



*This article includes the Steps to Making a Good Confession,  
the Act of Contrition and the Examination of Conscience.*

## How to Make a Good Confession

by Matthew Arnold

### What is the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

Reconciliation (Penance, Confession) is the Sacrament in which the priest, in God's Name, forgives one's sins committed after Baptism and reconciles one with God and Holy Mother Church.

The priest has the power to forgive sins (absolution) because Christ said to His Apostles, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and

Penance, you must a) make a sincere Act of Contrition (sorrow for sin), b) confess your sins to a priest, c) accept and fulfill the penance the priest imposes on you.

### Contrition

You must have religious sorrow (contrition) for your sins. That is, you must be sorry because you dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell (imperfect contrition) and/or because you have offended the infinitely good God (perfect contrition).

make a sincere Act of Contrition right away and go to Confession as soon as possible. If you have perfect contrition for the mortal sin and intend to confess it, God forgives you and takes away the sin right away. But you may not receive Holy Communion until you confess it to a priest in Confession.

You needn't confess all your venial sins, but it is helpful to do so, especially in overcoming bad habits. You may also renew your contrition for already

*"I am asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation."*

- Pope John Paul II

whose sins you shall retain, they are retained" (John 20:22-23). That power was passed on to their successors, the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church.

### When Should I go to Confession?

Everyone who has committed a mortal sin *must* go to Confession within the year, or immediately, when in danger of death. But it is highly recommended to go often and regularly to Confession, even if one has committed only venial sins. The Sacrament gives Sanctifying Grace (or increases it) and also gives Sacramental Grace to help avoid future sins.

### Requirements for Confession

To receive the Sacrament of

True contrition means a) you wish you had not committed your sins, b) you sincerely promise not to commit those sins again, c) that you mean to stay away from any person, place or thing that easily leads you to sin.

### What Must I Confess?

You must confess all mortal sins, which have not been confessed in a good confession. You must confess them with their number (how many or how often) and circumstance (anything that adds another sin, i.e., to angrily strike someone is a sin against the fifth commandment, but to commit this offense against your father is also a sin against the fourth commandment).

If you commit a mortal sin,

confessed sins.

To deliberately omit telling a mortal sin in Confession is itself a mortal sin of sacrilege. This is called "making a bad Confession" and to undo it, you must confess that you made a bad Confession, confess the omitted mortal sin(s), and also any mortal sins you have committed since then (including Communions received in the state of mortal sin).

If, after a sincere examination of conscience, you *forget* to confess a mortal sin, your Confession is good, but you must tell it in your next Confession. Since the sin is forgiven, you may go to Communion in the meantime.

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### **For the Reluctant**

You may go to any priest at any Catholic Church. You don't give the priest your name or any details that would identify you. The priest is never allowed to tell anyone any sin he has heard in Confession (the "Seal of Confession").

### **Steps to Make a Good Confession**

Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to help you make a good Confession. Make an examination of conscience by asking yourself what sins you have committed since your last good confession. Tell God you are sorry for your sins.

Once in the Confessional, you may make your confession face-to-face or behind a screen. Make the Sign of the Cross and say, "Bless me Father for I have sinned, it has been (however long) since my last Confession. I accuse myself of the following sins."

Name your sins and how many times you committed each one. Then say, "I am sorry for these sins and all the sins of my past life, especially..." (here name some sin already confessed).

The priest will then give you a penance (usually some prayers), and perhaps advise you. While the priest is saying the words of forgiveness (absolution), you should say the Act of Contrition. Father will then say, "God bless you," or "Go in peace," or words to that effect. You say, "Thank you Father," make the Sign of the Cross and exit the Confessional.

### **After Your Confession**

If possible, say your penance right away, and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the Sacrament of Penance.

### **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 are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, do penance and amend my life. Amen.

### **Examination of Conscience**

- ◆ How long has it been since my last Confession?
- ◆ Did I conceal any sin?
- ◆ Did I do my penance?
- ◆ Have I neglected my home and family duties, work or school?
- ◆ Have I been lazy, neglectful, willfully distracted at prayer or Mass?
- ◆ Have I used God's name irreverently, or taken false or unnecessary oaths?
- ◆ Have I missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days through my own fault?
- ◆ Have I done unnecessary work on Sunday?
- ◆ Have I disobeyed, or been disrespectful to my superiors (parents, teachers, employer)?
- ◆ Have I been unjust or unkind to those under my authority?
- ◆ Have I quarreled with, or purposely hurt anyone?
- ◆ Have I been cruel

(physically or mentally) to anyone?

- ◆ Have I had an abortion or assisted someone else to?
- ◆ Have I caused or led anyone else to commit sin?
- ◆ Have I offended against purity in thought, word or deed?
- ◆ Have I stolen or destroyed another's property?
- ◆ Have I accepted stolen goods?
- ◆ Have I paid my just debts?
- ◆ Have I scandalized or been a bad example to my family or others?
- ◆ Have I lied, repeated gossip, or hurt another's character?
- ◆ Have I been sinfully proud, greedy, angry, envious, jealous or intemperate in eating and drinking?
- ◆ Have I used illegal drugs or abused controlled substances?
- ◆ Have I observed the Church's laws of fasting and abstinence?
- ◆ Have I failed to support the Church?
- ◆ Have I received Communion during Easter time?
- ◆ Have I sinned against the duties of married life?
- ◆ Have I failed to show the love, respect and good example due my spouse?
- ◆ Have I neglected my duties to my children concerning their religious instruction, education or cultivation of good habits?

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