



## PREPARING FOR CONFESSION

The Sacrament of Confession, also known as Reconciliation or Penance, is a celebration of God's victory over sin by his death on the cross. Our creed asserts that Christians are baptised for the forgiveness of sins. In its ministry of Confession the Church makes present that redeeming power of Christ's love, and proclaims forgiveness for sins committed after baptism.

This Sacrament is the privileged moment in which the Church guarantees God's pardon to the sinner who truly repents. Confession should never frighten us. It is not so much an appearance before a judge who is about to sentence us, as a return home to a God who wants to be close to us. The best word we can use to describe God is love and Confession is a loving encounter between us and God. It is about hope, acceptance and a fresh start. In this Sacrament we allow God to love us.

God's forgiveness to the repentant sinner is unconditional. We cannot earn it; it has already been won for us by Christ's death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is our pledge of God's serious intent in reconciling us to him and to each other:

The call to conversion is found in God's word in scripture. We are called to change our minds, to change our hearts and to open ourselves to the living challenge which God lays down before us. It is with this attitude of conversion that we should approach the Sacrament of Confession.

*'No one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive... For his mercy endures forever!'*

*Misericordiae Vultus, Pope Francis*

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

When we examine our conscience we are looking for more than a list of rules that we have broken. We are seeking to look deeper into ourselves, and to ask in the light of God's Word, how can we change and become more receptive to the life of grace working within us. To do this we need to ask ourselves:

1. What have I done or not done?
2. Why have I acted in that way?
3. How can I begin to co-operate with God's grace to change my ways?

It is easy to get stuck on the first question and simply make a list of things we have done wrong which we recount every time we go to Confession. It is important to know what we have done, but a fruitful celebration of the Sacrament should go further.

Why do I act as I do? Are there habits that I have got into, or out of, that have caused me to act in this way? Are there situations that I should distance myself from, or people who easily lead me astray? Are there aspects of my lifestyle that invite trouble? It is often through asking WHY that we can begin to prepare the way to avoid sinful actions in the future.

When we have honestly tried to see why we behave in the way we do, we can start to find out HOW to avoid falling back again into old ways. This can give us hope that we can really amend our lives and put Christ at the heart of all that we do. Thinking about how we can change our lives shows us that there is a different and healthier way to live our lives.

The following examination of conscience is a guide to help us look at our lives more deeply and in the process to truly amend our lives. Take your time to pray through it admitting your failures before God.

*One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself.'*

*Mark 12:28-31*

# A SIMPLE GUIDE TO CONFESSION

encountering the mercy of God

*'Confession must not be a mere formality in a Christian's life, but rather an essential ingredient to nourish and sustain a commitment to follow Christ.'*

*Pope Benedict XVI*

## LOVE OF GOD

- Is God someone distant or a real part of my life?
- Do I pray regularly and attend Mass each Sunday?
- Do I read God's Word and try to understand what it asks of me?
- Is Christ central to my decisions?
- Am I conscious of the promptings of the Holy Spirit?
- Have I used the name of God or Christ as a swear-word?
- Are there any false gods in my life: sex, money, ambition, reputation?
- Have I been involved with the occult: ouija boards, seances, tarot cards, fortune tellers, crystals, reiki etc?
- Have I put faith in horoscopes?
- Have I received Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?

## LOVE OF NEIGHBOUR

- Do I care about others, or do I just look after my friends?
- Do I contribute to my family's happiness or detract from it?
- Do I honour and respect my parents?
- Am I a good parent?
- Have I faithfully kept my marriage vows to my spouse?
- Has our marriage been open to new life, or have I used contraception, sterilisation etc?
- Have I engaged in sexual activity before/outside of marriage?
- Have I had an abortion or encouraged another to have one?
- Have I used IVF?
- What kind of Christian example do I give to others at work?
- Do I put in a fair day's work or pay a fair wage?
- Do I take a public stand on moral and social issues?
- Do I gossip or spread rumours about people?
- Am I concerned for the sick, the poor, the elderly, those in prison?
- Do I gossip or spread rumours about people?
- Have I stolen money or goods?
- Do I encourage people or do I use them for my own purposes?
- Have I been verbally or physically violent towards people?
- Are there people who I refuse to forgive?
- Do I pray for my enemies?
- Have I led anyone else into sin, either through bad example or direct encouragement?

## LOVE OF SELF

- Do I thank God for the wonder of my being?
- Do I always follow my own conscience?
- Have I tried to grow in my understanding of faith?
- Have I abused my body by eating or drinking too much?
- Do I use my body impurely as an object of sexual gratification?
- Have I read or watched material which leads me away from God's ways?
- Do I indulge in pride or boastfulness?
- Have I had patience in moments of trial and suffering?
- Am I lazy, close-minded or slothful?
- Have I used the graces and talents that God has given me worthily?
- Do I give in to disappointment and self-pity?
- Am I a truthful person in my words and in my actions?

## IN CONFESSION

Begin by saying:

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It is [state the length of time] since my last Confession.**

Then briefly tell the priest your 'state of life,' to help him understand your situation; e.g. 'I am at school' or 'I am a wife and mother'.

If you have not been to Confession for a while and are unsure of what to do, do not worry. Tell the priest and he will help you through the Sacrament.

Now confess your sins. Be simple and straightforward. Just put into words what you have done wrong since you last went to Confession. Don't make excuses; but if it helps, say a little bit about what happened and why. When you have finished, say:

**I am sorry for all these and all my sins.**

The priest will then give you some advice. He will give you a penance to do (a prayer or action that expresses your sorrow and your desire to put things right and live a new life). The priest will then ask you to make an Act of Contrition. You say one you know, or use the following:

**O my God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you; and by the help of your grace, I will not sin again. Amen.**

The priest then says the prayer of absolution, which is the moment when God forgives your sins. He may add some other prayers as well.

## AFTER CONFESSION

Make sure you give some time to return to the church and reflect on what has taken place during the Sacrament, pray the penance if the priest has asked you to say a prayer, and make a brief act of thanksgiving before leaving. The following prayer may be suitable for this purpose:

*Happy are those whose offence is forgiven whose sin is wiped away. Blessed are those to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is found no deceit. When I kept my sin secret, my body wasted away. I groaned all day long; your hand lay heavy upon me by night and by day. But now I acknowledged my sins, and uncovered my guilt before you. I said to myself: "I will confess my wrong to the Lord." And now Lord, you have forgiven my sin and removed all my guilt. I give you thanks, my God, with all my heart, and glorify your name, O Lord, for ever; for your great love to me has been constant, and you have saved me from the depths. Blessed be God who did not reject my prayer nor withhold his love from me*

*Based on Psalms 31, 65 & 85*

If you forgot to mention something small, don't get worried about it. As long as we make an honest examination of conscience and do not deliberately conceal anything from the priest, we can trust in God's forgiveness.