

Preparation for Confession

St. Maximus Orthodox Church, Denton, Texas

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Preparation for the Holy Mystery of Confession

A Canon of Repentance

Composed by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

O Lord my God, save Thou the soul of Thy servant that hath been washed in Thy Blood, and open unto *him* the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit. (John 1:18; I John 4:12-13)

The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is man, and who can know him? (Jeremiah 17:9)

From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch let Israel hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption; and He shall redeem Israel out of all his iniquities. (Psalm 129:5-6)

O God, be merciful to me, a sinner. (*3 times with prostrations*)

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of life: Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto 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 debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Amen.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for laying aside all excuse, we sinners offer unto Thee, as to our Master, this supplication: have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, have mercy on us, for in Thee have we put our hope. Do not be angry with us, nor remember our iniquities, but look down upon us even now, since Thou art compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies; for Thou art our God and we are Thy people; we are all the work of Thy hands, and we call on Thy Name.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Blessed Theotokos, open the doors of compassion to us whose hope is in thee, that we may not perish, but be delivered from adversity through thee, who art the salvation of the Christian people.

Lord, have mercy. (12)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Come, let us worship God our King

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God.

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ Himself, our King and our God.

Psalm 50

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of thy compassions, blot out my transgressions. Wash me yet more from my transgressions, and from my sin purify thou me. Against thee alone have I sinned, and have done evil before thee; that thou mightest be justified in thy words, and conquer when thou art judged. Behold, in transgressions was I conceived, and in sin did my mother bear me. Behold, thou hast loved truth, the hidden and

secret things of thy wisdom hast thou revealed unto me. Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop and I shall be cleansed; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Thou shalt make me hear joy and gladness; the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice. Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out my transgressions. A clean heart create in me, O God, and a right spirit renew in my inmost parts. Cast me not away from thy face, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Give me again the joy of thy salvation, and establish me with a princely spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and the impious shall return unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; my tongue shall rejoice in thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips and my mouth shall declare thy praise. For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would have given it; with burnt-offerings thou wilt not be pleased. A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God will not despise. Do good, O Lord, in thy goodwill unto Zion; and let the walls of Jerusalem be built. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifice of righteousness, oblations, and burnt-offerings; then shall they lay bullocks upon thine altar.

The Canon of Repentance, tone 6

Ode 1

Irmos: When Israel passed on foot over the sea as if it were dry land, and beheld their pursuer Pharaoh drowning in the sea, they cried aloud unto God: Let us sing a song of victory!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment. But trusting in Thy lovingkindness, like David I cry to Thee: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of life, for my spirit riseth earth to pray towards Thy holy temple, bearing the temple of my body all-defiled. But in Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord Almighty, I know how much tears can accomplish: they led Hezekiah forth from the gates of death, delivered the sinful woman from long-standing iniquities, and justified the publican beyond the pharisee; and, numbered with them, I pray: have mercy on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Theotokos, for I have profaned my soul with shameful sins and have wasted my life in laziness. But by thine intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

Ode 3

Irmos: None is holy as Thou, O Lord my God! Thou hast raised the strength of Thy faithful, O Good One, and made us stand firmly on the rock of Thy confession.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Like the prodigal son do I also approach Thee, O Compassionate One, having squandered all my life; in departing I have wasted the riches that Thou didst bestow upon me, O Father. Accept me that repent, O God, and have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Stretching forth Thy fatherly arms, receive me now, O Lord, as Thou didst receive the prodigal, O Compassionate One, that I may thankfully glorify Thee.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Glory to Thee who hast not thus far destroyed me!
Glory to Thee who art patient with mine iniquities!
Accept me who turn away from Thee, O compassionate Father, Only-begotten Son, Holy Spirit, my Creator and Lord, and have mercy on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Having shown forth all thy beneficence upon me, O God, through the divine entreaties of Thy Mother disregard the multitude of my transgressions, in that Thou art my Benefactor.

Ode 4

Irmos: “Christ is my strength, my God and my Lord,” — the sacred Church reverently singeth with a mighty voice, rejoicing in the Lord.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Woe is me! What shall become of me? What shall I do? Committing sin—fool that I am!—I have not feared the Master; wherefore, even before the judgment, I am condemned. O good and just Judge, turning unto me, save me who have angered Thee more than all men.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned before Thee. Cleanse Thou me! For there is none among men that sin whom I have not surpassed in iniquity.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lover of man, who desirest that all be saved, raise me up and receive me who repent, for Thou art good.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, O Lord, whom all fear, trembling before the countenance of Thy might, before Thee do I fall prostrate, O Immortal One; Thee do I implore, O Holy One: Save Thou my soul, through the intercessions of Thy saints and of the Theotokos.

Ode 5

Irmos: I pray Thee, O Good One: Enlighten with Thy Divine Light the souls which look to Thee from early dawn, that they may know Thee, O Word of God, as the True God who calleth them out from the darkness of sin.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Cast into the deep abyss of pleasures, I call upon the depths of Thy compassion, O Helmsman: Save me!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Wellspring of compassion, do Thou now grant me compunction and sighing, that I may lament the boundless sea of my evil deeds.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

The span of my life is short and full of pain and evil; yet accept me in repentance, and call me to my senses. That I may be neither the spoils nor the sustenance of him that is alien, O Savior, do Thou Thyself take pity on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Thou art our weapon and a wall of defense, O Virgin Theotokos; thou art a help unto them that call upon thee. And now in prayer do I move thee, that I may be delivered from mine enemies.

Ode 6

Irmos: Beholding the sea of life surging with the storm of temptations, and taking refuge in Thy calm haven, I cry unto Thee: Raise up my life from corruption, O greatly merciful One.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Taking pity, save me, O Son of God. Have mercy, Thou who didst heal the possessed by a word. Speak unto me with the voice of compassion, as Thou didst to the thief: “Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise, when I come in My Kingdom.”

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Ask not of me worthy fruits of repentance, for my strength hath failed within me. Grant me a contrite heart and poverty of spirit, that I may offer these to Thee as an acceptable sacrifice, O Thou who alone art our Savior.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lover of man, I have not the boldness to lift mine eyes and gaze unto the measureless heights, having sinned against heaven; nor can I call myself Thy prodigal son; yet take pity on me freely, O Thou who hast boundless mercy.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Virgin Mary, at the hour of judgment, do thou entreat the Judge whom thou didst bear, that He have compassion, O Pure One, and save the condemned, O thou who alone art intercessor for man.

Ode 7

Irmos: The angel made the furnace a source of dew for the pious youths, and the will of God, which burned the Chaldeans, made the persecutor call out: Blessed art Thou, O God of our fathers!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I dare not lift mine eyes to heaven, wretch that I am, because of mine evil deeds; but like the publican, sighing I cry out to Thee: Cleanse me, a sinner, and deliver me from the hypocrisy of the pharisee, O God of our Fathers, who alone art compassionate.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Thieves have fallen upon my soul and left it wounded by my transgressions, barely alive; but heal me, O God of our Fathers.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Perceiving the barrenness of my much-suffering soul, yet do Thou forbear, O Christ, and cut me not down like the cursed fig tree, O God of our Fathers.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O all-pure Theotokos, grant me aid by thine intercessions, repelling the attacks of grievous misfortunes.

Ode 8

Irmos: Thou didst cause dew to pour from the flames over the pious youths, and didst burn the sacrifice of a righteous man with water – for Thou doest all things, O Christ, by Thy will alone. We exalt Thee throughout all ages.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Having rolled away the stone of obstinance from my heart, O Lord, raise up my soul which has been slain by the passions, O Good One, and vouchsafe unto me in compunction to bring Thee palms, as to the Vanquisher of hell, O Master, that I may obtain eternal life, O Thou who alone lovest man, hymning Thy dominion and compassion unto all the ages.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I have enriched myself with unseemly thoughts, wretch that I am. I have defiled my soul with wicked pleasures and the darkness of despair. Shed upon me the radiance of repentance, O my God, that I may thankfully glorify Thee unto all the ages.

Let us bless the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord.

Wasting away with the disease of sin, I am laid low upon the bed of despair. Wherefore, do Thou visit me in Thy love for man, O Physician of the sick, and leave me not to sleep grievously unto death, O All-compassionate One, that I may cry out to Thee, O Bestower of mercy: O Lord, glory to Thee!

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O most holy Mother of God, Rampart of Christians, deliver thy servant who am wont to cry earnestly unto thee; oppose thou my vile and prideful thoughts, that I may cry to thee: Rejoice, O Ever-virgin!

Ode 9

Irmos: It is not possible for men to see God upon whom the ranks of angels dare not gaze, but through thee, O All-pure One, was the Word Incarnate revealed unto men, whom magnifying together with the Heavenly Hosts, we call thee blessed.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

To Thee do I flee, O Jesus, Son of God, who didst assume the guise of a servant for my sake, wretch that I am; have mercy on me through the intercession of Thy Bodiless Hosts.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Before Thee do I fall prostrate, O my Deliverer; through the entreaties of Thy Forerunner and of all Thy Prophets and Forebears, have mercy on me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

To Thee do I sigh, O Lover of man, Thou only Refuge and Hope of sinners, Savior of all; through the prayers of Thy Disciples who preached Thee, the Savior, to us, have mercy on me.

Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

In Thy goodness, being well-pleased to be born of the most-pure Virgin and to abide upon earth with men, O Word of God, do Thou have mercy upon me through her intercession and that of all the Saints who have ever been pleasing unto Thee.

We then proceed to examine our lives thoroughly in the light of the commandments of the Law and of Christ.

Having examined our lives, we then complete the prayers of preparation for the Holy Mystery of Confession.

Meet it is in truth to bless thee, O Theotokos, who art ever-blessed and all blameless and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, look upon and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto 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 debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Amen.

Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious without compare than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, verily, Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.



Self-Examination according to the Ten Commandments

First Commandment: *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*

- Have I believed in God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God in Three Persons?
- Have I acknowledged God as the Lord, the source of all good things, the Savior of my soul and body?
- Have I loved God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength?
- Have I constantly had the thought of God in my mind and the fear of God in my heart?
- Have I failed to trust in God and His mercy?
- Has my faith in God been shaken by skepticism or doubt?
- Have I complained against God in time of adversity?
- Have I been thankful for God's blessings? Have I given thanks to God at all times for all things, or have I complained or cursed when things did not go "my way"?
- Have I questioned or doubted the holy tenets of the Orthodox Faith?
- Have I asked God to strengthen my faith?
- Have I been prideful? trusted in my own strength and ability rather than in God? Have I asked God's blessing on all that I do?
- Have I done the right thing out of love of God or out of vainglory, so that others notice how good I am?
- Have I despaired of God's mercy or help?
- Have I prayed to God every day, morning and evening?
- Have I prayed with zeal?
- Have I always attended Divine Services whenever possible? Have I missed any of them without good reason?
- Have I tried to serve God, putting Him and His will first in my life and keeping His commandments?
- Have I preferred religious books over others? Have I, in fact, read them?

- Have I read atheistic or heretical books out of sinful curiosity?
- Have I attended the meetings of heretics and schismatics?
- Have I willingly brought my tithes and offerings into the Lord's House as part of my worship?
- Have I honored God with the first part of my income rather than the leftovers?
- Have I given alms to those in need when I had the opportunity?
- Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or persecution?
- Have I denied that I am a Christian?
- Have I denied any teaching of the Orthodox Church?
- Have I given way to superstition?
- Have I consulted astrologers, fortune-tellers, spiritualists, or read horoscopes?
- Have I put myself before God?
- Have I forgotten or neglected the most important thing in life, that is, preparing for eternity? How will I answer God if I have given myself up to vanity, sloth, pleasure, and carelessness?

The Second Commandment: *Thou shalt not make thee any graven image...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them...*

- Have I made an idol of any person or thing?
- Have I given to any one or to any thing the worship that is due to God alone?
- Have I put God first? Or have I given first place to: accumulation of money, acquisition of property, amusement or entertainment or sports, food and drink, clothes, self-adornment, attention to myself, eliciting praise from others, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, spending time in distractions, obsession with myself, or with other persons or things?

Have I been distracted from God by a passion for watching television or movies, surfing the internet, attending the theater, or playing games of one sort or another?

Have I been so anxious about myself, my family, or my friends that I have neglected God, failed to serve Him, and not carried out what is required of me by the Church?

Have I given too much attention to my home and its furnishings, its decoration and repair?

Have I paid too much attention to a car, truck, van, boat, or other vehicle of travel?

Have I been irreverent during Divine Services, let my attention wander, been insincere, been late, or gone in and out of services unnecessarily?

Have I neglected to receive Holy Communion regularly?

Have I received the Divine Gifts without due preparation?

Have I made an idol of myself?

Have I made an idol of some passion? love of money? gluttony? sexual desire? anger?

Have I allowed a passion to take possession of my heart?

Have I read the Holy Scriptures regularly?

Have I read books that would be spiritually nourishing?

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

Have I called on Him to help me?

Have I read the lives of the Saints and tried to imitate their virtues, especially those of my Patron Saint? Have I asked for their prayers and their strength?

The Third Commandment: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

Have I profaned the name of God in any way?

Have I been thoughtless or irreverent with the name of God?

Have I used the name of God in a curse?

Have I treated something holy as a joke, or joked about holy things?

Have I grumbled toward God or even renounced Him at any time?

Have I shown due respect to the clergy and the faithful, or have I hindered them in their work through gossip, slander, backbiting, or in any other way?

Have I shown respect for all other people, who are made in God's image?

Have I prayed absent-mindedly or inattentively?

Have I cursed anyone or anything?

Have I sworn a false oath?

Have I broken an oath or a promise?

Have I entered into any sinful or unlawful contract or made a sinful or unlawful promise?

Have I given in to despondency or despair?

The Fourth Commandment: *Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work...*

Have I failed to attend Divine Services on the Lord's Day or on a Great Feast without just cause?

Have I kept others from attending Divine Services?

Have I done unnecessary work on Sundays or on Great Feast days?

Have I violated the sanctity of the Lord's Day or Great Feasts by unwholesome or frivolous activities?

Have I distracted others from keeping these days in a godly way?

Did I pray at home if I was unable to attend Divine Services on the Lord's Day or a Great Feast?

Did I make every effort to worship "in spirit and in truth" while I was at a Divine Service?

Did I allow myself to be distracted by worldly concerns at a Divine Service? to judge others? to think unwholesome or frivolous things?

Did I make the effort to come to Divine Services on time?

Have I diligently kept the fasts of the Church?

Have I caused anyone else to violate the fasts or tempted anyone to do so?

Have I fasted properly in my heart, realizing a hunger for God and life in Him, rather than legalistically, just to fulfill the letter?

The Fifth Commandment: *Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

Have I been disrespectful to my parents or inattentive to their advice and concern for me? Have I been lacking in love for them? Have I withheld love from them?

Have I disobeyed my parents?

Have I neglected my parents or failed to help them?

Have I cared for my parents in their illnesses or old age?

Have I deceived my parents or caused them pain by my words or actions?

Have I prayed for my parents and other relatives?

Have I prayed for the repose of my parents and other relatives who are departed?

Have I done my duty toward my family?

Husbands: Have I laid down my life for my wife, and loved her as Christ loves His Church?

Wives: Have I been obedient and respectful to my husband?

Have I encouraged peace and mutual respect among the members of my family?

Have I been responsible toward my *wife/husband*, children, and others who depend on me for help, counsel, guidance, or support?

Have I been lacking in love for my *wife/husband* or harmed *her/him* in any way?

Have I set a good example for my children?

Have I tried to rear them in godliness and teach them the Faith?

Have I disciplined them with patience? or in anger?

Have I been overindulgent with my children?

Have I been stingy with any members of my family or with others?

Have I neglected my godparents or failed to honor them?

Have I neglected my godchildren or failed to instruct, guide, or encourage them in the Orthodox Faith?

Have I worked for my employer honestly and diligently?

Have I treated fairly and respectfully all who worked with me or who are under my supervision?

Have I respected and prayed for the civil authorities?

Have I honored those who are older than I?

Have I shown respect for all others?

Have I mocked or made fun of others?

Have I respected the clergy of the Church and prayed for them?

Have I criticized or mocked them? Have I been embittered against them, especially when they chastised or corrected me?

Have I honored God as my Father, the Church as my Mother, and other human beings as my fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters?

The Sixth Commandment: *Thou shalt not kill (murder).*

- Have I killed another person, or have I contributed to the death of another person?
- Have I had an abortion or given support and encouragement to someone else to have one?
- Have I wanted another person to die?
- Have I wanted any type of harm to come to another person or group of people?
- Have I tried to kill myself or thought seriously about doing it?
- Have I caused injury to another person?
- Have I caused injury to myself through smoking, overindulgence, drinking too much alcohol, taking drugs or too much medicine, or through evil and intemperate living?
- Have I given way to anger?
- Have I cursed anyone or hurt anyone with undue harsh words?
- Have I been cruel to anyone?
- Have I ignored someone who needed help or failed to defend someone who was being treated unjustly or cruelly?
- Have I failed to respond to those who are in need: to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the imprisoned, the homeless, the ill, the troubled, the afflicted, the depressed, or those with other needs that I could help?
- Have I harmed someone spiritually by leading him into temptation to commit spiritual death through heresy, schism, or by some other sin?
- Have I shown malice or hatred toward another person?
- Do I bear any malice or resentment or hatred in my heart toward anyone else?
- Have I prayed for my enemies and done good to them?
- Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against anyone?
- Have I mistreated animals or destroyed or harmed any living creature unnecessarily?

The Seventh Commandment: *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

- Have I committed the sins of adultery or fornication or had any sort of sexual contact with another person outside of marriage (the union of one man with one woman)?
- Have I committed the sin of masturbation?
- Have I done anything impure alone or with any other person(s)?
- Have I engaged in bestiality, transvestitism, sodomy, homosexual relations, or any other abnormal sexual practice?
- Have I degraded myself or another person in any way?
- Have I forgotten or ignored human dignity?
- Have I been immodest in dress or behavior or speech?
- Have I lived in an improper way with anyone else?
- Have I read or looked at immoral, suggestive, or pornographic books, magazines, pictures, movies tapes, dances, plays, or performances?
- Have I entertained impure thoughts or fantasies? Have I been unfaithful to my spouse through impure thoughts or fantasies?
- Have I looked at any person or thing in an impure way?
- Have I spoken or listened to impure or suggestive language, dirty jokes, or lewd songs (much of popular music)?
- Have I eaten or drunk too much? Have I tempted others to do so?
- Have I associated with bad companions?
- Have I been to unsavory places?
- Have I been lazy, idle, or wasteful of time?
- Have I tempted others or led them to commit sinful acts or to entertain sinful thoughts?
- Have I tempted others through my own immodesty or through suggestive language or actions?
- Have I been unfaithful to any trust given me?
- Have I betrayed the confidence of anyone else?
- Have I judged another person?

The Eighth Commandment: *Thou shalt not steal.*

Have I stolen anything or wished to do so?
Have I stolen by fraud, deception, or conspiracy?
Have I kept anything that did not belong to me?
Have I stolen by not rendering a service for which I was compensated?
Have I tried honestly to find the owner of lost articles I found, when it was reasonable to do so?
Have I cheated or defrauded anyone?
Have I accepted or purchased stolen goods?
Have I disposed improperly of another person's goods?
Have I paid my debts in a timely way?
Have I lived within my means? Have I run up credit card debt beyond what I can quickly pay off?
Have I lived extravagantly or wastefully?
Have I been selfish with what is entrusted to me?
Have I been miserly in soul?
Have I shared with others?
Have I been stingy?
Have I given to those in need?
Have I given God the first part of my income?
Have I robbed God by not bringing my tithes and offerings into His house?
Have I been honest and upright in my dealings with others?

The Ninth Commandment: *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

Have I slandered anyone?
Have I lied?
Have I added to or taken away from the truth?
Have I made careless statements or spoken evil of anyone?
Have I betrayed the confidence of another person?

Preparation for Confession

Have I criticized others?
Have I rejoiced in the failings or downfall of others?
Have I covered my brother's shame as Shem and Japheth covered their father Noah's nakedness?
Have I spread gossip or scandal?
Have I hurt the reputation of anyone else?
Have I concealed the truth or assisted in carrying out a lie?
Have I confessed to sins I have not committed?
Have I confessed all the sins I have committed?
Have I failed to come forward to defend another person when I knew he was being slandered or spoken against unjustly?
Have I tried to see the good in others?
Have I concentrated on the shortcomings of others?
Have I engaged in idle chatter?
Have I spoken unnecessarily?
Have I laughed or acted frivolously?
Have I made a real effort to be truthful at all times?

The Tenth Commandment: *Thou shalt not covet...*

Have I envied others, either their lives or their goods?
Have I desired anything that was another's?
Have I damaged or destroyed the possessions or property of others?
Have I desired things God has not given me?
Have I been discontent in my life?
Have I held back anything due to another because I wanted it myself or for any other reason?
Have I hoped for the downfall of another so that I might gain by it?
Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone?
Have I wanted from God what I refused to give to a fellow man: forgiveness? goods? grace? physical or spiritual blessings?
Have I been greedy?

Have I been jealous of another person's goods, money, appearance, success, love, popularity, being loved by another or others?

Have I concentrated my time, efforts, and thoughts on the things of this world rather than on the things of the spirit?

Preparation for Confession **An Examination of Conscience**

I, a sinful soul, confess to our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, all of my evil acts which I have done, said or thought from baptism even unto this present day.

First Torment: Idle speech

- * Have you spoken without thinking? or spoken too much? or spoken anything that is impure? or shameless? or without need or order? or unreasonable? or unclean?
- * Have you thought or said angry words or foul words?
- * Have you participated with or sung worldly shameless songs in word or thought?
- * Have you laughed unnecessarily or excessively? or laughed about things that you shouldn't have laughed about or found funny?
- * Have you acted too silly?

Second Torment: Lying

- * Have you kept the vows of your baptism?
- * Have you failed to keep oaths or promises to God?
- * Have pronounced the name of God without reverence?
- * Have you falsely confessed your sins? or was insincere about, belittled, justified, or kept silent about your sins during confession?
- * Have you lied?
- * Have you been sly or secretly mischievous? or have you been deceptive or hypocritical?

Preparation for Confession

- * Have you honestly obeyed traffic laws?
- * Have been argumentative or stubborn?

Third Torment: Spoke evil of others

- * Have you spread rumors or gossiped in thought or in word?
- * Have you slandered anyone wanting to or intending to injure the reputation of another?
- * Have you given bad ideas or words to people?
- * Have you laughed at other's deficiencies or misfortunes?
- * Have you maligned treated anyone with malice or shown hatred toward or abused or wronged or injured anyone?
- * Have you condemned anyone? or declared others unfit?
- * Have you made fun of people in thought, word, or action? or mocked in a harmful way?
- * Have you reproached anyone or reflected on anyone abusively?
- * Have you taunted, teased, or tempted anyone?
- * Have you insulted anyone?

Fourth Torment: Gluttony

- * Have you eaten before putting on the sign of the cross?
- * Have you eaten when you were not hungry?
- * Have you eaten too much at one time or became too full during the fasts?
- * Have you eaten without having thankfulness to God?
- * Have you eaten like a slob or out of control stuffing food in your mouth?
- * Have you consumed too many alcoholic beverages to the point of being drunk?
- * Have you respected the feasts and fasts as much as I should?
- * Have you broken the fasts?
- * Have you not looked forward to the fasts taking in mind the true meaning and purpose of them?
- * Have you eaten too many sweet foods for the enjoyment of them or had a love of sweets?

* Have you had gluttonous fantasies?

Fifth Torment: Sloth

* Have you taken efforts to remember and extensively learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers by reading spiritual things?

* Have you kept your physical and spiritual passions in check all the time? Or had a general carelessness about doing things having to do with the salvation of your soul?

* Have you devoted yourself to the comforts of life?

* Have you lacked endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows by not struggling against your passions as much as you should?

* Have you been idle? or not worked as hard as you could have? or fallen asleep at work? or not wanted to get out of bed?

* Have you complained about having to work or attend long services or say long prayers?

* Have you cared to praise and thank God as much as I could or should have throughout the day?

* Have you failed to keep in continual prayer trying always to keep your mind on serving God?

* Have you dwelled upon your previous sins?

* Have you fallen into despondency? Or given up hope or not having faith in God that He can and will change you?

* Have you forgotten to pray at certain times during the day?

* Have you rushed through or not said your morning and evening prayers whole-heartedly?

* Have you attended the services completely?

* Have you been fully prepared to go to Church to worship? or have you gone to Church only half-heartedly, lazily, and carelessly?

* Have you conversed during the services about things not having to do with the service?

* Have you paid complete attention during the services?

* Have you let your mind wander or daydream or think other ungodly thoughts during prayer or services?

Preparation for Confession

* Have you left the Church before the dismissal and blessing?

* Have you forced yourself to do good at all times?

* Have you had a weak will?

Sixth Torment: Stealing

* Have you stolen anything or thought seriously about stealing something?

Seventh Torment: Avarice and love of money

* Have you loved riches?

* Have you been content with what God gave you?

* Have you wished in your mind that you had more money than you do already?

* Have you acquired unnecessary things? or had an immoderate attachment to material things?

* Have you been too concerned or caught up with material things?

* Have you been too concerned with things having to do with the flesh?

* Have you bought things in exchange for proper tithing?

* Have you been greedy or selfish?

* Have you worried about money or financial circumstances instead of putting your trust in God?

* Have you had fantasies about material wealth or having riches?

Eighth Torment: Usury

* Have you gained riches by exploiting people?

* Have you accepted bribes?

* Have you acquired something that belonged to another?

Ninth Torment: Injustice

* Have you judged anyone?

- * Have you acquitted the guilty and condemned the innocent all for the sake of gain
- * Have you been unjust in anyway?
- * Have you accused an innocent person of committing an act that they did not do?

Tenth Torment: Envy

- * Have you envied anyone? or been jealous?

Eleventh Torment: Pride

- * Have you been prideful?
- * Have you thought myself better than anybody else?
- * Have you considered yourself worthy while considering others unworthy?
- * Have you had a high opinion of yourself in any way?
- * Have you talked down to anyone?
- * Have you compared or measured yourself up to anyone?
- * Have you looked out for other people's faults rather than your own?
- * Have you tried to conceal the shortcomings of others while trying to conceal your virtues?
- * Have you been critical of other people or criticized anyone?
- * Have you been arrogant, vain, or conceited?
- * Have you relied completely on yourself rather than God?
- * Have you bragged or boasted of things that you have accomplished? Have you loved praise and honors? Have you put on airs?
- * Have you been prideful of the good deeds that you have done?
- * Have you failed to give proper honor or obey your parents or superiors appointed by God? Have you been disobedient?
- * Have you thought yourself self-important?
- * Have you been self-willed instead of trying always to do the will of God?
- * Have you been self-righteous? Have you self-justified your sins?

- * Have you disregarded the counseling of your conscience?
- * Have you failed to confess any of your sins through negligence or false pride?
- * Have you been impatient or anxious about anything in which you shouldn't be that way about?
- * Have you been prejudice towards anyone for any reason?
- * Have you had prideful fantasies of power, fame, or glory?

Twelfth Torment: Anger and Ruthlessness

- * Have you felt anger?
- * Have you said anything unfeeling towards anyone? Have you harmed or hurt anyone's feelings in any way?
- * Have you carried on arguments with anyone about anything in your head?

Thirteenth Torment: Bearing grudges

- * Have you nurtured evil thoughts against anyone?
- * Have you returned evil for evil?
- * Have you remembered wrongs anyone did to you in the past?
- * Have you bore any grudges instead of understanding, loving, and forgiving?
- * Have you kept in mind when anyone made offences towards you?
- * Have you imagined ways you could have revenge on anyone?

Fourteenth Torment: Murder

- * Have you wounded anyone in some way?
- * Have you had any violent or destructive thoughts?
- * Have you had any harmful thoughts aimed towards anyone?
- * Have you wished evil upon anyone?
- * Have you been angry with people without a just cause?

Fifteenth Torment: Magic, sorcery, poisoning, and incantations

- * Have you thought about your past interest in magic and things relating to magic?
- * Have you imaged Holy things having some sort of magical properties?

Sixteenth Torment: Fornication

- * Have you had any sensual or lustful thoughts? carnal thoughts?
- * Have you daydreamed about amorous and lustful things and found them sweet?
- * Have you made impure glances?
- * Have you touched yourself in a lustful or passionate way that was pleasing or arousing?
- * Have you had blasphemously lustful thoughts about saints and holy people?
- * Have you been unchaste in thought, word, or deed?
- * Have you waken up from lustful bad dreams and found them pleasing to think about?
- * Have you had fantasies of lust or fornication?

Seventeenth Torment: Adultery

- * Have you had any adulterous thoughts with married people?

Eighteenth Torment: Sodomitic sins

- * Have you sinned against your nature?

Nineteenth Torment: Heresies

- * Have you participated in Holy Communion having as much humility or the fear of God as you should?
- * Have you loved and feared the Lord always?
- * Have you turned away from the Orthodox confession of faith by apostatizing and agreeing with false doctrines or beliefs?
- * Have you lacked faith?
- * Have you doubted or had misconceptions about the faith?

- * Have denied holy things or had a negative attitude towards them?
- * Have you been grateful for all of God's great and unceasing gifts, His mercy, His long-suffering, and His providence?
- * Have you fulfilled the Holy Commandments of God, the canons, and the rules of the Church?
- * Have you blasphemed or swore in thought or word?
- * Have you thought curse words when you pray?
- * Have you turned words of prayer into profane words or filthy concepts?
- * Have you feared man instead of God?
- * Have you been too attached to parents, relatives, and friends?
- * Have you answered the telephone during prayer?

Twentieth Torment: Lack of compassion and cruelty of the heart

- * Have you lacked mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and love for anyone?
- * Have you felt hatred toward anyone? or any other manifestation of hatred?
- * Have you been unfriendly to anyone? or been cruel?
- * Have you ridiculed anyone?
- * Have you rejoiced at the misfortunes of other's?
- * Have you had abusive or violent thoughts?
- * Have you been polite and friendly while driving on the roads and highways?

I have sinned in deed, word, and thought, voluntarily and involuntarily, knowingly and unknowingly, in knowledge and in ignorance, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, by day and by night, and it is impossible to enumerate all of my sins because of their multitude. But I truly repent of these and all others not mentioned by me because of my forgetfulness and I ask that they be forgiven through the abundance of the mercy of God.

What Is Necessary for a Saving Confession?

by St. Innocent, Enlightener of the Aleuts

What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance. But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect—what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Isn't that so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us. To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins which have stolen into your heart. To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession. But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of? When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance, 1) before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return. Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: As I live, saith the Lord, i.e., I assure and swear by My life. In desiring I do not desire, i.e., I do not at all desire the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion.

2) It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? and who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him. And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him—the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really accept-able?—a broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations!

3) It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive. And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great—truly great, both before God and before man,—Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but to do nothing, it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses. On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned,—if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain, for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you, in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say,

"Forgive me." Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

4) It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, "For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?" Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

5) Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins—then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, "I forgive and absolve," the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!

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Making a Good Confession

St. Theophan the Recluse

Repentance is a simple matter—just sigh and a few words, “I have sinned, and shall not sin again.” But this sigh must have passed through the heavens in order to become an intercession at the throne of Truth, and these words must erase from the book of life all the marks representing our sins. Where can they obtain such power? From pitiless self-judgment and in fervent contrition. This is the path of our repentance: make your heart softer and more humble, and then, at Confession, do not be ashamed to reveal all that shames you in the eyes of the Lord and of the people.

In the matter of preparing for Communion, the greatest difficulty for us is to go to Confession and to reveal ourselves to our spiritual father. Actually, this should be a most gratifying experience. Is it not a comfort for him who is covered with wounds to be healed? For him who is covered with soil to be cleansed? Or for him who is chained to regain his freedom? This is precisely the spiritual power of absolution at Confession. We come with our injuries and leave healed; we come unclean and leave cleansed; we come in bonds and leave free. That is the promise of the Lord: first tell of your transgressions and then you will be forgiven.

Undoubtedly you will be forgiven, but first you must confess your transgressions without concealment. Know that only an open wound can be treated, only exposed dirt can be cleansed, only those bonds that are shown can be untied. Beware, lest you leave unhealed, uncleaned, and enslaved.

The action comes from the Lord. The spiritual father speaks and acts for Him. The Lord knows your sin, and even in your thoughts you cannot conceal it from Him, but the Lord wants to know whether you are prepared to confess your sins in His presence, if He Himself were standing before you, or whether you would try to conceal them like your forebears, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. That is why He appears to you in the person of your spiritual father to whom you confess and who in His name gives

you absolution, which by the very fact of having been uttered by weak mortals on earth, becomes impressed in heaven by the Lord’s power. Your spiritual father also represents all mankind. He who is ashamed to reveal himself should banish this shame with the thought that here, in front of his spiritual father, the shame that he feels is lesser than that to come. This shame can bring salvation instead of joylessness and hopelessness. There will come the day when all our bad deeds will be revealed to all mankind, and then the shame we will feel will be such that we should rather be buried under mountains than experience it. Therefore the Lord instituted this experiencing of shame before a single person, so you may be spared experiencing it before all mankind.

But there is one great evil in our hearts—at times we are quite ready to reveal all our sins but the main one, the one that shames us the most. Most often this is a carnal sin, but there are others that can be in this category. He who is burdened with such a weakness is ready to perform any good deed just to leave this sin hidden, but the Lord has a rule: give Me no alms if you are unchaste; don’t fast if you are suffering from greed; don’t offer prayers if you are filled with vanity. Open up your wound, so you may be healed and imbued with goodness. Be inspired to overcome within yourselves precisely that which resists the most.



A Catechism on Confession: How To Make a Good Confession

When preparing to go to confession, every Orthodox Christian should try to remember all the sins that he has committed, whether voluntary or involuntary, and should examine his life in detail. If there are sins that were committed before his last confession, but which he then forgot to confess, he should mention these also.

When you come to confession, you should confess your sins sincerely, remembering that you are not confessing them to the priest, but to God Himself, Who already knows, but wants you to admit your wrongs and your guilt. You should not feel embarrassed before your spiritual father, because, being a man like yourself, he knows human weaknesses and the inclination that all people have towards sin, and thus he cannot judge you harshly when you come to confession. But maybe you are embarrassed to confess your sins before your spiritual father because you are afraid of losing his good opinion? On the contrary, if you value his good opinion, you should understand that he will respect you all the more for the sincerity of your confession. Also, if you are ashamed and afraid to lay bare your sins before your spiritual father, how will you bear it when at the Dread Judgment your sins—if you have not been freed of them by true repentance—will be revealed before God Himself, His angels, and all mankind, both people you know and strangers? If you remember this, you will want to free yourself from your sins and from the punishment that they bring upon you, and will confess them in all sincerity before your spiritual father. You should hide nothing wrong that you have done, but at the same time you should not add anything extra, and not blame yourself for what you have not done by simply saying, “Everything I have done is sinful,” or some such catch-phrase. Nor should you admit every sin you are asked about whether you have done it or not, as some people mistakenly think they should. Your confession must be realistic and therefore true.

Another reason why you should not simply say, “I have sinned in everything, word, deed, and thought, and by omission,” without giving further details, is because your spiritual father needs to know exactly what you have done in order to give you good advice. Also such a short, undetailed confession means that you are avoiding what confession is intended to achieve, i. e. to bring you to admit what you have done and to admit that you were wrong in doing it. Your spiritual father already knows that you are a sinner, for no man is without sin; even the holy Apostle Paul described himself as the “chief of sinners.” Each sin must be mentioned in turn, just as you would enumerate all your symptoms to a doctor. You should not just think of a couple of main trends to “discuss,” and neglect to mention the innumerable other sins.

Do not mention the sins of others in your confession, unless this is necessary for your spiritual father to understand how and why you yourself have sinned. If you have a personal problem involving other people, which you would like to discuss with your spiritual father, or if you are in need of advice or some consolation for some unkindness that has been done to you, make an appointment to see your spiritual father at some other time. Also, do not use the fact that many people commit some sin that you have committed as an excuse for it. Still less say “but everyone does that.” For one thing, you have come to confess your own sins, not those of others. How can you be sure that without exception every human being commits any given sin? Or even though you might know of their sin, how can you be sure they have not repented of it in their heart? Pay no heed to the sins of others. Oftentimes we imagine the motives and intentions and sinful inclinations of others, for no man knows the heart of another.

Confess your sins fully but concisely; one does not have to make a story of them! That in itself can be an evidence of pride. Particularly regarding carnal sins, do not go into detailed descriptions of sin. If your spiritual father feels that you need to confess any particular sin in fuller detail, he will ask you about it, and then you should not hesitate to describe it fully and to answer all his questions.

Before going to confession make a thorough preparation, and examine your life so that you recognize your sins. If you wish you can write out a list, or keep a list day by day. In order to check your sins, it is wise to check them against some list. One can use the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or the list of sins in the prayer of daily confession of sins read before going to sleep each day, or that in the prayer at the end of the Canon to the Guardian Angel in the Prayer Book. Such checking against a list is very beneficial, otherwise one tends to remember only the most serious sins, or the most noticeable or most extraordinarily, and to forget, perhaps deliberately, the underlying ones, the ones that have become habitual, and the things that we have forgotten even to remember as sins because they have become so much a part of our life. Sins of neglect, omission, and laziness often fall into this category, as do the ones that are seemingly respectable: pride, vanity, etc.

Do not try to make excuses for your sins, for the more that you justify yourself, the less forgiveness you will receive. It is important that you yourself should fully realize how wrong each sin you have committed is—and the more you understand the wrongfulness of any sin, the easier it will be for you to make an effort of will to avoid committing it in the future. However, you may mention if there is any special circumstance, such as some particular temptation or outside pressure, that it would be useful for your spiritual father to know, so that he can advise you how to deal with it.

It is important not to overlook any sin, but to mention all the sins that you have committed.

If you are asked whether you have committed a particular sin, it is not good enough to reply, “I can’t remember.” This is, of course, much less likely to happen if you go to confession regularly. It is good at the end of your confession to admit that there may be other sins which you have forgotten or have not realized that you have committed—such a sin might be by a careless word or action which has upset someone and perhaps caused them to sin.

Unless your spiritual father asks you about them, do not mention sins that you have not committed, nor good deeds that you have done. If you are asked whether you have committed some sin and have not, simply say “No.” Do not say, “I have committed no serious sins,” because this means that you do not realize how sinful what you have done is, and how sinful your insensitivity is.

Also do not be insensitive to the feelings and weaknesses of others, including your spiritual father. If you have not confessed for some time, or have some particular difficulty and are likely to need a long confession, try not to come on the eve of a great feast or when there will be many other people going to confession, but come on a day when there are likely to be few, or make a special arrangement with the priest. Also, unless it is otherwise completely impossible (because, for instance, you live far from the church), do not come for confession either immediately before the Divine Liturgy (when the priest will be preparing the gifts) or during the service, when you will cause the entire congregation to wait while your confession is heard.

If after your confession you are hoping to receive a blessing to partake of the Holy Mysteries, it is best to come for the confession after the evening service on the previous night.

You must be truly sorry for the sins you have committed. Unless you really regret having done them, and intend to try to avoid them in the future, you lack true penitence, without which your sins are not forgiven.

It is also necessary to confess with faith in Jesus Christ and to trust in His mercy. Only if we believe and trust in Jesus Christ can we receive remission of our sins. Judas Iscariot, for example, repented of his sin, not before one man, but before all, and he returned the pieces of silver. But instead of believing in Jesus Christ and trusting in His mercy, he fell into despair and, receiving no remission, he died a terrible death. Thus, in addition to careful confession and true repentance, faith and hope are essential for the salvation of a sinner.

Penances (Epitemia) — Their Nature and Purpose

Penance is a form of discipline or a prohibition administered by the priest (in accordance with the canons or laws of the Church) to those repentant Christians for whom it is necessary, much as a doctor prescribes a suitable medicine or treatment. It is a form of treatment for a moral sickness. Examples of penances are: fasting over and above what is required of all Orthodox Christians, special prayers of repentance with prostrations, reading books which will help in overcoming one's weakness, and the performance of good works.

Penances are not given to all who come to confession, but only to those who, by the nature or seriousness of their sins, require this special medicine. An example of this is St. Paul's excommunication of a Christian of the Church of Corinth for incest; then, because of his penitence, he received him back into the Church (11 Cor. 2:6-8).

Although penance would seem to be a punishment, its purpose is not to make retribution for sins, to pay back a debt, but is rather corrective, medicinal, and instructive—to cure the sinner from his sinful habits, to instruct him regarding both the harmful nature of what he has been doing, and ways to change his life, so that he shall not repeat his sin. Penance is intended to deepen and increase the penitent's regret for what he has done, and to strengthen the desire of his will for correction. The Apostle says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (II Cor. 7:10). This is upheld by the canons of the Ecumenical Councils and the teaching of the Fathers, who describe penance as a means of spiritual treatment to cure the diseases of the soul. The 102nd canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council says: "The character of a sin must be considered from all points and conversion expected. And so let mercy be meted out."

Moral Guidance or "The Opening of One's Thoughts"

It is necessary to distinguish between the mystery of confession itself, and the moral guidance of a spiritual father in "the opening of thoughts" which is still used, especially in some monastic communities, but is something quite different from confession. The telling of one's thoughts and actions before a spiritual elder, from whom one seeks moral guidance, has a vast psychological significance. It is very useful for moral training, the correction of bad inclinations and habits, and the overcoming of doubts and indecisiveness. In some monasteries this is practiced daily, but it is not a course to be entered upon lightly. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov says, "An indispensable condition of such submission is a Spirit-bearing guide, who by the will of the Spirit can mortify the fallen will of the person subject to him in the Lord, and can mortify all the passions as well." And he issues dire warnings about heeding "Elders" falsely so-called. Nonetheless, some writers (notably Prof. Andreyev) suggest that some form of "opening of the thoughts" can form part of Christian family life, so that husband and wife open their thoughts to each other each day. Of course such a practice is far removed from the spiritual discipline of Eldership of which Bishop Ignatius writes. Either way, this type of spiritual guidance, although very beneficial when rightly ordered, does not have the significance of a mystery or grace-bearing Church rite like confession, which is why confession itself, the sacrament of penitence, can take place only before a priest.

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A Prayer before Confession

St. Symeon the New Theologian

O God and Lord of all! Who hath the power over every breath and soul, the only One able to heal me, hearken unto the prayer of me, the wretched one, and, having put him to death, destroy the serpent nestling within me by the descent of the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit. And vouchsafe me, poor and naked of all virtue, to fall with tears at the feet of my spiritual father, and call his holy soul to mercy, to have mercy on me. And grant, O Lord, unto my heart humility and good thoughts, becoming a sinner, who hath consented to repent unto Thee, and do not abandon unto the end the one soul, which hath united itself unto Thee and hath confessed Thee, and instead of all the world hath chosen Thee and hath preferred Thee. For Thou knowest, O Lord, that I want to save myself, and that my evil habit is an obstacle. But all things are possible unto Thee, O Master, which are impossible for man. Amen.

Prayer After Confession

O Lord of mercy! Through Thy gracious goodness, my conscience is now unburdened of sins which oppressed me, and in the humblest manner of which I am capable, I revealed to Thy priest all my sins that I could recollect. I humbly beseech Thee: accept this confession and forgive me all my trespasses, those which I have forgotten, as well as those I have remembered. Grant me grace, Lord, to live more carefully hereafter and to refrain from my former vices, which I utterly detest. I firmly resolve never to be guilty of them, but especially my most bountiful and merciful Savior, enable me to withstand those temptations with which I am most troubled, and to avoid all occasions for offending Thee again. If a just man falls seven times in the day, how much more reason have I to fear for myself, O Lord, and dread that I shall not be steadfast in my resolution, having through my own frailty and vicious habits increased the natural blindness and weakness in which I was born.

Yet, O Lord, I firmly resolve through Thy merciful assistance, never to consent to any mortal sin, from which I humbly beseech Thee to preserve me while I live; as to my other sins and imperfections, I resolve to stand up against hem and hope, through Thy goodness, at length to avoid them. Amen.