

The Sacrament of Penance

A Guide to Holy Confession

How should we come to confession? What should we do?

We must:

- confess openly and fully, avoiding justifying our sin;
- be sincerely sorry for our sins;
- desire forgiveness and reconciliation with God and all;
- have a spirit of true repentance and the desire to change;
- make amends for our wrongs; and,
- decide to improve our lives.

These are the main parts of confession. The priest may tell us to do certain things -- to read, pray, practice silence, or perform certain acts of mercy -- we should follow his advice cheerfully and carefully, since God Himself speaks to us in the Sacrament if we are sincere and open to His being there.

Christ is coming to us in the Church. He is coming in the sacrament of Holy Communion at Divine Liturgy. He is coming either to accept us into loving unity with God or to judge and condemn us. We prepare ourselves to meet Him by opening our souls, confessing our sins, and seeking mercy and forgiveness. Our Lord has told us: "Nothing is hid that shall not be made visible, nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light. ." (Luke 8:17-18)

To prepare for the Sacrament of Confession, an Orthodox Christian needs time and space for personal silence, reflection, reading, and prayer. This takes place at home before going to Church for confession. Light a special votive lamp or candle, maybe burn some incense, and begin with, "Lord, here I am, and I'm willing to listen." Think about your past actions, words, and thoughts.

Prayers as you prepare for confession at home

O Lord, "Cleanse me from secret faults" (Psalm 19:12).

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

Glory to You, Christ our God, our hope, Glory to You!

Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, present in all places and filling all things, Treasury of Goodness and Giver of life: come and abide in us. Cleanse us from every stain of sin and save our souls, O Gracious Lord.

Holy God. Holy Mighty. Holy Immortal Have mercy on us.(3)

Glory to the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen

All Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, forgive our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for the glory of Your name.

Lord, have mercy.(3)

Glory to the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Ask God to speak to you about your sin. If you think you might forget, write down your thoughts and bring the list with you to confession.

EXAMINING OUR CONSCIENCE: The Greatest Commandment

Love the Lord Your God with All Your Heart

Have I prayed daily because of my love for Christ? Have I put Him first in my life, or is comfort, money, or pleasure, my primary goal?

Have I neglected to attend Divine Liturgy? What excuses have I given?

Have I learned, obeyed, and kept the rules of the Church?

Have I had any serious doubts about God? Have I doubted the teachings of my Church?

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Have I been unkind to my neighbor?

Have I gossiped or been vicious about those whom I know?

Have I told true but harmful things about my neighbor to others and hurt his or her reputation?

Have I forgiven everyone who has harmed me in any way? Do I bear a grudge against anyone?

Have I been jealous or envious of my neighbor's goods? Do I wish anyone harm who has more than I?

Have I stolen from or cheated my neighbor or anyone? Have I taken what is not rightly mine?

Have I disrupted worship by coming in late or leaving early, or going unnecessarily to the restroom?

Have I distracted others at prayer by talking or fidgeting during the Liturgy?

Is my attitude in Church appropriate to being in the presence of God?

Am I a good example to all?

Have I done anything to lessen suffering in the world?

Have I visited the sick, or cared for anyone other than myself or my relatives?

Have I been prejudiced toward any race or nationality?

Have I considered anyone beneath me socially or tried to make myself important at someone else's expense?

Our bodies were made by God and are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Have I done anything harmful to my own body? Have I treated it as a Holy Temple?

Have I forgotten to do everything to keep it healthy? Have I eaten or drunk harmfully? Have I failed to give it proper rest and exercise? Have I taken care of it when illness occurs?

EXAMINING OUR CONSCIENCE: The Virtues and the Vices

Pride - Humility

Do I humble myself? Have I bragged about myself and my achievements so as to make another look bad? Have I thought myself better than the next person or without sin?

Gluttony - Temperance

Is my lifestyle marked by self-control, or do I eat or drink too much? Do I seek entertainment or watch television to excess?

Greed - Generosity

Am I a good steward with what God has given me? Do I squander my money on appearance or possessions? Have I given alms to the poor? Am I generous in giving of my time, talents, gifts, and possessions?

Sloth - Diligence

Am I hard-working, or have I given in to laziness? Have I neglected my duties to God and His Church, to my family?

Envy - Contentment

Does another person's advantages or possessions cause me ill will and dissatisfaction? Do I desire what others have for the wrong reason?

Anger - Meekness

Do I lose my temper and become evil-tempered with those around me?

Am I forgiving or do I try to even-the-score?

Do I say "I'm sorry" and "I love you" to those I've hurt, especially within my family and the brethren?

Do I ask forgiveness from my parents, friends, enemies, and neighbors?

EXAMINING OUR CONSCIENCE: The Ten Commandments

You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me

Have I believed in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Have I failed to trust in God and in His mercy?

Have I complained against God?

Have I been thankful in all things?

You Shall Not Make Any Graven Image

Have I given to anyone or anything the worship that is due to God alone?

Have I set before myself the holy life of Jesus and tried to imitate Him?

Have I been irreverent during Church services, let my attention wander, or been insincere?

You Shall Not Take the Name of the Lord Your God in Vain

Have I ever spoken any Name of God lightly, or in a casual or frivolous manner?

Have I ever spoken to God as if He were at my beck and call, existing to do what I want or think I need?

Have I prayed to God irreverently, or without appropriate fear?

Have I cursed anyone or anything, or sworn a false oath?

Have I failed to give proper reverence to holy persons and holy things?

Have I ever blamed God for evil?

Have I broken a promise?

Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it Holy

Have I strayed away from Church, or prevented others, from going?

If I couldn't go to Church because of illness, did I pray at home?

Honor Your Father and Mother

Have I respected my parents and been obedient to them?

Have I caused them pain by my words or actions?

Have I neglected or failed to help them?

Have I forgiven my parents for anything unloving they may have done?

Have I been rebellious or self-reliant?

You Shall Not Kill

Have I caused the injury of death of any one, or wished that any one, including myself, were dead?

Have I given way to anger, or harmed others with words or actions?

Have I defamed others who needed help, or failed to stand up for those unjustly treated?

Have I been cruel to anyone?

Do I hate anyone?

Have I mistreated animals or destroyed any life unnecessarily?

Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against them?

You Shall Not Commit Adultery

Have I read immoral books or magazines, or delighted in obscenity?

Have I associated with bad companions or frequented unsavory places?

Have I led others to commit sinful acts?

You Shall Not Steal

Have I stolen anything or wished to do so?

Have I kept anything that did not belong to me?

Have I tried honestly to find owners of lost articles I have found?

Have I cheated anyone?

Do I respect other people's property?

You Shall Not Bear False Witness

Have I told lies, or added to or subtracted from the truth?

Have I spoken carelessly, or spoken evil of anyone?

Have I told any secrets entrusted to me, or betrayed anyone?

Have I gossiped about anyone or harmed their reputation?

Have I slandered anyone by spreading negative things about him or her, whether true or not?

Have I concealed the truth, or assisted in carrying out a lie?

Have I ever told a "little white lie," or framed my words so as to deceive?

You Shall Not Covet

Have I envied anything good that has come to others?

Have I been jealous of another's good fortune? Have I wished for anything that was another's?

Have I damaged or destroyed the property of others?

Have I wished for things God has not given me, or been discontented with my lot in life?

Have I complained, murmured, or grumbled about the life God has given me?

Have I been ungrateful?

Have I been stingy?

Have I held back anything due another?

Have I hoped for the downfall of anyone?

Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone?

Have I expected God to give me what I would refuse one of my fellow men?