



St Elizabeth's, Richmond

Confession Guide



How to prepare for Confession

Introduction

Whether you go to confession frequently, or whether it has been many years since your last confession, this leaflet will help you get the most out of this wonderful Sacrament. Don't forget that the priest is there to help you. If you are not sure about something or don't know what to say feel free to ask. Listen carefully to any advice he may give you.

Many Names one Sacrament

Although known most commonly as 'Confession' in popular culture, the Church also has other names for this Sacrament each of which highlights a different aspect. 'Confession' puts the emphasis on what we do when we 'confess' or 'speak forth' our sins. 'Reconciliation' emphasises the effect of the Sacrament in restoring our relationship with God. 'Penance' emphasises our desire to turn away from and make amends for our sins. Sometimes Confession is also called the 'Sacrament of Pardon and Peace'.

The Examination of Conscience

We prepare for the sacrament by looking honestly at what we have done since we last went to confession. This review of our life is called an "examination of conscience". It is good to examine our conscience regularly, even daily, because it not only helps us recognise our sins but also enables us to see other areas of our lives where God is inviting us to respond more generously to the call to holiness.

The Gravity of Sin

Some sins we commit are relatively minor. We call them venial sins. It would be very difficult to confess them all, but it is good for us to mention some in confession, especially those which represent an area we are struggling with.

Other sins are more serious or grave. They are called mortal sins. We are bound to mention in confession all our mortal sins, including as far as possible, the number of times we have committed them. We cannot receive Holy Communion until we have sought forgiveness for mortal sins.

For a sin to be mortal three conditions must be met:

1. The offence must be serious or "grave";
2. We must know we are committing a serious sin;
3. There must be full consent of the will to the sin.

Sorrow for our Sins

Sorrow isn't a question of how bad we feel about something we have done. If you are not sure whether you are sorry, ask yourself whether you want to do the same thing again. Contrition is sorrow for our sins. In the Church we sometimes distinguish between Perfect and Imperfect Contrition (also known as 'attrition'). Perfect Contrition is a sorrow for our sins that springs from our love of God. Imperfect Contrition is a sorrow for our sins coming from any other motive (disappointment with ourselves, fear of hell, etc). Imperfect Contrition is sufficient for our sins to be forgiven in confession.

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Sample Examination of Conscience

There are many different ways of examining our conscience and some people find it helpful to vary their approach from time to time. A sample examination of conscience such as the one below can be useful in different ways. First of all it can help us focus on what we have actually done rather than vague dispositions we may or may not have acted on. In turn this helps us confess our sins concretely and clearly. Finally, and this is important, it helps those people who have a tendency to 'confess' everyone else's sins to focus on their own instead!

The following sample Examination of Conscience is based on Jesus' commandment that we should 'love God above all things and love our neighbour as ourselves' (cf. Mark 12:30f).

How well do I love God?

- Do I ignore God or exclude him from my life?
- Do I neglect my daily prayers or say them carelessly?
- Is my prayer a real conversation with God in mind and heart?
- Have I blasphemed or used God's name in anger or carelessly?
- Have I missed Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation through my own fault?
- Have I received Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?
- Do I observe the one hour fast before receiving Holy Communion?
- Do I abstain from meat on Fridays?

How well do I love my neighbour?

For all:

- Have I been impatient, angry or jealous?
- Have I taken part in, or encouraged, an abortion or any other means of taking human life?
- Have I been drunk, used drugs, or given a bad example to others?
- Have I driven carelessly, or under the influence of alcohol or drugs, so as to endanger my life or that of other people?
- Have I placed myself in danger of sin by reading or looking at what was indecent or pornographic?
- Have I sinned against the virtue of purity by myself (masturbation) or with others (fornication, adultery, homosexual acts)?
- Have I been dishonest by stealing or cheating?
- Have I been lazy at my work or at home?
- Have I been uncharitable or unkind in thought, word, or deed?
- Have I told lies? Do I judge others rashly?
- Have I broken secrets entrusted to me or taken part in gossip?

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For Spouses:

Do I pray for my husband or wife?

Am I critical of my spouse, putting them down in public or in private?

Do I make an effort to foster and show my love and affection for my spouse?

Do I try to make up whenever there has been a disagreement or do I allow resentment to continue? Am I too proud to say 'Sorry'?

Do I mistreat my spouse verbally, emotionally or physically?

Have we used artificial means of birth control in order to prevent having children?

For Parents:

Have I neglected to teach my children their prayers and give them a Christian education?

Have I set my children a bad example by not taking them to Mass, or being careless about my own religious duties?

Do I take care to ensure that my children do not witness arguments at home?

Do I watch over the books they read and their television or internet viewing?

Do I take care to 'befriend' my children? Am I overly strict or lax with them?

Do I explain decisions to them and so give them criteria by which they can grow to maturity?

For young people:

Have I been disobedient or rude to my parents or teachers?

Do I treat my parents with affection and respect? Do I pray for them?

If I live away from home, do I keep in touch with my parents and other members of my family?

Do I quarrel with my brothers or sisters or other members of my family? Do I forgive?

Do I study hard at school or college?

Am I grateful for the sacrifices my parents have made for me? Do I show my gratitude?

Am I careful to set my friends a good example, especially in matters of behaviour, attendance at Holy Mass and moral issues? Do I realise that my example might help them take seriously their Christian calling?

Do I always speak and act with the utmost respect for members of the opposite sex?

Do I make an effort to know and understand my faith so that I can respond intelligently to the questions others may have about it?

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How to go to Confession

Before Confession

Pray first, asking the Holy Spirit to give you the light and courage you need to make a good confession. Then spend some time making a sincere examination of conscience to see how you have sinned since your last confession. The examination of conscience will help you recognise your sins and not just areas of your life you may feel bad about. Remember that long explanations or excuses are unnecessary and that your confession should be 'concise, complete and contrite', so think about what you will say to confess your sins simply, with humility and honesty.

At Confession

1. Begin by saying: "Bless me Father for I have sinned" and tell the priest approximately how long it is since your last confession.
2. Then tell him your sins, simply, clearly, and honestly. Remember that you are to confess your sins not other people's. When you have finished say: "I am sorry for these sins, and the sins of my past life".
3. The priest may give you some advice. If he does listen carefully because it may help you. He will then give you the Penance (usually a prayer to be said later). After that he will ask you to express your sorrow by saying an Act of Contrition. You could say:
 1. "Jesus, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner"; or
 2. "O my God, because you are so good, I am truly sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace I will try not to sin again".
4. The priest will then give you the Absolution:

"God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and **I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**" **R. Amen.**
5. He may add:

May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of all the saints, whatever good you do and suffering you endure, heal your sins, help you to grow in holiness, and reward you with everlasting life".
R. Amen.

After Confession

Immediately after confession, find a quiet moment to pray the prayers of penance the priest will have given you. Reflect on any advice he may have given you or things he may have suggested you to do. Above all rejoice in the mercy and love of God for you.



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