

Self-Examination for The Sacrament of Penance

Commonly Called Confession and Absolution

The power and authority of absolution reside in the Apostolic priesthood by virtue of our Lord's express declaration: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." The Sacrament of Penance is the method by which this authority is exercised to remit sins committed after Baptism. Sin destroys the union between the soul and God which was effected in Baptism. Thus, just as there is a sacrament (Baptism) to effect the union in the first place, so there is a sacrament (Penance) to restore this union when sin has broken it. The outward and visible sign of the sacrament is the declaration of a Priest of the Apostolic succession: "I absolve thee from all thy sins." Its inward and spiritual grace is the application of the merits of the Cross to the life of the individual for the forgiveness of sin.

The part of the person approaching this sacrament is repentance. True repentance has three elements: (1) **Contrition** or sorrow for sin. This can be obtained only at the foot of the Cross. We may not have an *emotion* of sorrow, but when we see what our sins have done to Jesus, we shall *be* sorry; (2) **Confession** of all known sin. This involves a careful examination of our conscience. We cannot confess our sins until we see exactly how we look to the all-seeing eye of God; (3) **Satisfaction** or **Amendment of Life**. We must intend to lead a new or better life. This intention is shown by our acceptance and performance of the penance imposed by the Priest in confession.

Self-Examination

Before self-examination, say this prayer:

O Holy Spirit, 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 to 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, knowing how deeply they have wounded the loving Heart of my Heavenly Father; and help me to make a good confession that all stain of guilt may be washed away in the Precious Blood of my Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Think of yourself as God's child, and of the wickedness of following Satan rather than your loving Father.

Do not be in a hurry, and do not vex yourself because you cannot remember everything. Be honest with God and with yourself; this is all God asks of you.

Write down briefly what you remember of your sins. Don't try to depend on your memory. If there is any question you do not understand, let it alone and go on to the next one.

Do not fret about your sins. Remember, you are trying to recall them in order that you may be forgiven, not that you may be condemned, "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, shalt thou not despise."

PRIDE is putting self in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or of some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by him in a specific relationship to the rest of his creation.

Irreverence. Deliberate neglect of the worship of God every Sunday in his Church, or being content with a perfunctory participation in it. Disregard of other Holy Days or of additional opportunities for giving God honor. Failure to thank God or to express our gratitude adequately.

Disrespect for God or holy things by deliberately treating them, in thought, word, or deed, in a profane, contemptuous, or over-familiar manner. Use of holy things for personal advantage, or the attempt to bribe or placate God by religious practices or promises.

Sentimentality. Being satisfied with pious feelings and beautiful ceremonies without striving to obey God's will.

Presumption. Dependence on self rather than on God, with the consequent neglect of the means of grace—sacraments and prayer. Dispensation of ourselves from ordinary duties on the grounds that we are superior persons. Satisfaction or complacency over our spiritual achievements. Refusal to avoid, when possible, immediate occasions of temptation. Preference for our own ideas, customs, schemes, or techniques. Foolish optimism.

Failure to recognize our job as a divine vocation or to offer our work to God. Unwillingness to surrender to and abide in Christ, to let him act in and through us. Failure to offer to God regularly in intercession the persons or causes that have, or should enlist our interest and support.

Distrust. Refusal to recognize God's wisdom, providence, and love. Worry, anxiety, misgivings, scrupulosity, or perfectionism. Attempts to discern or control the future by spiritualism, astrology fortune-telling or the like. Magic or superstition.

Over-sensitiveness. Expectation that others will dislike, reject, or mistreat us; over-readiness so to interpret their attitude, or quickness to take offense. Unfounded suspicions.

Timidity in accepting responsibility, or cowardice in facing difficulty or suffering. Surrender to feelings of depression, gloom, pessimism, discouragement, self-pity, or fear of death, instead of fighting to be brave, cheerful, and hopeful.

Disobedience. Rejection of God's known will in favor of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of the legitimate (and therefore divinely ordained) laws, regulations, or authority of the Church, state, husband, parents, teachers, etc.; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfil responsibilities or to consider the best interests of those under us.

Refusal to learn God's nature or will as revealed in Scripture, expounded in instruction or expert advice, or discernible through prayer, meditation or the reading of religious books. Absorption in our own affairs, leaving little time, energy, or interest for the things of God.

Violation of confidence. Breaking of legitimate promises or contracts. Irresponsibility. Treachery. Unnecessary disappointment of another, or the causing of shame or anxiety to those who love us.

Impenitence. Refusal to search out and face up to our sins, or to confess and admit them before God. Disregard of our sins or pretense that we are better than we are. Self-justification or discounting our sins as insignificant, natural or inevitable. Self-righteous comparison of ourselves with others.

Refusal to accept just punishment or to make due reparation when possible. Deceit or lying to escape the consequences of our sins, or allowing another to suffer the blame for our faults. Overcompensation or attempts at self-reform or self-vengeance, to avoid surrender to God in humble penitence.

Shame (hurt pride), sorrow for ourselves because our sins make us less respectable than we like to think we are, or because we fear punishment or injury to our reputation, rather than

sorrow for what sin is in the eyes of God. Refusal to admit we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can forgive our sins, or failure to use the means of getting assurance of his forgiveness when we need it. Unwillingness to forgive ourselves.

Vanity. Crediting to ourselves rather than to God our talents, abilities, insights, accomplishments, good works. Refusal to admit indebtedness to others, or adequately to express gratitude for their help. Hypocrisy. Pretense to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgments on others for faults we excuse in ourselves.

Boasting, exaggeration, drawing attention to ourselves by talking too much, by claiming ability, wisdom, experience, or influence we do not have, or by eccentric or ostentatious behavior. Undue concern over, or expenditure of time, money, or energy on looks, dress, surroundings, etc., in order to impress others; or deliberate slovenliness for the same purpose. Seeking, desiring, or relishing flattery or compliments.

Arrogance. Insisting that others conform to our wishes, recognize our leadership, accept our own estimate of our worth. Being overbearing, argumentative, opinionated, obstinate.

Snobbery. Pride over race, family position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions.

ANGER is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person.

Resentment. Refusal to discern, accept, or fulfill God's vocation. Dissatisfaction with the talents, abilities, or opportunities he has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint at the circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals of the blame for our maladjustment; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity or grumbling.

Pugnacity. Attack upon another in anger. Murder in deed or desire. Combativeness or nursing of grudges. Injury to another by striking, cursing, or insulting him; or by damaging his reputation or property. Quarrelsomeness, bickering, contradiction, nagging, rudeness, or snubbing.

Retaliation. Vengeance for wrongs real or imagined, or the plotting thereof. Harsh or excessive punishment. Hostility, sullenness, or rash judgment. Refusal to forgive, or to offer or accept reconciliation. Unwillingness to love, to do good to, or to pray for enemies. Boycotting or ostracizing another for selfish reasons. Spoiling others' pleasure by uncooperativeness or disdain, because we have not got our way, or because we feel out of sorts or superior.

ENVY is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging his gifts and vocation to others.

Jealousy. Offense at the talents, success, or good fortune of others. Selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or distress. Belittling others.

Malice. Ill-will, false accusations, slander, backbiting. Reading false motives into others' behavior. Initiation, collection, or retailing of gossip. Arousing, foistering, or organizing antagonism against others. Unnecessary criticism, even when true. Deliberate annoyance of others, teasing, or bullying.

Contempt. Scorn of another's virtue, ability, shortcomings, or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. Ridicule of persons, institutions, or ideals.

COVETOUSNESS is the refusal to respect the integrity of other creatures, expressed in the inordinate accumulation of material things; in the use of other persons for our personal advantage; or in the quest for status, power, or security at their expense.

Inordinate Ambition. Pursuit of status, power, influence, reputation, or possessions at the expense of the moral law, of other obligations, or of the rights of others. Ruthless or unfair competition. Putting oneself or family first. Conformity to standards we recognize as wrong or inadequate in order to get ahead. Intrigue or conspiracy for self-advancement.

Domination. Seeking to use or possess others. Overprotection of children; refusal to correct or punish lest we lose their affection; insistence that they conform to our ideal for them contrary to their own vocation. Imposing our will on others by force, guile, whining, or refusal to cooperate. Over-readiness to advise or command; abuse of authority. Patronizing, pauperizing, putting others under a debt of gratitude, or considering ourselves ill-used when others' affection or compliance is not for sale.

Respect of persons, favoritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth to fulfil duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the favor or approval of others. Leading, tempting, or encouraging another to sin.

Avarice. Inordinate pursuit of wealth or material things. Theft, dishonesty, misrepresentation, or sharing in stolen goods. Cheating in business, taxes, school, or games. Making worldly success the goal of our life or the standard for judging others.

Prodigality. Waste of natural resources or personal possessions. Extravagance or living beyond our income, to impress others or to maintain status. Failure to pay debts. Gambling more than we can afford to lose, or to win unearned profits. Unnecessary borrowing or carelessness with others' money. Expenditure on self of what is needed for the welfare of others.

Penuriousness. Undue protection of wealth or security. Selfish insistence on vested interests or on claimed rights. Refusal to support or help those who have a claim on us. Sponging on others. Stinginess. Failure to give a due proportion of our income to Church and charity, or of our time and energy to good works. Failure to pay pledges promised to the Church or charities, when able to do so.

GLUTTONY is the overindulgence of natural appetites for food and drink, and by extension the inordinate question for pleasure or comfort.

Intemperance. Overindulgence in food, drink, smoking, or other physical pleasures. Fastidiousness, fussiness, demanding excessively high standards, or dilettantism. Condemnation of some material things or pleasures as evil in themselves, attempting to prohibit their use rather than their abuse.

Lack of Discipline. Negligence in keeping the days of fasting or abstinence, or failure to use other needed means of self-discipline. Neglect of bodily health—not getting sufficient rest, recreation, exercise, or wholesome nourishment. Failure to use or to cooperate with available medical care when ill. Use of sickness as a means of escape from responsibilities.

LUST is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us.

Unchastity. Violation of the Church's marriage laws. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfill the purpose of Holy matrimony in the bringing forth of giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities or work involved. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence outside matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others.

Immodesty. Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress, or actions; or in oneself by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting dirty stories.

Prudery. Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil in itself. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempt to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex.

Cruelty. Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals.

SLOTH is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service, or sacrifice.

Laziness. Indolence in performing spiritual, mental, or physical duties, or neglect of family, business, or social obligations, or courtesies. Procrastination of disliked tasks. Busyness or triviality to avoid more important commitments. Devotion of excessive time to rest, recreation, amusement, television, light reading, or the like. Waste of employer's time, or shoddy or inadequate work.

Indifference. Unconcern over injustice to others, especially that caused by currently accepted social standards; or unmindfulness of the suffering of the world. Failure to become adequately informed on both sides of contemporary issues or on the Christian principles involved. Neglect of duties to state or community. Failure to provide adequately for, or to treat justly those in our employ.

Ignoring the needy, lonely, or unpopular persons in our own or the parish family, or in the neighborhood; or unwillingness to minister to them. Insufficient attention to the religious and other needs of our family. Failure to fulfill our obligation of Christian missionary witness, or to take a full and informed part in the effort to make the Church's unity and holiness a manifest reality on earth.

Prayer After Self-Examination

O My God, how great are my sins! Would that I had never offended thee. If by carelessness or ignorance I have forgotten anything in my self-examination, show it to me now that I may make a good confession. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contrition

O My God, I cry unto thee with the prodigal: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But now, O God, give me true sorrow of heart for my many sins whereby I have grieved thee, and enable me to make a full confession to thy priest, that I may receive perfect remission of them, through thine infinite goodness. Amen.

O God, I am very sorry that I have sinned against thee who art so good. Forgive me for Jesus' sake, and I will try to sin no more. Amen.

O God, I love thee with my whole heart and above all things and am heartily sorry that I have offended thee. May I never offend thee any more. Oh, may I love thee without ceasing, and make it my delight to do in all things thy most holy will. Amen.