

# A Guide to Confession

## Five Steps For a Good Confession

1. Examine your conscience.
2. Be sincerely sorry for your sins.
3. Confess your sins.
4. Resolve to amend your life.
5. After your confession, do the penance the priest assigns.

## Procedure in the Confessional

You say:

**"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been - (state the length of time) - since my last confession. These are my sins."**

Then tell your mortal sins and the number of times committed. If you have no mortal sin to confess, then confess the venial sins you have committed since your last confession. When you have finished telling your sins, you should say:

**"For these and all the sins of my past life I am truly sorry."**

The priest now gives the necessary advice, assigns your penance and asks you to say the Act of Contrition (in some form). Then wait and listen as the priest gives the absolution

Then say **Thank you, Father**, leave the confessional and perform the penance assigned by the priest.

## An Act of Contrition

**"O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all My love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen."**

## The Differences in sins

There are two major kinds of sin: original and actual.

Actual sin is sin which people commit. There are two kinds of actual sin, mortal and venial.

Mortal sin is a horrible offense against God, so horrible that it destroys the life of grace in the soul. Three simultaneous conditions must be fulfilled for a mortal sin: (1) the act must be something very serious; (2) the person must have sufficient understanding of what is being done; (3) the person must have sufficient freedom of the will. So I cannot commit a mortal sin if the matter is not serious (e.g., if I stole a small amount of money from my employer), or if I did not know what I was doing (e.g., if I were to hurt someone accidentally or unthinkingly), or if I did not act with full freedom (e.g., I was under physical or emotional pressure).

A Catholic should know well the difference between mortal and venial sins.

## Examination of Conscience

1. **I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.**  
Do I give God time every day in prayer?  
Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?  
Have I been involved with superstitious practices (horoscopes or ouija boards) or have I been involved with the occult?  
Do I seek to surrender myself to God's Word as taught by the Church?  
Have I ever received Communion in the state of mortal sin?  
Have I ever deliberately told a lie in Confession or have I withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession?
2. **You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.**  
Have I used God's name in vain: lightly or carelessly?  
Have I been angry with God?  
Have I wished evil upon any other person?  
Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object?
3. **Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.**  
Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation?  
Have I tried to observe Sunday as a family day and a day of rest?  
Do I do needless work on Sunday?
4. **Honor your father and your mother.**  
Do I honor and obey my parents?  
Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?  
Have I given my family good religious example?  
Do I try to bring peace into my home life?  
Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?
5. **You shall not kill.**  
Have I had an abortion or encouraged anyone to have an abortion? Have I physically harmed anyone? Have I abused alcohol or drugs? Did I give scandal to anyone, thereby leading them into sin?  
Have I been angry or resentful?  
Have I harbored hatred in my heart?  
Have I been sterilized for reasons of birth control?  
Have I encouraged or condoned sterilization?
6. **You shall not commit adultery.**  
Have I been faithful to my marriage vows  
In thought and action?  
Have I engaged in any sexual activity before marriage or outside of marriage?  
Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control?  
Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life?  
Have I respected all members of the opposite sex, or have I thought of other people as objects?  
Have I been guilty of any homosexual activity?

Do I seek to be pure in my thoughts, words and actions?  
Am I careful to dress modestly, so as not to tempt others?  
Have I been guilty of masturbation?

7. **You shall not steal.**  
Have I stolen what is not mine?  
Have I returned or made restitution for what I have stolen?  
Do I waste time at work, school or at home?  
Do I gamble excessively, thereby denying my family of their needs?  
Do I pay my debts promptly?  
Do I seek to share what I have with the poor?

8. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**  
Have I lied?  
Have I gossiped? Harmed someone's reputation?  
Have I spoken behind someone else's back?  
Am I critical, negative, or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?  
Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?

9. **You shall not desire your neighbor's wife.**  
Have I consented to impure thoughts? Have I caused them by impure television, movies, books, magazines or internet? Do I pray at once to banish impure thoughts and temptations? Do I listen to, or engage in, impure conversations or jokes?

10. **You shall not desire your neighbor's goods.**  
Am I jealous of what other people have? Do I envy other people's families or possessions?  
Am I greedy or selfish?  
Are material possessions the purpose of my life?  
Do I trust that God will care for all of my material and spiritual needs?

## Why go to Confession?

We need the sacrament of Penance because each of us, from time to time, sins. When we recognize that we have offended God who is all deserving of our love, we sense the need to make things right. Like the prodigal son in the Gospel, we long to know again the loving embrace of a forgiving father who patiently waits for each of us. Jesus himself has established this sure and certain way for us to access God's mercy and to know that our sins are forgiven. By virtue of his divine authority, Jesus gives this power of absolution to the apostolic ministry. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "in imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church" (1444).

We need to know that our sins are forgiven. There is something in our human nature that calls out for the assurance that our sins are actually forgiven. Confession is the visible manifestation of God's mercy that provides us, in human terms as well, the clear awareness that God has forgiven us.