

# How to Make a Good Confession



### 3. You shall keep holy the Sabbath day.

You shall keep holy the day of the Lord, serving God devotedly. Sunday is a day for adoration of God and a day of rest from the stress and activities of everyday life. How strong is your devotion to the Holy Eucharist? What can you do to reclaim the Sabbath in your life?

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*  
Matthew 22:39

### 4. You shall honor your father and your mother.

You shall respect legitimate authority in society. As authorities of the family, parents are to be not only respected, but also honored. Adults are expected to see to the care for their elderly parents. Children should learn from the virtues, prayerful life, education, and faith their parents have taught them. Parents, in turn, honor their children by caring for them and teaching them the ways of the faith. How do you live up to your family responsibilities?



### 5. You shall not kill.

You shall shun murder, scandal, hatred, and vindictive anger. Jesus asks you to be for life. Vindictive anger, hatred, and scandal tempt us to be against life. Abortion, murder, and other forms of violence require us to respond by affirming life. What has been your attitude to the sanctity of life?

### 6. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall observe fidelity to your spouse. The Church teaches that sex outside of marriage undermines God’s purpose of marriage, which is the union of husband and wife and the begetting of children (CCC 2378, 2380).

Staying faithful today is a great challenge. Christ calls us to holiness and fidelity to God, spouses, children, friends, Church, the community, and society. How faithful have you been to these teachings?

### 7. You shall not steal.

You shall seek justice and peace in all your relationships with others. The Church teaches that the goods of the earth are meant for the benefit of everyone. Justice and peace are means to that goal. What does your conscience tell you about sharing resources? How do you treat people who are struggling financially, spiritually, or physically?

### 8. You shall not bear false witness to another.

You shall be committed to truth in dealing with others. Trust is the glue that makes society work. Lies hurt and cause damage. How truthful are you? Can others place their trust in you?

### 9. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.

You shall have hearts that are pure and minds that are free of lust. Jesus says, “Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28). The same applies to a woman who looks at a man with lust. Jesus teaches, “Blessed are the clean of heart” (Mt 5:8). Our culture is saturated with images that invite the opposite. How are you handling this challenge?

### 10. You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.

You shall be dedicated to generosity, especially to the poor. In matters of money, property, power, and success, people are motivated by greed and envy. This wrecks families, careers, and the wholesomeness of society. What role do material goods take in your life?

*“If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing.”*

1 John 1:9

## Additional Resources

### Books

*Catechism of the Catholic Church.* (USCCB Publishing, 1994).  
*Essentials of the Faith, Updated: A Guide to the Catechism,* Alfred McBride, O.Praem. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2002).  
*Gateways to God: Celebrating the Sacraments,* Fr. Robert J. Hater. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2011).  
*A Pocket Guide to the Confession,* Michael Dubruel. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2007).  
*The Sacraments: A Continuing Encounter with Christ,* Donald Cardinal Wuerl. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2011).  
*Truth for Your Mind, Love for Your Heart: Satisfying Your Hunger for God,* Alfred McBride, O.Praem. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2010).

### Websites

Penance, *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,* [www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/penance/](http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments/penance/)

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*Bringing Your Catholic Faith to Life*

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Inventory No. P1359

*Nihil Obstat:* Rev. Michael Heintz, Ph.D.

*Censor Librorum*

*Imprimatur:* ✠ Kevin C. Rhoades

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May 17, 2012

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US \$14.95

ISBN 978-1-61278-660-5



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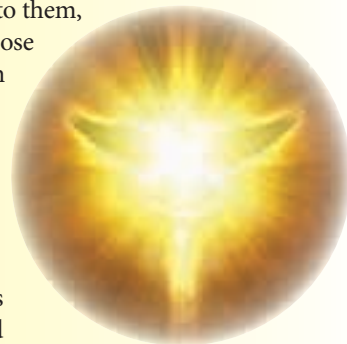
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## Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation: God Is Rich in Mercy

On Easter Night, the risen Jesus appeared to his apostles and said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’” (Jn 20:21-23).



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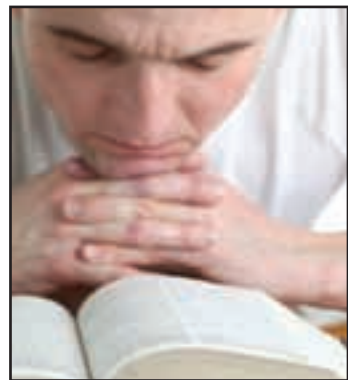
“The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continue, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation” (CCC 1421). The work of healing and salvation is the purpose of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. In our baptism we received new life in Christ. But we carry this life in earthen vessels and are inclined to sin again. We will always need God’s mercy and Christ’s sacrament of forgiveness.

God is not stingy with his mercy. God loves to lavish his mercy on us. At our slightest wish for forgiveness he rushes to us. Recall the marvelous scene in the story of the Prodigal Son. The son hesitates to return because he is fearful about how effective his confession will be. But every day his father goes to a hilltop scanning the road for his son. When the boy returns and is still a long way away, his father sees him and is full of compassion. “He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him” (Lk 15:20).

The Prodigal Son illustrates the full picture of conversion and repentance. God is always running toward us with a heart full of mercy, which enables our conversion and makes confession a joy. That is what the gift of this sacrament means. Real conversion is a grace from God. It is God who pulls our hearts away from sin and draws us longingly to him. All converts testify that their conversions belong to God. They joyfully pray, “To the Lord alone be the glory.” Jesus preached repentance and provided the Sacrament of Reconciliation to respond to our need. Jesus wants us to make a good confession.

## Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction: The Three Acts Needed for a Good Confession.

• **Contrition:** This involves regret for the sins committed and the resolution not to do them again. The penitent will need to prayerfully examine his or her conscience. Our motives for sorrow should arise from our faith in Christ. The following Act of Contrition expresses in prayer what “contrition” means:



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*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. Amen*

– Rite of Penance

• **Confession:** Confessing our sins opens us to reconciliation. We look directly at our sins and take responsibility for them. Confession of sins to a priest is an essential act of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. After a diligent examination of our consciences, we must confess all our sins.

• **Satisfaction:** Most of our sins injure others. We need to repair the harm. For example, this could mean restoring the reputation of someone we have undermined, apologizing, repairing a friendship, or paying compensation for injuries or damaged or stolen goods. Our sins also have a negative effect on our own souls. We need to work on recovering our full spiritual health. The penance we receive from the priest is meant to be an effective step in our self-improvement.

## Steps in the Rite of Reconciliation

The penitent may confess face to face with the priest or privately behind a screen.

**1** The priest will welcome you and invite you to make the Sign of the Cross. It will be helpful for the priest to know a little about you if he doesn’t already, and the time of your last confession. You may choose to begin with the traditional opening, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (weeks, months, years) since my last confession.” Relax. Be at ease. The priest is there to help you experience God’s mercy.

**2** Confess your sins in your own words to the priest. An appropriate way to conclude is by saying, “I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life.” The priest will help you from there.

**3** After you have confessed your sins to the priest, he will give you encouragement for your moral and spiritual growth. The priest then



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gives you a penance — which may include a brief prayer — and asks you to make an act of contrition. Then the priest absolves you from your sins. After this you may leave the confessional.

**4** Complete the penance the priest gives you. Thank God for his mercy. Promise yourself and God that you will try to avoid these sins in the future. Talk to God and ask for his help especially in avoiding temptations — those near occasions of sin.

## An Examination of Conscience

As Socrates stated, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Examining your conscience provides an opportunity to recognize sin and seek God’s grace.

How do you train your conscience? God’s Word has provided us with the Ten Commandments for examining our consciences, as well as The Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7), The Duties of Christians (Rom 12-15), and St. Paul’s Hymn to Love (1 Cor 13).

## Using the Ten Commandments to Examine Your Conscience

*“You shall love the Lord,  
your God, with all your  
heart, with all your soul,  
and with all your mind.”*

Matthew 22:37



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### 1. You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

You will love and worship God when you realize how much God loves you. “The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). St. Thérèse of Lisieux said that from heaven she would teach us to love Love, which is God. What or who do you love most? Is there a false god in your life?

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

You shall respect God’s holy name. Our culture is filled with cursing, vulgar speech and irreverence for the name of God and Jesus. Some even use God’s name to justify violence and anger. How do you speak of God? Listen to and practice Christ’s prayer, “Hallowed [holy] be thy name.”



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