

# The Sacrament of Penance

## Confession Guide For Adults



*Jesus breathed on them saying,  
"Receive the Holy Spirit.  
If you forgive the sins of any,  
they are forgiven;  
if you retain the sins of any,  
they are retained"*  
(Jn 20:23)

† (Begin by making the Sign of the Cross)

Bless me father, for I have sinned. It has been (*how long?*) since my last confession. I am...

(*married, single, divorced, etc.*) Let the priest know if you are not married by Church, or cohabiting with someone in a relationship outside marriage.

These are my sins...

*Make an honest and sincere confession. For mortal sins, include kind and number, and any circumstances that affect the gravity of the sin. Long explanations are not necessary. At the conclusion, say:*

For these and any sins I may have forgotten, I humbly ask pardon and absolution.

*Priest may give some spiritual advice. He will assign a penance to be completed after the confession. Then recite the Act of Contrition:*

### Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee. I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, 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 do penance and to amend my life.

† Make the sign of Cross when priest gives the ABSOLUTION ("I absolve you of your sins...").

*Priest says, "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good"*

For His love endures forever.

*Priest says, "Go in peace."*

Thanks be to God!

# Examination of Conscience Based on the 10 Commandments

## I. I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me

- Putting personal goals, popularity, relationships, money, or hedonistic lifestyle above God.
- Failing to worship God & practice one's faith
- Compromising one's religious and moral principles
- Joining the Masons, New Age, cults, or other religions
- Having selective beliefs; being a "Cafeteria Catholic"
- Receiving "communion" in a non-Catholic church
- Denying God's existence (atheism)
- Superstitiousness – having fear of forces or bad luck
- Occult practices: voodoo, curanderismo, wicca (witchcraft), casting spells; Ouija boards; fortune-telling, palm-reading, Tarot cards, horoscopes, good luck charms
- Despair, lack of trust, anger or hatred for God

## 2. You Shall not take God's Name in vain

- Using God's name without love and respect
- Using the Lord's name as an expletive
- Cursing someone or willing evil in God's name
- Breaking an oath or vow to which God is witness
- Taking an illegal oath or making a promise to do evil
- Blasphemy: offend, insult, mock, reproach God
- Sacrilege: desecrating a Host; receiving sacraments in a state of sin; disrespect in a holy place
- Lack of reverence in Church, or for religious things
- No interest to know God, or learn, or study Scripture
- Profanity: foul, vulgar, or offensive language
- Enjoying sacrilegious or immoral music and art

## 3. Keep Holy the Lord's Day

- Missing Mass on Sundays and Holy Days without good reason (such as illness)
- Late for Mass, badly dressed, didn't fast one hour
- Unnecessary work, business, or shopping on Sunday
- Having job that interferes with Mass & religious duties
- Failing to pray each day, morning and evening
- Didn't fast/abstain during Lent; or observe regular Fridays as penitential days

## 4. Honor your father and mother

- Failure to love, respect, obey, and care for one's parents
- Failure to love and honor other parent of one's children
- Failure to create a stable, loving home for children
- Abandonment of one's spouse or children
- Setting bad example; neglecting education, discipline, and character formation of children
- Lack of interest/attention/time for one's children

- Anger and impatience when disciplining
- Neglect of household duties and responsibilities
- Stubbornness, arguing, talking back, rudeness
- Lack of forgiveness, impatience, holding grudges
- Critical, disloyal, and rejection of family
- Lack of hospitality; Lack of Courtesy
- Disrespect and neglect of the elderly
- Fighting over inheritance
- Rebelliousness and rejection of parental authority, legitimate customs, or time-honored traditions
- Failure to respect and obey civil laws
- Failing to vote; supporting unworthy candidates
- Unsupportive/disloyal to one's country and leaders
- Unsupportive of one's parish family and priests

## 5. You shall not kill

- Murder, homicide, manslaughter
- Having an abortion, or helping/encouraging one (*incurs automatic excommunication*)
- Using "morning-after" pills
- Creating, harvesting, freezing, or destroying human embryos in fertility procedures (IVF); sex-selection; embryonic stem cell research; cloning; genetic engineering
- Being "Pro-choice;" not upholding rights of unborn
- Euthanasia (mercy-killing); using pain medication or hospice care to hasten death; killing to harvest organs
- Denying the comatose nutrition & water
- Criminal or violent lifestyle; living by weapons
- Selling or using illegal drugs
- Drunkenness; driving under the influence
- Abusing alcohol; abusing prescription medications
- Reckless driving, taking unnecessary risks
- Attempted suicide; Suicidal intentions
- Unhealthy self-starvation (anorexia, bulimia)
- Gluttony, overeating, smoking
- Mutilation; excessive tattooing or body piercing
- Fighting, causing conflicts, failing to make peace
- Insulting or teasing others; being malicious or cruel
- Denigrate, ridicule, humiliate, expose, or mock another
- Cruelty: taking pleasure/satisfaction in another's pain
- Bullying; assault; intimidation; coercion
- Kidnapping; terrorizing; stalking
- Bigotry; Prejudice; being judgmental
- Quick to condemn; merciless; harsh
- Angry, hostile, hateful, losing one's temper, sulking
- Revenge; grudges; nursing injuries; unforgiving
- Scandal: giving bad example, leading others to sin
- Keeping dangerous/harmful company

## 6. You shall not commit adultery

### Sins against the Spousal Relationship

- Adultery: Violating one's own marriage vows, or another's
- Having an affair; Breaking up a marriage or family
- Improper conversations and behavior with opposite sex
- Keeping improper company; cheating on spouse
- Disrespect, disloyalty, lack of devotion for one's spouse
- Failure to listen, share, communicate
- Lack of intimacy, trust, support, warmth, friendship, sensitivity, interest in each other
- Willful divorce & desertion; thoughts of divorce
- Supporting divorce (except in cases of violence and abuse)
- Having several spouses (bigamy, polygamy)
- Divorce and remarriage (state of adultery)
- Living together outside marriage (cohabitation)
- Marrying civilly and invalidly (living in sin)
- Dating another when separated or divorced
- Approval or tolerance for same-sex unions
- Seeking annulment of marriage without true grounds; Trying to dishonestly nullify a valid marriage

### Sins while preparing for Holy Marriage

- Failing to practice chastity as a single person
- Giving to another what belongs to God and one's spouse (virginity, intimacy)
- Ignoring a religious calling
- Dating/marrying someone who is anti-Christian
- Ignoring parents' advice and concerns
- Disobeying God's law when deciding to marry.
- Marrying for wrong reasons: prestige, "escape"
- Being against children or large families; not open to life; holding a "Contraceptive mentality"

### Sexual Sins

- Separating the true meaning of sex from babies
- Using artificial contraception; suppressing fertility (birth control, prophylactics, withdrawal, Onanism).
- In-vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood
- Sterilization (vasectomy, tubal ligation)
- Sexual activity when unmarried (fornication)
- Sexually arousing activity before marriage (prolonged embraces, petting, passionate kissing)
- Immoral "dare" games; sexual activity via internet
- Deliberate sexual self-gratification (masturbation)
- Sexual activity with many partners (promiscuity)
- Sexual activity for pay or favors (prostitution)
- Sexual seduction; sexual abuse; harassment
- Rape; Sexual violence or coercion (assault)
- Sexual depravity, bestiality, sadomasochism
- Sodomy, homosexual activity, transvestism
- Sexual activity with family member or relative (incest)
- Voyeurism, ogling, impure glances; self-exposure

### Sinful Attitudes

- Immodest, revealing, or suggestive clothing
- Undignified dancing, gestures, or behavior
- Vanity; conceit; worrying too much about looks
- Vulgar sexual comments, insinuation, jokes
- Inappropriate flirting, innuendo

## 7. You shall not steal

- Stealing; Taking what belongs to another
- Robbery, burglary, pick-pocketing
- Shoplifting, bypassing utility meters
- Pirated downloads; using cable descramblers
- Buying, selling, or trading stolen property
- Failure of restitution for lost, stolen, or damaged property
- Stealing work of others; plagiarism; deriving benefit or gain from another's work without author/inventor's permission
- Borrowing without permission, or without returning
- Destroying another's property or work.
- Graffiti; defacing; vandalism; littering
- Gambling with another's money; gambling beyond what is reasonable entertainment; gambling where everyone doesn't have equal chance
- Not tithing a just amount for the support of the Church
- Neglect of almsgiving and sacrificial giving to the needy
- Taking from the poor, ignorant, or gullible
- Tricking someone out of property or money
- Selfish living; lack of generosity; failure to engage in the common work to better society
- Seeking "free ride" or handouts; Being a taker not a giver; freeloading; leeching; having an "entitlement" mentality
- Laziness; making others provide one's support; being a burden to others due to lack of effort
- Demanding as a right what is hard-earned privilege
- Wasting: time, money, effort, food, educational opportunities; Procrastination; Irresponsibility
- Not using one's earnings wisely and effectively; living beyond one's means
- Taking on debt without serious cause (esp. credit card)
- Not budgeting and prioritizing finances carefully
- Lack of stewardship, or cultivation of the environment as a common human resource
- Cruelty to animals; Extravagant spending on pets

### Sins in the Workplace & Society

- Bad work ethic; minimalism; cutting corners; not giving full day's work or best effort
- Paying unjust wages; lack of clarity about responsibilities; making unreasonable demands; mistreatment of workers
- Unsafe work environment; cut-throat competition; bully tactics; inequality of opportunity; favoritism
- Usury: Making profit with no benefit to owner of resources; making profit at human cost
- Overcharging; gouging; adding hidden costs

- Illegal business practices; fraud; blackmail; money-laundering; false accounting; insider trading; price fixing; bribery; embezzlement; forgery
- Cheating on income taxes
- Not paying bills on time; writing “hot” checks
- Frivolous or unjust lawsuits; false insurance claims; not paying back debts; breaking contracts
- Irresponsibility with discretionary spending; bad stewardship of funds belonging to another
- Consumerism: buying unnecessary items; buying unnecessarily expensive items (such as clothes, status symbols); ostentation
- Slavery: subjugation of others that treats persons as disposable property and ignores their rights and dignity.
- Promoting irresponsible government; Socialist, Marxist, or Communist agendas; welfare-dependency

## 8. You shall not bear false witness

- Lying (telling an untruth).
- Lying under oath in a legal setting (perjury)
- Failing to tell the truth when the other needs to know
- Deceiving, misleading, or misrepresenting the truth
- Failing to disclose and speak truthfully in important matters when the good of others depends on it.
- Lying when making wedding vows and thereby nullifying sacramental marriage
- Teaching as true something which is an error; or vice-versa
- Sowing confusion and doubt; skepticism
- Acting subversively, “behind someone’s back”
- Not communicating in work or family relationships; concealing expectations
- Cheating on tests
- Falsifying applications and documents
- Failing to take responsibility for wrongdoing and accepting the consequences/punishment
- Failing to admit guilt or place blame where properly due
- Always making excuses; rationalizing; denial
- Not apologizing when wrong; always having the last word
- Lying or exaggerating to look greater (boasting)
- Promoting someone’s greatness for the wrong reasons or insincerely (adulation); being obsequious; “yes man”
- Negative/destructive humor and jibes (irony and sarcasm)
- Failure to laugh at self; lack of humor and lightheartedness
- Cynicism; making personal attacks
- Gossip: any talk that puts someone in a bad light.
- Gossip by rash judgment: giving partial information and making judgments before all the facts are known; failing to give “benefit of doubt;” only seeing the negative
- Gossip by detraction: disclosing the truth uncharitably; exposing the sins and faults of others without justification; “tattle-taling”

- Gossip by slander: destructive lies or exaggerations; false accusations; tearing down the reputation and good name of another; spreading rumors
- Intentionally hiding past sins in confession
- Failing to keep secrets; being untrustworthy; violating confidence
- Insincerity; failing to keep one’s word, promises, obligations, and commitments
- Lack of integrity; trying to be someone one is not
- Self-righteousness. Judging and looking down on others.
- Hypocrisy; not practicing what one preaches; Pharisaical
- Deceptive; two-faced; fork-tongued
- Manipulative; twisting and distorting truth; exploiting another’s lack of knowledge
- Playing “politics”; playing games with people
- Giving in to “peer pressure”
- Failing to stand up for the truth
- Being an accomplice to evil through silence
- False advertising; distortion of truth; manipulation of information for private gain or personal agenda
- Violating the truth when it is a sacred trust (lawyer, judge, civil servant, journalist, politician)
- Promoting art or literature that is demeaning, or glorifies evil, or promotes immorality

## 9. You shall not covet your neighbor’s spouse

- Lust: treating person as object of sexual pleasure
- Deliberate impure thoughts; lustful fantasies
- Wishing to dominate or exercise power over another
- Possession, purchase, viewing of pornographic material
- Indulgence in semi-pornographic entertainment
- Visiting strip clubs; visiting sexual internet sites
- Enjoying indecent television, movies, literature, texting
- Acting with ulterior motives; “using” people
- Being manipulative, controlling, possessive, obsessive, or jealous of other people
- Narcissistic, self-centered, selfish, desirous of praise and adulation and popularity
- Seeking same-sex relationship

## 10. You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods

- Being ungrateful for God’s blessings
- Always complaining
- Always comparing self to others
- Never happy or content with sufficiency
- Greed: Always wanting more
- Collecting and hoarding unnecessary things
- Stinginess, miserliness
- Envy: Resenting success or good in another
- Envy of the “rich;” disgust for the “poor”
- Measuring worth by possessions, money, or status
- Loving money

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Why do I have to confess my sins to a priest?** Jesus gave the apostles his personal authority to forgive sins (Jn 20:22-23), which presupposes confession. This power exists in the Catholic Church to this day, in the bishops and priests.

**Can a priest reveal very serious sins, such as murder or child abuse?** No, the “Seal” of Confession is absolute. The priest may not repeat anything he has heard in confession.

**Is it better to Confess “face to face” or “behind the screen”?** The traditional preference for confessing anonymously reminds both the priest and penitent that Christ is actually the one forgiving. One also kneels as a sign of humility.

## **What is Mortal sin?**

Mortal sins are “deadly” or “serious” sins which destroy the life of God’s sanctifying grace in the soul (1 Jn 5:17). They break our relationship with God and merit eternal condemnation at final judgment. To be a mortal sin, there must be 1) grave matter 2) knowledge 3) free consent. In other words, it must be a *serious violation* of God’s law, done *knowingly*, and *freely*.

## **What is Venial Sin?**

These are sins which harm but do not destroy our relationship with God. Either it was a “less serious” infraction of God’s law; or there wasn’t full knowledge; or the will was very weak; or there were other mitigating circumstances.

## **Do I have to confess every sin?**

Mortal (Serious or Deadly) sins must be confessed in kind and number (what exactly you did, how often). Venial sins don’t have to be confessed, but it is helpful to do so. It is a sin to deliberately hide a mortal sin, and it renders the whole confession invalid.

## **What is Contrition?**

Contrition is having sorrow for sin, “being sorry.” We cannot be forgiven without true contrition and sincere repentance, which means honestly turning away from that sin and seeking God’s help in avoiding it. “*Imperfect contrition*” means we are sorry because we don’t want to be punished in hell, but “*Perfect contrition*” means we are sorry because we love God and deeply regret hurting Him.

**What is Penance?** Penance is the activity we do after confession to show that we are sorry, that we want to correct our fault, that we want to undo the damage we caused. It helps us to take full responsibility for our actions. Even though God forgives our sins, there are still consequences that have to be accepted, and a “debt” to be paid.

**How do I go to Confession if I am not married by the Church?** “Living together” with someone as man and wife when one is not married sacramentally with the Church’s blessing is a violation of the moral law (6<sup>th</sup> Commandment). This includes being civilly married. It is particularly problematic if one is divorced and remarried (Mt 19:9). Therefore, this situation has to be repented and rectified before the priest can give absolution, and before one can receive Holy Communion. Please schedule an appointment with the parish priest to have a civil marriage “convalidated.” Even though one may be in an irregular situation, one may still come to the confessional for counsel and guidance, but let the priest know your situation. Likewise, continue to attend Mass so as to be nourished by God’s Word, even though one cannot yet receive the Eucharist.

## **What happens if I am excommunicated because of abortion?**

Abortion is the sin of murder; an innocent human being was unjustly deprived of life and the grace of baptism. Because it is such a serious sin, and because our society legalizes and even encourages the practice, the Church attaches the penalty of automatic excommunication (Canon 1398) to a Catholic who procures an abortion, or directly assists an abortion (driving someone, helping to pay, advising someone it’s okay). Excommunication means one is expelled from the community of the faithful and cut off from the sacramental graces that Jesus entrusted to the Catholic Church for salvation. An excommunicated soul would come before the throne of God on Judgment Day alone, without the Church to support or intercede. Anyone in this situation needs to repent, and come to confession as soon as possible in order to be reconciled with the Church, and begin the healing process from abortion.

**Is a penance service the same as regular confession? What is “General Absolution”?** It has become more common to have communal penance services where a large group of people examine their conscience together and then go to confession “communion line” style. These services can be helpful if done correctly, according to liturgical norms. For instance, you can’t substitute one main sin or a couple sins for all your sins. The penitent still has to make a complete, “integral” confession of sins, or else the confession is invalid. Second, you can’t skip the Act of Contrition, it is an integral part of the sacrament. Third, the priest cannot give “general absolution” to everyone simply because there are not enough priests, or not enough time. “General absolution” can only be given to a group in an extreme emergency such as before a battle, or in a plane about to crash. Even with general absolution, the penitent would still have to make an integral confession afterward, as soon as the danger has passed.