores that I have not set aside Sunday for spiritual and family activities? Have I been lazy, neglectful, inattentive, irreverent, or willingly distracted during my prayers or at Mass? Have I given good example about the importance of Mass to those under my care?

4. Honor your father and your mother.

Did I honor, obey and pray for my parents? Have I failed to help my parents when they were in need? Did I respect my brothers and sisters? Have I been disobedient or disrespectful to any lawful authority, boss,

teacher, police officer, spouse, etc.? Have I neglected to correct my children just to keep peace in the house, or been excessive in my correction? Did I fail to help at home or to spend time with my family? Do I blame my parents for my own shortcomings? Have I willingly failed to arrange for my children's Baptism? For divorced parents: Have I disrespected my former spouse to my children or others? Have I instructed my children in the Catholic Faith as I promised to do in my marriage vows? Do I give my children a good example as a Catholic by word and deed?

5. You shall not kill.

Did I give in to feelings of anger or jealousy? Have I kept hatred in my heart or refused to forgive anyone? Have I ever struck anyone in anger, intending to injure the person? Did I fight or cause scandal? Have I willfully hurt my spouse or children? Have I unjustly wounded another by word or deed; or been purposefully unkind? Have I taken pleasure in anyone's misfortune? Have I abused alcohol or drugs? Have I failed to apologize for my wrongdoings? Have I in any way permitted, encouraged, coerced or helped someone, including myself, to have an abortion?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

Have I allowed the media to form my view of sexuality, instead of letting the Holy Spirit do it through the teachings of the Church? Has my current marriage been blessed by a priest or deacon? Am I guilty of impurity with myself, premarital sex, adultery, or contraception by pills, devices etc.? Do I live chastely according to my state in life (married, single, or ordained)? Do I avoid occasions of impurity? Have I sinned with others of the same gender?

7. You shall not steal.

Have I stolen what is not mine? Did I return it or make up for what I have stolen? Have I cheated on tests or homework? Have I neglected my duties or been slothful and wasted time at my work? Have I taken things from work that were not my property? Have I willfully and unjustly damaged the property of others? Have I cheated or defrauded others? Have I borrowed money or property and willfully not returned it in a timely manner? Have I downloaded music I have not paid for from the Internet or copied music from a friend's CD, or allowed my children to do so? Have I contracted debts without plans to pay them back, or without any prospect of being able to do so? Do I avoid laziness & gluttony?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Have I lied, gossiped, talked about people behind their backs, or lent an ear to scandal about someone else? Do I always tell the truth? Did I reveal secrets that should have been kept confidential? Am I uncharitable, or overly critical or negative in my speech? Have I read letters not intended for me? Have I injured the reputation of others by speaking about their failures or sins with little desire or intention to help them? Have I condoned prejudice and hatred toward people of other nationalities, races, or religions?

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

Have I consented to impure thoughts? Have I indulged in impure talk, or sung or listened to improper or suggestive songs? Did I give my mind over to lustful thoughts or fantasies? Have I been an occasion of sin or temptation to others by my language or actions? Was I immodest in dress or behavior? Have I looked at pornography, impure books, magazines, or videos? Did I neglect to control my imagination or desire for other people? Have I been guilty of using flirtation or my dress to entice others to notice my body? Have I used indecent language or told indecent stories? Have I rejected my family in my heart, wishing to distance myself emotionally and personally from them?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

Is my heart greedy? Am I envious of others because I don't have what they have? Do I habitually compare myself with others? Have I encouraged my children to define themselves by their possessions, or to envy others' possessions? Am I moody or gloomy because I don't have all the material things I desire? Do I work, study and keep busy to counter idle thoughts? Is my heart set on earthly possessions, rather than the treasures in Heaven? Have I refused or neglected to help someone in need? Have I wished or desired a loss or misfortune upon my neighbor or their property?