

A GUIDE TO CONFESSION

For a lot of us it may have been quite some time since we have been to Confession. There are probably as many reasons why we don't go as there are those of us who haven't gone in a while. There are a couple of reasons that I hear quite often and so I assume they are something that a lot of us struggle with in getting to this sacrament of healing. The first is that we tend to think that what we have done is the worst thing ever and we are terribly embarrassed by our sin or we just don't think that God could ever forgive what we have done. The second is that we don't know how to go to confession. In the first case we should know that we are not alone in what we have done to sin against God and our neighbor as there is no sin that is new under the sun. There is no sin that God will not forgive and there is no pattern of sin that God is not willing to enter so to help us on our way to healing that part of our life. In the second case there are no wrong ways to go to confession! Just go and let the priest know you don't remember how to do it and he will help you.

I would also like to give you a simple guide to help in your preparation for the sacrament during this Lenten season.

1. Enter the confessional! This is the first step and the rest is easy after this one. You can either go face to face or go behind the screen.
2. Begin with the sign of the cross and continue with the words: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (this long) since my last confession."
3. Confess your sins beginning with the grave, or mortal, sins working your way to the venial sins. If you don't know if a sin is mortal, ask the priest and he can help you with the matter.
4. Receive your penance from the priest and complete the penance as soon as you can after leaving the confessional.
5. Pray the Act of Contrition.
6. Receive absolution from the priest and be on your way to a more productive Lent and faith filled life.

A good rule of thumb in preparing ourselves for confession is to take a good look at our lives in light of the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. This examination from the Knights of Columbus helps in examining our conscience so that a life changing confession can take place.

TEN COMMANDMENTS:

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no strange gods before me.

- ✠ Do I seek to love God with my whole heart, mind and soul? Do I pray daily?
- ✠ Have I had any involvement with the occult, witchcraft, wicca, ouija boards, seances, tarot cards, new age crystals, fortune telling, or the like? Have I put faith in horoscopes?
- ✠ Have I denied a truth of the faith out of concern for the respect or opinion of others?

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

- ✠ Have I used God's holy name irreverently?
- ✠ Have I blasphemed God, the Church, Mary, the saints, or sacred places or things?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- ✠ Do I try to keep Sunday as a day of prayer, rest, and relaxation, avoiding unnecessary work? Do I cause others to not keep Sunday holy by how I live my life?
- ✠ Have I missed Mass without sufficient reason?
- ✠ Have I come late to Mass or left early without sufficient reason?

4. Honor your father and mother.

- ✠ Do I respect my parents?
- ✠ Have I deliberately hurt my parents?
- ✠ Have I neglected my family duties?

5. You shall not kill.

- ✠ Have I killed anyone?
- ✠ Have I had an abortion or encourage someone to have an abortion?
- ✠ Have I harmed anyone physically or emotionally?
- ✠ Do I love my neighbor? Is there anyone whom I refuse to love? Have I wished harm or misfortune on anyone? Is there anyone for whom I hold a grudge?

- ✠ Have I attempted suicide or seriously considered it?
- ✠ Have I abused drugs or alcohol?
- ✠ Have I led anyone to sin through bad example or direct encouragement?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

For those who are married:

- ✠ Am I faithful to my spouse in thought and action?
- ✠ Have I used artificial contraception, or been sterilized?
- ✠ Am I married outside of the Church?

For the unmarried:

- ✠ Have I engaged in sexual activity with anyone?

For all of us:

- ✠ Have I deliberately viewed pornography?
- ✠ Have I engaged in self-gratification?
- ✠ Have I told impure jokes?
- ✠ Do I dress modestly?
- ✠ Have I read immodest books or novels?

7. You shall not steal.

- ✠ Have I stolen or accepted stolen goods?
- ✠ Have I cheated anyone out of what I owe?
- ✠ Do I gamble excessively?
- ✠ Do I share what I have according to my means?
- ✠ Have I pirated videos, music, or software?

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

- ✠ Have I lied or sworn falsely?
- ✠ Have I plagiarized or been academically dishonest?
- ✠ Have I gossiped or revealed confidential information without good reason?
- ✠ Have I ruined the good name of others by spreading lies or maliciously revealing their faults and sins?

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

- ✠ Have I deliberately and consciously permitted sexual thoughts about anyone besides my spouse?
- ✠ Do I guard my imagination and senses?
- ✠ Have I viewed material for the purpose of arousal?
- ✠ Am I responsible about what I read?

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

- ✠ Am I envious of the possessions, abilities, talents, beauty, or success of others?

PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

1. You shall attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. You shall receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season.
3. You shall confession your sins at least once a year.
4. You shall keep holy Sunday and the holy days of obligation.
5. You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence.
6. You shall provide for the material needs of the Church.

My hope is that all of us will seek out the sacrament of reconciliation this Lenten season so that, together, we might experience the healing mercy of God in a specific and personal way as we strive to grow in holiness.