

- Have I cheated on my taxes?
- Have I given or accepted bribes?
- Have I made unjust or false insurance claims?
- Have I unreasonably refused to help someone in need?
- Do I provide for the needs of the poor?
- Do I flaunt my wealth or good fortune?
- Do I live beyond my means?
- Am I jealous of what other people have?
- Do I envy the families or possessions of others?
- Am I greedy or selfish?

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

- Have I lied?
- Have I committed perjury (lying under an oath to tell the truth, orally or in writing, especially before God)?^A
- Have I gossiped?
- Do I unjustly speak badly of others behind their back?
- Am I sincere in my dealings with others?
- Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my thoughts of others?
- Do I keep secret what should be kept confidential?
- Have I unjustly or unnecessarily injured the reputation of others?^{O/U}
- Have I cheated in school or work?
- Do I blame others for my mistakes?
- Do I brag or exaggerate my accomplishments?

A GUIDE TO GOING TO CONFESSION

You may go to Confession kneeling or sitting, anonymously behind-a-screen or "face-to-face"—these are usually your options, although the priest has the right to require anonymous Confession.

After greeting the priest, you begin by making the sign of the cross saying:

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

The priest may invite you to confess your sins; but he will usually remain silent, in which case you continue, saying these or similar words:

“Bless me father, for I have sinned. It’s been [number of days, weeks, months, years] since my last Confession.”

- *It is then helpful to reveal your "state in life", e.g.:*

"I am a married man with 3 small children," "I am single, and live alone," etc.....

- Then say: **“These are my sins.”**

- *List by number and kind all mortal sins you have recollected in*

your examination of conscience.

- *You may also describe the types of venial sins you have committed, especially any which are of particular concern to you.*

- *Close with these or similar words:*

“For these, and all my sins, I am truly sorry.”

The priest may ask you some questions to understand your situation better. He may also give you advice.

The priest then gives you a “penance” to perform. If you know you can’t fulfill his penance, tell him so he can give you another penance (e.g., sometimes you don’t know the particular prayer).

YOU THEN MAKE AN ACT OF CONTRITION, in these or similar words:

“Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishment; but most of all because I have offended Thee, My God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.”

THE PRIEST RESPONDS saying the prayer of absolution, extending his hand and making the sign of the cross [*Sometimes he begins this prayer while you are saying your Act of Contrition*]:

“God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and poured out the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church, may God grant 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.”

You make the sign of the cross and respond: Amen.

The priest then says a dismissal to which you respond:

Priest: “Go in peace.”

You respond: “Thanks be to God.”

He may also add:

Priest: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.”

You respond: “His mercy endures forever.”

As you leave the confessional it is polite to say, “Thank you, Father.” Leave the confessional and do your penance as soon as possible, immediately in church if you can.

MAKING A GOOD CONFESSION: A Brief Examination of Conscience and Guide to Going to Confession

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**(Parents: consider if this is inappropriate
for your children)**

How do we make a “good Confession”? We begin by prayerfully, and with honesty and humility, looking at our lives to recognize the sins we’ve committed since our last Confession, i.e., we make “an examination of conscience.” In particular, we need to look for **mortal sins**, i.e., sins that involve *all three of the following criteria*: 1) *grave matter*, 2) *full knowledge* of the sinful character of the act, and 3) *complete consent*. If any one of these is lacking it is not a “mortal sin,” but may be a “venial sin.”

“Grave matter” means the act involves some very serious moral evil, found either in 1) the act itself or 2) the intention behind the act. Grave matter can be difficult to identify, but not always.

Note that some sinful acts are grave matter when they involve circumstances that are serious or very important, but are *not* grave matter if they involve only small or trivial things. These acts that can be either grave or not are said to “admit of parvity” (smallness). Many of the sins listed below would “admit of parvity,” unless the word “serious” accurately describes them. For example, a lie is always a sin, but lying under oath is grave matter while lying about whether you like someone’s outfit is not grave matter.

Also, in Confession ***you must distinguish the “kind” of mortal sin committed***: be clear about what the sin was, but avoid graphic or long explanations. So it is not enough to merely say “I had bad thoughts” or “I acted inappropriately,” rather one should more specific, e.g. “I had lustful thoughts,” etc.

You must also give the number of times you committed particular mortal sins. Sometimes this is very difficult or even impossible to remember, in which case, try your best give the priest some idea of the frequency or number; e.g., “at least once a month for several years,” etc.

Besides mortal sins, we should also consider confessing (but are not required to confess) vices (sinful habits) or other venial sins that are particularly problematic.

A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This brief examination of conscience is not all inclusive or exhaustive, but is a useful tool to help you prepare for Confession. Remember, as you go through your examination consider if any of your sins mortal. Also, remember to confess how many times you committed particular mortal sins.

Note, to help you identify mortal sins, sins that *always* involve *grave matter* are marked with an “A” and sins that *very often* or *usually* involve *grave matter* (so should be considered very carefully) are marked with an “O/U”. This does *not* mean that sins *not marked* never involve grave matter, as discussed above.

1. *I am the Lord your God. You shall not have strange gods before me.*

- Have I worshipped or prayed to other deities, pagan gods or the devil? ^A
- Have I participated in satanic rituals or occult practices (including ouija boards, tarot card readings, etc.) or witchcraft? ^A
- Have I made any things more important than God in my life: e.g., money, security, power, people, myself, etc.?
- Do I seek to love Him with my whole heart?
- Have I been angry with God? ^{O/U}
- Did I despair of or presume on God's mercy? ^{O/U}
- Do I give God time every day in prayer?
- Have I received Communion in the state of mortal sin? ^A
- Have I ever deliberately told a lie to or withheld a mortal sin from the priest in Confession? ^A
- Have I dissented from defined Church doctrine? ^{O/U}
- Did I disregard important liturgical norms of the Church?
- Did I deny my Catholic Faith? ^A
- Did I fail to defend my Catholic Faith? ^{O/U}
- Am I willfully ignorant of basic doctrines of the faith (e.g., failing to reasonably educate yourself in the faith)?
- Have I been prideful?
- Have I eaten or drunk in excess, the sin of gluttony?
- Have I been an irresponsible steward of creation?

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

- Have I violated an oath or promise sworn before God? ^A
- Have I used God's name lightly or carelessly?
- Have I cursed someone using God's name? ^A
- Have I wished evil upon any other person?
- Have I insulted a sacred person or abused a sacred object? ^{O/U}
- Did I use foul language, especially in front of children?

3. *Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.*

- Have I willingly missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of

Obligation, or caused my family to? ^A

- Have I been inattentive at Mass, or do I regularly arrive late or leave early?
- Have I observed Sunday as a day of prayer and rest? ^{O/U}
- Have I done needless or servile work on Sunday? ^{O/U}
- Did I keep the Church's laws of fast, abstinence and penance? ^A

4. *Honor your father and your mother.*

- Do I honor and obey my parents?
- Do I care for my aged or infirm relatives, especially parents?
- Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
- Have I abandoned my spouse or children? ^{O/U}
- Do I allow anger or resentment to affect the way I speak to or discipline my children?
- Am I impatient with aging parents?
- Have I denied just assistance to family members?
- Have I given my family good religious and moral example? ^{O/U}
- Have I tended to the religious education and the moral and spiritual formation of my children? ^{O/U}
- Have I postponed giving my children the sacraments? ^{O/U}
- Have I failed to baptize my child within the first few weeks after his or her birth? ^{O/U}
- Do I try to bring peace into my home life?
- Did I give bad example to others, especially the young?
- Do I obey and respect legitimate authorities, like priests, teachers, police?
- Do I obey civil laws?
- Did I financially support the Church and my parish?

5. *You shall not kill.*

- Have I intentionally physically harmed anyone? ^{O/U}
- Have I had an abortion or encouraged or assisted anyone in doing so? ^A
- Have I engaged, in any way, in sins against human life such as artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization? ^A
- Have I participated in or publicly approved of euthanasia? ^A
- Do I hate anyone? ^{O/U}
- Have I been quarrelsome or resentful?
- Have I insulted anyone, or called them harsh or profane names?
- Have I unjustly and intentionally harassed, made fun of, ridiculed anyone? ^{O/U}
- Have I unjustly used physical force or my position of authority or power to force someone to do something against their will?
- Have I held grudges, or failed to forgive anyone? ^{O/U}
- Have I wished for or sought revenge?
- Have I taken pleasure in others' misfortunes?
- Have I threatened anyone unjustly or unnecessarily?
- Do I *unjustly* discriminate against others? ^{O/U}

- Have I judged others rashly or unjustly, judged their hearts, or judged them as beyond repentance or God's mercy?
- Have I intentionally harmed myself, or attempted suicide? ^{O/U}
- Have I irresponsibly or unreasonably neglected my health?
- Have I abused alcohol or drugs? ^{O/U}
- Have I mutilated my body in any unnecessary way?
- Did I give a bad example, cause moral confusion to others, or otherwise lead anyone into sin (“scandal”)?
- Did I materially cooperate in another's mortal sin? ^{O/U}

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

- Have I obeyed the Church's laws of marriage? ^{O/U}
- Have I attempted marriage after a divorce (without a Church annulment)? ^A
- Am I married “outside the Church,” i.e., without a Catholic ceremony? ^A
- Have I been unfaithful to my marriage vows in thought or action? ^{O/U}
- Has sexual intimacy always been respectful of my spouse, consistent with nature, and open to life? ^{O/U}
- Have I had any sexual activity outside of marriage? ^A
- Have I used any method of contraception or artificial birth control? ^A
- Have I directly and intentionally committed or encouraged sterilization (e.g., vasectomies, tubal ligations)? ^A
- Have I masturbated? ^A
- Have I committed sodomy or sadomasochism? ^A
- Have I committed oral sex? (if inside marriage, discuss with confessor.) ^A
- Have I viewed pornography, or other impure images? ^A
- Have I thought of other people as mere objects to be used sexually? ^{O/U}
- Have I been guilty of any homosexual activity? ^A
- Have I been unchaste in thought, word, or deed? ^{O/U}
- Am I careful to dress modestly, so as not to provoke sin in others? ^{O/U}

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

- Have I stolen anything?
- Have I failed to return or make restitution for what I have stolen?
- Have I intentionally damaged anyone's property?
- Do I waste time at work, school, and home?
- Do I pay fair wages and provide fair benefits to my employees? ^{O/U}
- Do I gamble excessively? ^A
- Do I pay my bills and debts promptly?
- Have I cheated anyone out of what is justly theirs?
- Have I cheated on tests?