



THE SACRAMENT

OF CONFESSION

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”(1 John 1:9)

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1. What is Confession?

Confession is one of the sacraments of the Orthodox Christian Church. It helps to think of Confession as the Sacrament of Reconciliation, because we are reconciled to God through His forgiveness and by our change of heart, and by our turning away from self-love and turning toward the love of God and our neighbor. This sacrament is a face-to-face, person-to-person meeting with our Lord, who wants to reunite us with Himself and with the people of God. Through Confession God bestows forgiveness of sins on us, when we confesses our sins and sincerely repent of them.

In every sacrament there is an act of offering. In the Eucharist, we offer bread and wine; in Baptism, in Chrismation, and at ordinations, we offer ourselves; in marriage, we offer the relationship between two people; and in the anointing of the infirm, we offer our human sickness and suffering. In the Sacrament of Confession, we offer our own sinfulness.

2. How do we know what sins to offer up to God in Confession?

When we stand before the icon of the Cross of Christ and the Gospel Book with the priest beside us, what should we say? What sins we must confess? What sins must we offer? More importantly, how do we discover what to say and what sins to offer?

To understand more clearly what sin is, we must look at the word that the New Testament uses for sin: **hamartia**. This Greek word means, "missing the mark." Sin is, therefore, being off target, moving in the wrong direction, heading for the wrong goal. And what is our goal?

St. Paul writes that we are to attain to "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). This means that the measuring stick we use when confessing our sins is not how well or how poorly we are keeping rules we have been taught. Nor is our measuring stick how better or worse we are compared to others. *Our measuring stick is none other than the person of Jesus Christ.*

Many of us approach the Sacrament of Confession by presenting a "shopping list" of ways that we have broken God's commandments. However, by using this approach, we can remain shallow and

insufficiently drawn back to God. Our Confession may become coldly mechanical and leave us unaware of our sinfulness: after all, we reason, we haven't killed anyone or stolen money from any banks; we're not so bad!

Jesus addressed such a mechanical approach when He gave us the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee (Luke 18:9–14). In this story, Jesus lets us know that the Pharisee kept God's commandments, and even did more. He told God, "I am glad that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector." Yet, Jesus said that the Pharisee went away not right with God.

Additionally, St. Paul reminds us that "no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin" (Roman 3:20).

So, we must approach Confession in a way other than comparing ourselves to others or by justifying ourselves how well we have observed the Ten Commandments, as the Pharisee did. Instead, we must see ourselves — our deeds, actions, inactions, words, silence, thoughts, and pursuits — in light of the life of Jesus Christ.

3. What is spiritual disease?

Humans are creatures made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, being human is not an excuse for weakness: for example, when we say, "I am only human." Rather, being human is a call to greatness, to a high calling. Sin is the failure to live up to that high calling. St. Paul wrote that all of us "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). When we sin, we fail to be truly human as God wishes and as He has created us to be. To sin is *abnormal*. Sinfulness is an illness that distorts the image of God in us.

Moreover, specific sins that trouble us may be symptoms of deeper, underlying sins that the Fathers of the Church call "passions." For example, we may confess losing our temper, but the **root** of this sin may be jealousy or pride. It is important for us to "scratch the surface" of our apparent sins, in order to understand their source.

Finally, it is important to mention two broad types of sins — sins of commission and sins of omission. A sin of *commission* involves doing, saying, thinking, or feeling something that is contrary to our high calling. A sin of *omission* occurs when we fail to do to, say, or think in a proper way. At times, the sins of omission may

be the hardest kind to recognize and to repent of.

4. How can I become more aware of my sins?

A sincere Confession begins long before we leave for the church to seek Confession. In Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son, when the young man finally comes to his senses, he says, "I will set out and go back to my father and say to Him: 'Father, I have sinned before heaven and against you. I am not longer worthy to be called your son...'" (Luke 15:18-19). Before the son takes one step on the journey back to his father, he rehearses what he will say. In other words, he *prepares*. We must do the same. An effective Confession depends on good preparation.

How do we prepare for Confession?

First, we must set aside some time to prepare. This period must be a time when we are free from distractions and interruptions. Preparation should take place where we will not be disturbed. We can go to our room and close the door. We can sit before our icon corner in our bedroom or office.

We begin simply by placing ourselves in God's presence. We say to Him, "Here I am, Lord." At

the outset, this may be difficult for us because we can become easily distracted, and our attention span has grown increasingly limited. But we must cultivate this time of quiet and silence. Without it, we will never be able to recognize our sins, or hear God's prompting in our heart.

As an illustration, an early ascetical father of the Church tells of a desert monk who poured some water into a bowl and said to his novices, "Look at the water." They looked, and it was disturbed. After a little while he said to them, "Look how still the water is now." And as they looked into the now calm water, they saw their own faces reflected in it, as if in a mirror. Then he said to them, "It is the same for us who live among men; disturbances prevent us from seeing our faults. But when a man is still, then he sees his failings."

Second, we cannot know our sins unless we draw near to Jesus Himself. We cannot truly come to know ourselves without God. Repentance cannot be attained on our own efforts. When we use our own efforts we are more apt to compare ourselves to others or to see only their sins. Remember, Jesus is our measuring rod. Let me offer another helpful illustration.

An abbot of a monastery said once, "The sinfulness of men is hidden behind their backs. It seems that many of us carry two bags: one in front of us where we keep the sins of others, and one just over our shoulders where we throw our own sins so as not to see them. The Christian is called to reverse the bags.... i.e. to place his own sins in the bag immediately before him and the sins of others in the bag that is on his back."

Another abbot of a monastery once said that the nearer a man approaches God, the greater sinner he sees himself to be.

So, preparing for Confession presumes an ongoing relationship with God. If we do not have an ongoing love-relationship with Jesus, we will be tempted to think that there is nothing to restore or reconcile. If a love relationship does exist, then the Holy Spirit will make it clear to us how our relationship has been broken or damaged by sin.

In this relationship that we call "prayer," we must ask God to show us what He finds displeasing in us, what He wants us to repent of. One way in which this happens is that we discover our sins not by seeing how evil we are, but by seeing how good God is. And by reflecting on God's goodness, we are convicted. So, in prayer, we meet God as the God of forgiveness

and mercy, and then we see the sinfulness of our anger and judging of others; we find in Him the generous giver of all good things, and then we are convicted in our greed, jealousy, and material anxiety; we encounter the humble Lord, and then we see the foolishness of our pride and conceit; we are embraced by the God of love, and then we discover our selfishness and lust for what they truly are.

Third, we can prepare ourselves by reading. Reading helps us to "discern errors." For this reason, reading from the Bible is most important. Particularly helpful are passages such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and St. Paul's chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13). Other important passages include Romans 12, 13, 14; the 1st book of John; James 3; and Ephesians 4. By following a rule of daily Scripture readings, we will find other passages we can return to when preparing for Confession. In addition, passages such as Psalms 32, 38, and 50 (51) are very helpful because they are considered to be psalms of repentance. Readings are valuable because they convict us.

Fourth, we must actively take what we gather from silence, prayer, and reading and examine ourselves. To do this successfully we must have an attitude of self-blame or self-accusation. This

means refusing to make excuses for ourselves or comparing ourselves to others. It means playing the role of prosecutor instead of defense attorney.

In our actual preparation, silence, prayer, reading, and reflection will not necessarily follow one after another in sequence, but might be mixed in order. Our silence may lead to reading, our reading to prayer, or more silence, etc. What is important is that we include all these ingredients. Let me give some examples of how this might work.

We are silent before God, and, frankly, bored. We pray, but cannot pay attention to prayer. This can lead us to reflect on how little we truly love God, for we find His company so dull. Or, our silence and prayer is distracted by worry and anxiety about money. Then we read in the Gospel the command of Jesus not to worry about these things (Matthew 6:25–34). We can then reflect on our lack of trust in our heavenly Father.

All these means will help us to write down our reflections and bring our personal list to Confession, if we think we might forget our meditations.

Lastly, since all of the Christian life is a struggle with sin and temptation and is an on-going effort

of repentance, all of life helps to prepare us for Confession.

Very often, our relationships at home, at work, or at school disclose our sinfulness. Our “enemies” often reveal to us the rage that slumbers and lies dormant inside. In this way, we should see our “enemy” as having been sent to us by God to be our “friend” because the “enemy” discloses the dark tendencies that lurk below the surface.

As an illustration, Pambo, a 4th century desert father, once went into the city of Alexandria. He happened to see a prostitute and began to weep. Those who were with him asked why he wept: “Two things make we weep: one, the loss of this woman; and the other, that I am not as concerned to please God as she is to please wicked men.”

If we are alert and listening for God who speaks to us in a gentle whisper (I Kings 19:12–13), there will be many moments of our life that God will use to show us where we need to change.

5. What should I not say in Confession?

If we wish to make a good Confession, we should avoid saying any of these six things:

- "I HAVE NO SINS." In the New Testament, it is written, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...If we claimed we have not sinned we make God out to be liar and His word has no place in our lives." (1 John 1:8, 10). In addition, if we have no sins, why then is it necessary to partake of Holy Communion since it is provided to us for "the remission of sins"? And how can the priest "absolve" in Christ the sins of someone who "doesn't have any." If we are having trouble identifying our sins, then let us ask for help from the priest. This is a better way than to state that we have none!
- "I AM A SINNER." Certainly, we are all sinners, but we cannot stop there. Confession must be real and personal. Sins need to be identified, named for what they are, confessed, and hated.
- "I'VE GOT A PROBLEM." The priest is always available to spend time with those who need advice, help, or encouragement. Helping and providing an empathic ear is part of his ministry. But this is better done outside of Confession. Confession deals with sins. The problems we have may certainly have sins connected to them, and these should be confessed. We may need

to explain to the priest the context of our problems so he can understand where the sins come from. Thus, we should try to focus our Confession on the ways that our sins may have contributed to the problems.

- "I'VE GOT EXCUSES." Excuses can easily be obstructive in getting to the heart of our sins. We come to Confession to be forgiven, not to be excused. Try not to justify yourself. It is best to confess simply and honestly. God desires this more than anything.
- "CONFESSING OUR NEIGHBOR'S SINS." We come to Confession to confess our sins, not those of our neighbors, friends, or relatives. We may, however, need to confess our sinful reaction to our others' failings.
- "I TRY TO BE GOOD." It is assumed that everyone is trying to do better. The better response is: Where am I failing? When we ask this question, healing can begin. Further, it may be tempting to become cynical about Confession because it always seems to consist of "the same old sins." Let us not get discouraged. The Fathers of the Church teach us that there are some sins and passions that we will have to wrestle

with for most, if not all, of our lives. This doesn't mean that we should accept them.

Here is an illustration that might be of help. Metropolitan Antony Bloom, of blessed memory, tells a story about the Western saint, Philip Neri. "He was an irascible man who quarreled easily. He suffered from violent outbursts of anger and of course endured violent outbursts from his brothers. One day he felt that it could not go on, so he ran to the chapel, fell down before a statue of Christ and begged Him to free Him from his anger. The first person he met was one of the brothers who had never aroused the slightest anger in him, but for the first time in his life this brother was offensive and unpleasant to him. So Philip burst out with anger. Realizing what had taken place, Philip ran back to the chapel, cast himself before the statue of Christ and said, 'O Lord, have I not asked you to free me from this anger?' And the Lord answered, 'Yes, Philip, and for this reason I am multiplying the occasions for you to learn.' "

6. What is the role of the priest in Confession?

For many, the greatest obstacle to confessing well, if at all, is that we must confess "to" a priest. The first thing we must remember is that we do not confess to the priest; we confess to Christ. In the Orthodox service books the priest is instructed to say to the penitent: "Christ stands here invisibly and receives your Confession...I am only a witness..."

Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) writes, "The priest is simply God's usher, introducing the penitent into the divine presence. To pursue the medical analogy, he is only the receptionist in the waiting room. It is to Christ, not to the priest, that the Confession is made...and it is from Christ, not from the priest, that the forgiveness comes...."

7. What is absolution?

Absolution is the concluding proclamation by the priest, of repentance and forgiveness. It is the acknowledgment that repentance is truly present in the heart of the penitent. In praying the prayer of forgiveness, the priest recognizes (as best he can) the sorrow that the penitent experiences for his or her sins,

and the desire to overcome sin. A priest can, however, withhold absolution if: a) There is no repentance or desire to stop an obviously sinful activity or way of life; b) There is a failure to acknowledge a sin as being, in fact, sinful; and c) The person is not a believer, that is, if he or she does not truly accept the dogmatic or moral teachings of the Church.

We must remember that the refusal of absolution is not punishment. Even excommunication in the early church was pronounced with the hope of healing the sinner. The Church's purpose is to save, not to judge or condemn.

The priest may also *delay* absolution for a time of penance. This is done to help the penitent to realize the true and serious nature of the sin and to deepen his repentance.

The priest is also expected to give a word of exhortation. This can include a "diagnosis" in which the priest helps the penitent uncover the causes or the passions underlying the sins confessed; as well as a "prescription" of things the penitent should do to avoid the sin in the future.

8. What is repentance?

It is not enough just to identify our sins, nor simply to feel sorrow or to have regret because of them. Nor it is enough to confess them. We must take the next step by "repenting" of them. Repentance means to change our minds about them. It means to see the wrongness of our whole attitude and to take the steps (with God's help) to change our direction. A changed mind, a changed heart, and a changed direction can lead to a changed life. Then, we can begin to bear fruit that befits repentance. Our Lord taught, "A good tree brings forth good fruit."

Repentance may be prompted by a number of negative things — an awareness of one's sins or one's impoverishment, or the feeling that one cannot live up to the greatness of God's calling. But it is also prompted by a number of positive things — to look upward to God's love and forgiveness, and to see what by the grace of Christ we can yet become. "Repentance is not self-hatred," as Metropolitan Kallistos has written, "but the affirmation of my true self as made in God's image. It is a starting point for a new life in Christ."

9. How often should I go to the Sacrament of Confession?

Local practice states that a member in good standing must receive Confession and Communion at least once a year. It is a typical "bylaw" in most parishes. A sad fact, however, is that many Orthodox Christians will do only the bare minimum. Many adhere to this once-a-year duty because it is what is prescribed. Others follow it because they claim it is the old country practice, or it is what their parents did themselves and taught their children to do.

It is clear from studies of the history of the sacraments that the "once-a-year" practice actually is representative of decay in church life; it is a deviation from the Tradition of the Church. So, what should our practice be?

Confession, like Communion, should be regular and frequent. The words "regular" and "frequent," however, must be qualified. What is undeniable is that if we allow too much time to expire between Confessions, bad habits become ingrained in us, and we begin to view our sinful ways as normal and justifiable. It is much easier to pluck a weed from the ground when it is small than to

ignore it, only to find that it requires much more effort later to dig out!

So if our discipline so far has been to confess only once a year, then let us challenge ourselves to confess twice a year. If our discipline has been to confess twice a year, then let us challenge ourselves to attend Confession during the four fasting seasons of the Church.

Simply said, regularity and frequency should be growing from year to year as our life in Christ grows from year to year. If that happens, the rewards will be great in our spiritual life.

10. What procedure do I follow in Confession?

The penitent should approach the place of Confession and see the Cross of Christ and the Gospel Book lying on the table. The penitent should kiss these holy things to begin the Confession.

At this point the practice may vary. Some penitents commonly pray the Prayer Before Confession, which begins, "I, a sinner, confess...." Others may wait for the priest to

begin the prayer, "O God, our Savior...."
Either is acceptable.

Then, the penitent may begin to confess his or her sins. The priest may respond with some spiritual advice.

Some penitents may then end their Confession by reading the prayer, "For these and all my other sins, known..." and a Penance may be given. Others may allow the priest to begin the Prayer of Absolution immediately. Again, both forms are acceptable.

The penitent will again kiss the Gospel Book and the Cross before leaving, and ask for the blessing of the priest. He or she can then return to a pew for prayer and meditation.

11. Should I expect to struggle against sin?

In Confession, we must promise to use every method known to us to overcome our sins and correct our lives. Our only promise, however, is that we will try. We cannot guarantee any good results. And this, in fact, is all that God desires: a firm struggle to overcome. If we make this struggle with all our strength and courage, then God Himself

will give the victory, at a time when He alone sees fit to do so. Our sole task is to remain faithful in battle.

St. John Chrysostom wrote: "Let us learn then, and having reckoned up our faults, let us accomplish their correction in time and let us determine to correct one this month, another next month, and a third in that which follows. And so mounting as it were by steps, let us get to heaven by a Jacob's Ladder. For the ladder seems to me to signify in a riddle the gradual ascent by means of virtue, by which it is possible for us to ascend from earth to heaven, not using material steps, but improvement and correction of manners."

12. What wisdom regarding Confession can I glean from saints?

Here is some encouragement from the saints and spiritual writers regarding the value and importance of the Sacrament of Confession.

"The more sincerely we confess our sins, the calmer will our souls be after. For sins are secret serpents, gnawing at the heart of man, and never letting him rest; they are prickly

thorns, constantly goring the soul, they are spiritual darkness.”—*St. John of Kronstadt*

“Why should a sinner be ashamed to make known his sins, since they are already known and manifest to God, and to His angels, and even to the blessed in heaven? Confession opens the door to heaven.”—*St. Ambrose of Milan*

“If we take one step towards the Lord, He takes ten towards us.”—*Tito Colliander*

“It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins.”—*St. Isaac the Syrian*

PRAYERS IN PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

Introductory Prayers

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Having invoked the Holy Trinity, keep silence for a little while, so that your thoughts and feelings may be freed from worldly concerns.

Then recite the prayers without haste, and with your whole heart.)

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. (This may be repeated several times)

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere and fillest all things. Treasury of blessings and Giver of Life: Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal! Have mercy on us (3 times)

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

O most-holy Trinity, have mercy on us. O Lord, cleanse us from our sins. O Master, pardon our transgressions. O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy Name’s sake.

Lord, have mercy. (3 times)

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 trespasses as we

forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.

Come, let us worship God our King. Come, let us worship 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 steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones, which thou hast broken rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners will return to thee. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, though God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of thy deliverance.

O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise. For thou hast no delight in sacrifice were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, then wilt thou delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on thy altar.

Prayers of Repentance

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

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

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

I have sinned, O Lord, have mercy. (3 times)

O God, be merciful, to me a sinner. Look down upon me, O Heavenly Father, as Thou looked upon the penitent prodigal son; forgive my transgressions and mercifully have pity on me; grant to me Thy grace and the remission of my sins.

Examination of the Heart

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and

unconscious, hidden and open, great and little, committed by word and deed, in thought and intention, by day or night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self-love and my boastfulness; I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarrelling, and cursing.

I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my anger, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance, and rancor. I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclination, covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and laziness; I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, ridiculed, and mocked.

I weep over my self-indulgence, greed, love of money and miserliness, lack of mercy, and cruelty; I weep over my slothfulness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration at prayer and in church, for not observing fast days and doing charitable works.

I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and lack of feeling in what concerns

the Faith, and over all my foul and reviling thoughts.

How many times have I taken the Name of God in vain! How often and lightly and freely, at times even brazenly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, and mocked them?

How often have I been proud and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done?

How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant, and mean?

How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred, or envy?

How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind and my imagination and my heart with lustful sensations?

How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on foods and alcoholic beverages, because of intemperance and lack of self-control. How often have I broken the holy fasting seasons and fasting days?

How often through selfishness, pride, or false modesty have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary, and grasping for attention?

How often have I entered the Church without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absentminded, and left in the same spirit? And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little, lazily, and inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting prayer.

How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy?

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

Examination of the Conscience, Using Scripture

1. When Jesus saw him there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6)

What is my attitude to this Confession? Have I prepared for it? Am I sincerely willing to change my life so that it will be more in

keeping with the Gospel? Did I forget or hide any serious sins in my last Confession? Have I made reparation to anyone I have injured? Since my last Confession have I remained firm in my efforts to change my life, or did I give up due to laziness, discouragement, or forgetfulness?

2. Jesus said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." (Matthew 22:37–38)

Do I really love God above all things? Or are worldly things such as possessions, power, or popularity more important to me? Have I placed my trust in these or in such things as horoscopes, occult practices, and superstitions? Have I prayed on a regular and daily basis? Do I pray attentively? Do I approach prayer with joy and enthusiasm, or do I allow anything, no matter how trivial, to be an excuse to shorten prayer or avoid it entirely? Do I think about God during the course of my day?

3. Jesus said: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before

my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32–33)

Am I willing to be known as a Christian in public and private life? Have I been embarrassed or afraid to admit my belief in Christ and His Church to others? If someone said something unfair or inaccurate about Christ or Christianity did I try to speak the truth with gentleness, respect and love?

4. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, to give the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3:15)

Do I know what the Orthodox Church teaches and believes? Do I take the time to read, study, or learn more about my faith? Am I able and willing to answer questions about Christ, the Church, and my faith? Did I read, study or meditate on God's word in the Bible daily?

5. "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his Name. Bring an offering and come before Him;

worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness.” (1 Chronicles 16:29)

Do I keep Sundays and feast days holy by participating as fully as possible in the liturgical services? Do I observe the fasting days and seasons of the Church? Do I receive our Lord’s Body and Blood in Holy Communion frequently? Did I prepare diligently for Holy Communion by prayer and fasting? Do I ever receive Communion without seriousness of heart?

6. Submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)

Have I honored and obeyed my parents, showing them love and respect and helping them with their material, emotional, and spiritual needs? Have I been loving, patient and understanding with my children? Did I discipline them appropriately? Have I tried to impart my faith to them by word and example? Do I contribute to the peace and well-being of my family by offering my time, service and love? In my job or profession, am I an honest and hard worker? Do I view the

service I render my employers and others as service done to and for Christ? Do I pay my employees a just wage? Are my expectations of them fair and reasonable? Have I fulfilled my promises, contracts, and obligations? Do I work, as I am able, to promote peace, justice, morality, and love in my community? Do I use my positions of responsibility and authority for the good of others?

7. Jesus said: “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.” (Luke 6:27–29)

Have I caused injury to another’s life, health, spiritual or emotional well being, or material possessions by violence or neglect? Have I quarreled, been unduly angry with or insulted anyone? Have I been reconciled with them? If I have injured or offended anyone, have I sought his or her forgiveness? If anyone has injured or offended me, have I forgiven them? Or am I still filled with hatred or a desire for revenge? Am I committed to accepting

suffering rather than inflicting it? Did I seek to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence of any sort? Do I strive for peace within myself, and work to be a peacemaker in my daily life?

8. "It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God." (1 Thessalonians 4:5-6)

Have I been faithful to my spouse? Have I exercised self-control in regards to food, drink, drugs, and sexual desire? Have I misused my sexuality by fornication, impure thoughts, and fantasies? Have I participated in indecent conversations or made use of pornographic entertainment, pictures, or reading? Have I incited others to sin by my own failures in this area?

9. Jesus said: "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

Have I envied or desired inordinately another's position or property? Have I stolen or damaged the property of others? Did I restore it or make restitution? Do I share my possessions with those who have less? Do I give freely and generously of my time, talent, or money to those in need and/or the church?

10. "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." (James 1:26)

Have I taken the name of the Lord in vain? Have I blasphemed or used profane language? Do I talk too much or listen too little? Have I lied or, by cowardly silence, have I avoided telling the truth? Have I gossiped or spread rumors about others? Have I spoken harshly, unjustly, unnecessarily, or insultingly to anyone or about anyone? Do I spend time in silence? Or must I always be talking or having the radio or television on? Am I addicted to social media? Have I been boastful about myself or judgmental about others?

11. "Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Is all that I do motivated first and foremost by a desire to love and serve God and my neighbor in the way that God wills me to? Do I think of myself as better than others? When I pray, fast or do any good, do I try to do it secretly? Or, by word or display, do I make sure that others notice me and my works?

12. "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall." (Psalm 55:22)

Am I anxious or worried about anything? Is there a problem or hurt that I should bring to the Lord in Confession for forgiveness, healing, or guidance?

PRAYER DIRECTLY BEFORE CONFESSION

I, a sinner, confess to the Lord God Almighty, One in the Holy Trinity, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, to my holy Guardian Angel, to all the Saints, and to you, my spiritual Father, all my sins.

PRAYER DIRECTLY AFTER CONFESSION

For these and all other sins, known and unknown, by which I have angered the Good God, I am heartfully sorry. I repent sincerely and I promise, with the help of God, to better my life. For these and all the sins of my past life I humbly ask pardon of God, and I ask you, my Spiritual Father, to give me salutary penance and absolution.

Credits

1. *Preparing for Confession*
By L. Joseph Letendre
2. *Confession and Communion*
By Archpriest Donat Augusta
3. *Compiler and editor of this booklet*
Archpriest Steven Belonick