

Examination of Conscience

“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind...”

1. Is God the center of my life? Are there “false gods” in my life that tend to replace God as my chief concern in all I do: for example, money, work, pleasure?
2. How strong is my faith in God? Do I try to grow in my understanding of Jesus’ message and of the teachings of the Church? Is there any aspect of the Church’s teaching that troubles me?
3. Do I honor God especially on Sundays and holy days? Do I participate at Mass or am I just there? Do I pray frequently and with attention or are my prayers just a routine?
4. Do I reverence the name of God? Am I careless with God’s holy name?

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself...”

1. Am I a loving person to all I meet? Do I treat others as I want to be treated? Do I ever “use” people to get what I want or to “get ahead?” Am I harboring any feelings of hate towards anyone?
2. Do I show concern for others or are my efforts concentrated on myself? Do I give my time and/or possessions to those less fortunate? Do I show respect to all persons no matter what their sex, age, race, religion, social or economic status?
3. Do I value life? Do I uphold the rights of the unborn, of children, the old or those who are physically or mentally disabled or oppressed?
4. Within my family, do I show respect to all? Do I try to listen and respond to the concerns of all family members? As a spouse, am I faithful and supportive of my partner? As a parent, do I guide my children in the Christian way of life and give them good example?
5. Do I tell the truth? Am I jealous of what others have or do I steal?
6. In the workplace, am I honest? Do I do all that is expected of me? Am I considerate of my co-workers? Do I offer help when they need it? If I am in a leadership position, do I use my authority for the good of all and in a spirit of service or do I grasp for power?
7. As a citizen, am I concerned about the nation’s policies in terms of justice and the good of the entire earth and world? Do I keep the laws? Do I pay just taxes? Do I work to make our nation and the world more responsive to the needs of all people?
8. Do I consciously try to be a model of living out my faith? Do I ever give bad example?

“So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us...”

1. Have I made good use of my gifts and my time? Am I lazy?
2. Do I look with the eyes of faith at the sorrows and disappointments of life?
3. Do I regard my body and that of others as the temple of the Holy Spirit? Am I chaste? Am I guilty of any thoughts or actions unworthy of the purity to which God calls us? Have I encouraged others to sin in this regard?
4. Am I always faithful to my conscience? Do I take time for my own spiritual growth and ongoing inner conversion? Am I open to change and the call to a fuller life prompted by God’s Spirit in my heart and life?

How to Go to Confession

Before You Go... Reflect on what sins you have committed (see the other side of this handout), and remember these encouraging words from Pope Francis: *“Do not be afraid of Confession! One who is in line to confess feels all these things – even shame – but then, when he finishes confessing, he leaves free, great, beautiful, forgiven... happy. And this is the beauty of Confession. Jesus is there...and He receives you with so much love.”*

- 1. Introduction.** When you come before the priest, begin by making the Sign of the Cross (praying the words out loud), and continue by saying, “Bless me, Father, I have sinned. It has been (how long) since my last confession. These are my sins...”
- 2. Confession.** List the sins you have committed that came to mind when doing your examination of conscience. Don’t be too general (like, “I haven’t been a good person”), but a lot of detail is not necessary either (you don’t need to tell the whole story of how a sin came about). If you’re not sure if something is a sin is, just ask the priest. This isn’t counseling, so unless you ask, the priest likely won’t give you advice. He’ll just move on to...
- 3. Penance.** The priest will suggest something for you to do or pray as a response to God’s mercy. You’ll have to remember what this is and do it after the confession is over, so pay attention.
- 4. Contrition.** The priest will then ask you to pray your “Act of Contrition,” demonstrating your sorrow for your sins. This needs to be prayed out loud for the priest to hear, but need not adhere exactly to one formula. Here is one example, but you can also pray from your heart:

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. (*Rite of Penance, no. 45*)
- 5. Absolution.** Don’t get up to leave after that prayer, because the best part is yet to come: the priest will extend his hands in your direction and he will pray the Prayer of Absolution: “God, the Father of Mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the Church, may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” **You respond: Amen.**
- 6. Concluding Praise.** The priest will then likely say something like, “God has freed you from your sin. Go in Peace.” To which you can respond: “Thanks be to God.”

After You Leave... Don’t forget to do your penance. If it is saying certain prayers, you can do it in the church before you leave.