

# THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

**Five conditions must be fulfilled in order to make a good confession:** an examination of conscience; sorrow for the sins; a firm desire of amendment; to tell the sins to a priest; to complete the penance that he imposes on us.

**Three conditions are required for a sin to be mortal:** that the matter be grave and that, in addition, it be committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.

At the end of this document, you will find an “Act of Contrition” and the Sacramental Absolution that the priest should pronounce when absolving your sins.

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BEFORE CONFESSSION

How long has it been since my last good confession? Have I voluntarily concealed any mortal sin in a past confession? Do I have true sorrow for my sins and the desire to change? Have I completed the penances from past confessions and repaired the injustices committed? Have I received communion in the state of mortal sin?

**First Commandment:** I am the Lord thy God: Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me.

Have I seriously doubted some truth of faith? Did I do it in front of others? Have I failed to trust in the help of God? Have I spoken irreverently about the things of God, of the Church, and its ministers? Have I neglected prayer or the sacraments? Am I superstitious? Do I believe in fortune tellers, witches, amulets, or similar things? Have I read books, magazines or webpages that are contrary to faith or morals? Do I seek to know more

about the faith? Do I have other “gods,” that is to say, things that occupy me more than God –money, my profession, my studies, pleasures, etc.—?

**Second Commandment:** Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.

Have I been irreverent with the name of God, of the Virgin Mary, or of the Saints? Have I offended them with blasphemies (insults to God)? Have I given false witness or given witness without necessity? Have I done it in front of others? Have I made a vow, oath, or promise and left it unfulfilled through my own fault?

**Third Commandment:** Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.

Do I believe all that the Catholic Church teaches? Do I show the proper docility to Church authorities, as representatives of Christ? Do I skip Mass or arrive late on

Sundays or days of obligation? Have I worked unnecessarily on Sunday? Have I fulfilled the precepts of the Church<sup>1</sup> and the conditions for making a good confession and communion<sup>2</sup>? Have I observed the laws of penance on the Fridays of the year<sup>3</sup>? Have I participated in the apostolic works of the Church?

**Fourth Commandment:** Honor thy father and thy mother.

*For children:* Was I disobedient or disrespectful toward my parents and superiors? Did I neglect to help my parents in their material and spiritual needs? Do I ask Masses for my deceased parents?

*For parents:* Have I given bad example to my children? Have I been concerned with their spiritual formation? Have I fulfilled my duty to educate them? Have I abused my authority toward them? Have I tolerated scandal or moral dangers among those who live in my house? Have I fought with my spouse? Do I care for my spouse's needs?

**Fifth Commandment:** Thou shalt not kill. Have I caused harm to the life, reputation, or goods of others? Have I consented, collaborated, or obtained an abortion, participating in this serious crime? How many times? Do I have true love for my neighbor, or have I taken advantage of him by using him for my personal benefit? Have I been a source of serious scandal to my neighbor with my words or actions? Do I hold

enmity, hate, or rancor against anyone? Have I been carried away with anger? Have I desired serious evil for my neighbor, or have I been happy at his troubles?

**Sixth and Ninth Commandment:** Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

Have I stained my body with some improper action? Alone or with another? Have I placed myself in the near occasion of sin against purity? Have I read or watched anything, or had any conversation against purity? Have I participated in shows or entertainment contrary to Christian and human integrity? Have I been, in this, the cause of sin for others? Have I amused myself with improper thoughts or memories, even though I have not carried them out? Have I dressed immodestly?

**Spouses:** Am I married in the Church? Have I used or consented to contraceptives or other unnatural methods against procreation?

**Seventh and Tenth Commandment:** Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.

Have I stolen or aided in a robbery? Have I returned the goods and repaired the damage committed? Have I been fair, responsible, and honest in my work? Have I paid a just salary, fulfilled contracts? Have I paid just taxes? Have I supported projects of social action that are immoral or anti-Catholic? Am I selfish with the things I have? Am I envious

of the things others have? Do I do whatever possible to help the poor and help in the works of the Church?

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

Have I lied? Have I slandered (to say serious and false things about another)? Have I made rash judgments (bad statements about another without a fair basis)? Have I gossiped (talking without reason about the defects and faults of others)? Have I revealed secrets without just cause? Have I repaired the harm done by saying these things?

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## END NOTES

### **<sup>1</sup> The Precepts of the Church**

1. To attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.
2. To confess your sins at least once a year.
3. To receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.
4. To observe the days of abstinence from eating meat and fasting established by the Church.
5. To provide for the needs of the Church.

### **<sup>2</sup> Conditions for Receiving Holy**

#### **Communion**

1. To be in the state of grace, that is to say, to be free from any mortal sin.
2. To abstain for at least one hour before Holy Communion from any food and drink, with the exception of water and medicine.
3. To know what you are receiving and to approach the altar with devotion.

### **<sup>3</sup> Penitential Days and Times.**

#### **The Laws of Fast and Abstinence**

The **penitential days and times** in the universal Church are every Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent, unless a liturgical solemnity occurs on any of these days. **Acts of penance, piety, and charity** should be practiced on those days.

On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday there is an **obligation to fast** (for those between 18 and 59 years of age) and to **abstain from meat** (from the age of 14 onward). The law of fasting prescribes that only one full meal may be taken during the day while a light meal is allowed in the morning and at night with no other food at other times of the day.

**In the United States**, on all Fridays of the year the United States Conference of Bishops **recommends** abstinence from meat, prayer (ex. Way of the Cross), penance (especially eating less food), charity (ex. visit the sick) and almsgiving. **Abstinence from meat is obligatory on all the Fridays of Lent.**

### **An Act of Contrition**

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee,  
and I detest all my sins,  
because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell,  
but most of all because they offend 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 occasions of sin.  
Amen.

### **Sacramental Absolution to be given by the Priest**

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.