

In the Confessional

Entering — In most parishes, the penitent has two choices for going to confession. He or she either goes face to face with the priest or behind a screen where the priest does not see him or her.

Beginning — The priest will guide the penitent through the confession if he or she is unfamiliar with the sacrament. Begin by making the sign of the cross. Say it so the priest can hear you. The priest will then say a prayer or read a passage from Scripture asking for God's assistance.

After opening prayer — The penitent then says, "It has been ... (*however long*) ... since my last confession." or "This is my first confession."

Confession of sins — Then the penitent begins to confess his or her sins. It is important to confess all mortal (serious) sins since your last confession and even other mortal sins forgotten in a previous confession. Make sure to include the number of times. This is where the piece of paper from the examination of conscience comes in handy.

Direction from the Priest — After the penitent confesses his sins, the priest may give him or her some counsel and advice. Then the priest will give the penitent a penance. For example, he may tell the penitent to say three Our Fathers, pray the joyful mysteries of the rosary, visit a nursing home for half an hour, spend time with family, etc. Then the priest will ask him or her to make an act of contrition.

Act of Contrition — The penitent then makes an act of contrition, such as the following (a different one may be chosen):

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

Absolution — The priest will then grant the penitent absolution, which includes the prayer, "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Closing Prayer — The priest will then say, "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good." The penitent responds, "His mercy endures forever." After leaving the confessional make sure to give thanks to God for the Sacrament of Reconciliation just received. Then promptly and devoutly perform the penance. This may not be possible if the penance is of a social nature, that is, visiting a nursing home, helping the poor, etc., but it should still be done as soon as possible.

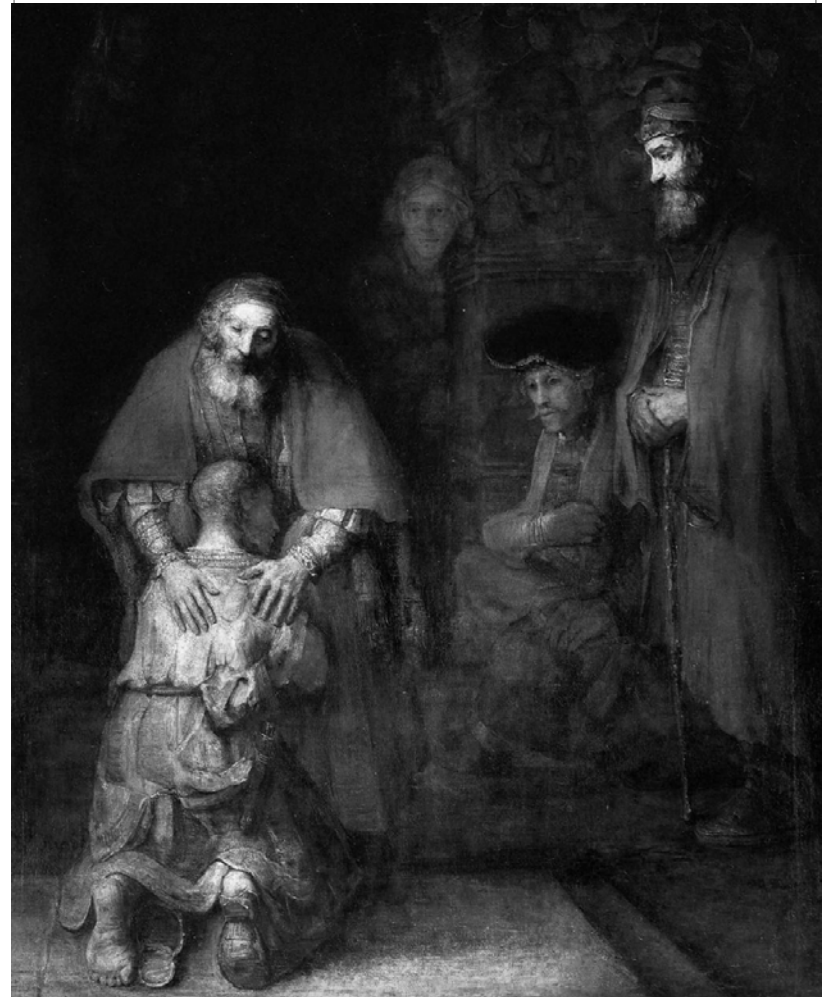
Sources for this Guide:

Weinandy, Thomas, O.F.M.Cap., *Be Reconciled to God. A Family Guide to Confession*, The Word Among us, Gaithersburg, MD, 1988.

The Vatican II Weekday Missal, Daughters of St. Paul, 1975.

The Holy Father's Advice to Priests about Their Duty of Hearing Confessions.

A Guide to the Sacrament of Reconciliation for Young Adults



Preparation Make an Examination of Conscience

It is important to prepare for reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Spend adequate time (10-20 minutes) making an examination of conscience. Some like to use a piece of paper to write down the sins that come to mind during the examination. However, it is not necessary. Make sure to include the number of times for all mortal (serious) sin. It is a good idea after confession to either throw away or burn the piece of paper as a sign that both God and ourselves have forgiven and now forgotten those sins.

Prayer before Confession

O most merciful God! Prostrate at Your feet, I implore Your forgiveness. I sincerely desire to leave all my evil ways and to confess my sins with all sincerity to You and to Your priest. I am a sinner, have mercy on me, O Lord. Give me a lively faith and a firm hope in the Passion of my Redeemer. Give me for Your mercy's sake a sorrow for having offended so good a God. Mary, my mother, refuge of sinners, pray for me that I may make a good confession.

Examination of Conscience Based on the 10 Commandments

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.

Is God my first priority? Do I give time to prayer? Have I performed my duties towards God reluctantly or grudgingly? Have I been rebellious towards God and His commands? Have I murmured against God, at personal misfortune or at the prosperity of others? Have I received Communion in the state of mortal sin? Have I deliberately told a lie in Confession or withheld a mortal sin? Have I believed or practiced anything that is of the occult: ouija boards, tarot cards, fortune tellers, séances, channeling, astrology?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Did I make use of God's name mockingly, angrily, carelessly, or in any other irreverent manner? Did I make use of the Blessed Virgin Mary's name or the saints' names mockingly, angrily, carelessly, or in any other irreverent manner? Did I tell a lie under oath? Did I break private or public vows? Have I angered others so far as to make them swear, or blaspheme God?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's day.

Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or on Holy Days of obligation? Have I done needless work or shopping on Sundays or Holy Days of obligation? Have I done anything to make the Lord's day unholy?

4. Honor your father and your mother.

Have I respected my parents and superiors as I should? Have I disobeyed or deceived them? Have I done things behind their back that I know they would disapprove of? Have I been arrogant and stubborn with them?

5. You shall not kill.

Have I caused, desired, or hastened the death of anyone? Have I approved or assisted in an abortion? Have I been guilty of drug or alcohol abuse? Have I gotten angry or nurtured any resentments against others? Have I refused to forgive others? Was I an occasion for others to sin with my conversations, "off-color" jokes, immodest way of dressing, invitation to attend certain shows, lending harmful books or magazines, etc.? Did I try to repair the scandal done? Did I cause anyone harm with my words or actions? When someone offends me, do I desire revenge or harbor enmity, hatred or ill-feelings?

6 & 9. You shall not commit adultery or covet your neighbor's wife.

Have I willfully entertained indecent thoughts? Have I engaged in impure conversations? Have I looked for forms of entertainment which put me in the proximate occasions for sin (immoral movies, plays, readings, music, internet, pornography, etc.)? Have I led others to sins of impurity or immodesty? Have I masturbated? Have I had sexual intercourse outside of marriage? Have I performed any homosexual acts? Have I used artificial contraception? Have I suggested the use of artificial contraception to others?

7 & 10. You shall not steal or covet your neighbor's goods.

Have I stolen any object or money that did not belong to me? Have I run into debt beyond my ability to pay it back or neglected to pay others back? Have I willfully damaged others' property? Did I harm anyone by deception or fraud? Have I gotten envious or jealous of others' goods? Do I get angry with God for giving more to others than to me? Do I seek to share what I have with the poor? Am I diligent in my work and studies or do I give in to laziness or love of comfort? Do I have an excessively materialistic view of life? Have I cheated to make life easier?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Have I told any lies? Did I engage in gossip or back-biting? Have I made fun of others? Did I judge others in my thoughts or in conversations? Have I unjustly accused others? Have I sinned by detraction, that is, telling the faults of others without necessity? Have I lied about others? Did I reveal secrets without due cause?