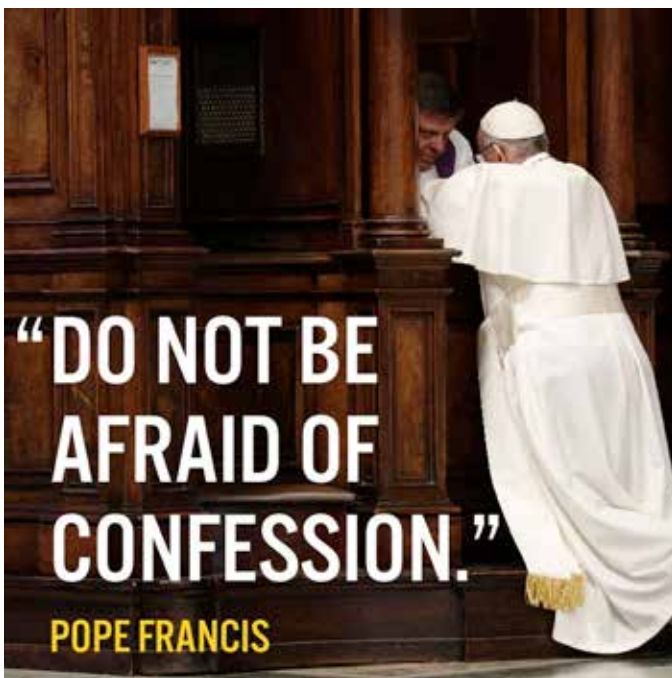


GUIDE TO A GOOD CONFESSION

This brochure can help you to prepare for and make a good confession. It includes an examination of conscience and all the steps involved in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. You can even bring it with you into the confessional.

The most basic requirement of a good confession is to have the intention of returning to God like the prodigal son, acknowledging your sins with true sorrow before His representative, the priest.

The text in this brochure is adapted from the *Handbook of Prayers: A Complete Treasury of Prayers and Order of Mass*, by Fr Charles Belmonte. Originally published in 1993, it is now available as a free eBook in .pdb, .epub and .mobi formats. Downloadable at <http://fsubelmonte.weebly.com/e-books.html>



EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

If you remember other serious sins besides those indicated here, mention them in your confession.

- ▶ Have I received communion or other sacraments in the state of mortal sin? Have I intentionally failed to confess some mortal sin in my previous confession?
- ▶ Have I seriously doubted my faith or put myself in danger of losing my faith by reading anti-Catholic literature or involving myself with non-Catholic sects? Have I engaged in superstitious or occult practices, like astrology, tarot cards, reiki, etc.?
- ▶ Have I indulged in consumerist excess? Have I dishonoured God’s holy creation and not behaved as a good steward in my treatment of the environment?
- ▶ Have I missed Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation through my own fault, without any serious reason? Have I deliberately violated the required fast and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?
- ▶ Have I disobeyed just authority in important matters?
- ▶ Have I hated anyone? Have I refused to forgive? Have I sought revenge? Have I injured anyone?
- ▶ Have I neglected my duty by spending excessive time watching TV or browsing the web or playing games? Have I used social media to bully or harass others?
- ▶ Have I purposely drunk to excess? Have I taken drugs?
- ▶ Have I watched pornography or viewed indecent TV shows or movies? Have I wilfully dwelt on impure thoughts or engaged in impure conversations? Have I committed unchaste acts, alone or with others?
- ▶ Have I endangered my own life or failed to defend another human life at any point between conception and natural death? Have I used contraception?
- ▶ Have I stolen or deliberately damaged another person’s property? Have I failed to make reparation for theft or damage? Have I lied or behaved dishonestly?
- ▶ Have I sinned by calumny or detraction — repeating the faults of others without just cause, even if it is true? Have I rashly judged others in serious matters?

GUIDE TO A GOOD CONFESSION



1 BEFORE CONFESSION

- ▶ Be truly sorry for your sins.

The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is 'heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more.' We can only approach the Kingdom of Christ by *metanoia*. This is a profound change of the whole person by which one begins to consider, judge, and arrange one's life according to the holiness and love of God.

— Introduction to the *Rite of Penance* (1974).

Metanoia does not require you to never sin again. But it does mean you resolve to *avoid the near occasions of sin*. If you sincerely intend to rectify your life, you can correspond with the abundant graces God gives you to resist and conquer temptation.

- ▶ You may have a choice of confessing your sins behind a screen, or face to face with the priest. Both options are legitimate and offer different benefits.

BEHIND A SCREEN

Confessing behind a screen safeguards your anonymity, and it can remind you that you're confiding in the Lord himself, not the priest. Speaking behind a screen is not a "natural" thing to do, but then again, confession isn't natural! The Sacrament of Reconciliation is profoundly supernatural, because the priest acts *in persona Christi* — in the person of Christ.

FACE TO FACE

You might prefer a face to face encounter if you'd appreciate human reassurance. After you have confessed your sins, the priest will offer encouragement and advice, usually in the form of a conversation.

- ▶ If you do not know how to confess your sins, or if you feel uneasy or ashamed, ask the priest to assist you. He will help you make a good confession. Answer his questions with simplicity, without fear or shame. Place your trust in God.

2 DURING CONFESSION

- ▶ Start with the sign of the cross.
- ▶ The priest will encourage you to have confidence in God saying: **"May the Lord be in your heart and help you to confess your sins with true sorrow."**
- ▶ You begin: **"Bless me Father, for I have sinned. My last good confession was . . ."** Advise the number of weeks, months or years.
- ▶ Name the sins that you remember. Start with the sin that's most difficult to say; after this, the rest will be easy.
- ▶ When you're finished, say: **"For these sins, and those I have forgotten, I ask God's pardon and your penance and absolution Father."**
- ▶ The priest will assign a penance and invite you to make an act of contrition. You may say, for example: **"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 Saviour Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy."**
- ▶ The priest gives you absolution. Listen to these words attentively: **"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."**
- ▶ At the end, as the priest is blessing you, make the sign of the cross and answer: **"Amen."**
- ▶ The priest might continue: **"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 eternal life. Go in peace."**
- ▶ Reply, **"Thanks be to God"** and take your leave.

3 AFTER CONFESSION

- ▶ Do the penance as soon as possible. Your penance will diminish the temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven. Your penance will also configure you to Christ, who alone expiated your sins, once for all, on the cross at Calvary.
- ▶ Give thanks to God for His mercy and forgiveness.
- ▶ If you recall some serious sin you forgot to confess, rest assured that it was forgiven with the others. Just be sure to mention it in your next confession.
- ▶ Resolve to make your next confession at a set time. The Church directs us to confess our serious sins once a year, but an annual confession is the bare minimum. A monthly confession is commendable; those who really wish to grow in virtue and holiness might consider fortnightly or weekly confession. Pray about it before the tabernacle, seeking the Lord's counsel.

Everyone say to yourself: "When was the last time I went to confession?" If it has been a long time, don't lose another day! Go! The priest will be good. And Jesus is there, and Jesus is better than the priests — Jesus receives you. He will receive you with so much love!

Perhaps you reply, "But Holy Father, I am embarrassed!" Even embarrassment is good. It does us good, because it makes us more humble. Do not be afraid of confession.

When someone is in line for confession they feel embarrassment, fear, even shame — but then, when they finish confessing, they leave feeling free, forgiven, clean, happy!

Pope Francis, from a homily on 19th February, 2014.

