

## **GUIDE TO CONFESSION**

Most persons outside the Catholic Church think that it is a very difficult thing to go to confession. The truth is that confession is one of the most consoling features of the Catholic religion. Catholics go to confession with the conviction that they are really telling their sins to God. The priest is present as God's representative, to give advice and encouragement, to settle doubts of conscience, to guide the penitent's future conduct, and above all to forgive sins in the name of Christ Himself. Never, under any circumstances, even to save his own life, may he reveal a single sin of the penitent.

Sometimes we hear people say that it is enough to confess our sins to God, without having to tell them to another human being. To these persons we answer that since God Himself has commanded us to confess our sins to the priest, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John 20:23), as his representative, we must obey God if we wish to receive the pardon of our sins.

With all these considerations before them, Catholics should not find it difficult to make a worthy confession, especially in view of the fact that they are always free to confess to a priest who does not know them. Surely, it is most unreasonable to conceal a mortal sin in confession. Such an act renders the confession useless. The sinner leaves the confessional still burdened with all the sins with which he entered and in addition with a new sin of sacrilege. He has the obligation of telling all the sins again; and if he has the misfortune of leaving this world without receiving the forgiveness of his transgressions, the sin which he was afraid to reveal to one person in private will be revealed to the whole world to his shame at the last judgment.

We should be very careful in preparing for confession to know exactly what sins we have committed, their particular nature, any circumstances changing their nature, and especially the number of times each has been committed. If we do not know the exact number of times, we should strive to know it as nearly as possible; or at least get an average number by the week or the day. Of course, strictly speaking, we are obliged to tell the number of our mortal sins only; venial sins can be confessed merely by specifying their nature without mentioning their number. Indeed, venial sins need not be confessed at all. These are forgiven with the reception of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. Yet, it is advisable to inform our confessor of even our venial sins, because we receive from the Sacrament of Penance special graces to help us avoid them in the future.

### **HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION:**

There are five basic steps to a making a good confession:

- 1) Examine your conscience
- 2) Tell your sins to the priest
- 3) Say an Act of Contrition
- 4) Do the Penance the priest gives you
- 5) Make a firm purpose of amendment

***Examine your conscience:*** Before entering the confessional, we should prepare ourselves for a good confession by taking sufficient time not only to examine our conscience but, especially, to excite in our hearts sincere sorrow for our sins and a firm purpose not to commit them again.

**Tell your sins to the priest:** Upon entering the confessional, we kneel, make the sign of the cross, and say to the priest, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned”; and then we tell how long it has been since our last confession. After telling the time of our last confession, if we have committed any mortal sins since that time, we must confess them and also any that we have forgotten in previous confessions. Telling the nature and number of each; we may also confess any venial sins we wish to mention. We should end our confession by saying: “I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life, especially for ...”; and then it is well to tell one or several of the sins which we have previously confessed and for which we are particularly sorry.

**Say and Act of Contrition:** Contrition is defined with three parts: a deep sorrow for sin, a hatred for the sins we have committed, and a firm purpose of sinning no more. Perfect contrition means you are sorry for your sins because they offend God Whom you know is all Good and Whom you really love above all things for His own sake. An example of an Act of Perfect Contrition would be:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, 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 occasion of sin. Amen.

Imperfect contrition occurs when we are sorry for having offended God because we fear the punishment due to our sins, such as Purgatory or Hell, or because our sins are hateful in themselves. Imperfect contrition is sufficient to receive forgiveness for sin in the Sacrament of Penance.

After you say an Act of Contrition, the priest, *in persona Christi capitis*, will give you absolution by saying,

***“I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”***

**Do the Penance the priest gives you:** In most instances, the penance the priest gives you is in the form of prayers to recite. Therefore, immediately after you leave the confessional, you should remain in church until your penance has been said.

**Make a firm purpose of amendment:** A firm purpose of amendment means that at the moment of our Confession, we must sincerely resolve to avoid sin and – as far as possible – the near occasion of sin. We should be truly determined not to commit any mortal sin, but it can also be aimed toward omitting at least one venial sin. This sacrament is a call to conversion. If we do not sincerely try to give up the things that lead us into sin, we do not fully cooperate with God’s grace.

Never become discouraged. With God’s grace we will succeed if we continually trust in Jesus and His Blessed Mother. Frequent confession is the remedy for conquering sin and temptation.