



# THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE/ RECONCILIATION FAQ'S

## Q: What is sin?

**A:** Sin "is an offense against God as well as a fault against reason, truth and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God". —CCC 1849, 1850 In other words, sin is willfully rejecting good and choosing evil. Unfortunately, in today's culture, many people have lost the understanding of sin. Pope John Paul II said that "it happens not infrequently in history, for more or less lengthy periods of time and under the influence of many different factors, that the moral conscience of many people becomes seriously clouded. . . . Too many signs indicate that such an eclipse exists in our time". Today's society tells us that you can do whatever you want, whatever you feel like doing and there are no consequences. The idea that we each determine right and wrong is prevalent and misleads many.

## Q: Who gave priests the authority to forgive our sins?

**A:** Jesus did. "On the evening of that day, the first day of the week," Jesus showed himself to his apostles. "He breathed on them, and said to them: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" (John 20:19, 22-23) —CCC1485

## Q: What is the difference between mortal sin and venial sin?

**A:** In judging the degree of sin, it is customary to distinguish between mortal and venial sins. "Mortal sin," the *Catechism* teaches, "destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law . . . Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it". —CCC 1855

**Mortal Sin** is "a grave infraction of the law of God that destroys the divine life in the soul of the sinner (sanctifying grace), constituting a turning away from God. For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be present: grave matter, full knowledge of the evil of the act, and full consent of the will". —CCC 1855, 1857 Committing a mortal sin is "to choose deliberately - that is both knowing it and willing it - something gravely contrary to the divine law and to the ultimate end of man is to commit a mortal sin. This destroys in us the charity without which eternal (happiness) is impossible. Unrepented, mortal sins brings eternal death (Hell/eternal separation from God)". —CCC 1874

**Venial Sin** "does not destroy the divine life in the soul, as does mortal sin, though it diminishes and wounds it". —CCC 1855 "Venial sin is a failure to observe necessary moderation, in lesser matters of the moral law, or in grave matters acting without full knowledge or complete consent". —CCC 1862 Venial sins can lead us to committing mortal sins. "Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin". —CCC 1863

## Q: How often should I go to Confession?

**A:** The Sacrament of Penance reconciles us with God and the Church. If you have committed a mortal sin, you should seek God's forgiveness in this sacrament as soon as possible. A Catholic who has committed mortal sin should not receive Holy Communion before going to Confession. The grace we receive in this sacrament gives us strength to avoid sin (both mortal and venial) and temptation, so we should go frequently. Many people recommend going to Confession once a month.

## Q: Why do Catholics receive the Sacrament of Penance?

**A:** "Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayers labors for their conversion." —CCC1422

The Sacrament of Penance is also referred to as a Sacrament of conversion or confession. When we receive this Sacrament, we return to God with all of our heart, we turn away from evil, and we express the desire to change our life with the help of God's mercy and grace. Through the Sacrament of Penance, God gives us a new heart and the strength to begin again. All of our sins are forgiven and our communion with God and the Church is restored. Confession is the visible manifestation of God's mercy that gives us the clear awareness that God has forgiven us.



## Q: How do I go to confession?

**A:** One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church, must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his or her conscience (see the attached Examination of Conscience). The confession of venial faults is also strongly recommended by the Church. —CCC1493

### *The Simple Steps:*

- Enter the confessional. Once the priest makes the sign of the cross, the repentant says "Forgive me, Father for I have sinned. It has been insert number months since my last confession."
- The repentant confesses his or her sins.
- The priest will usually offer some guidance or encouragement. Then, he will assign an act of penance to the repentant and ask him or her to make an act of contrition.
- The repentant makes his or her act of contrition (see attached Act of Contrition).
- The priest absolves the repentant from their sins and sends him or her forth.
- The repentant does their act of penance and their sins are forgiven.

# EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

## **I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other Gods beside me.**

Did I fail to love God, to make Him first in my life, to thank Him, trust Him, love Him as He deserves? Did I fail to pray? Have I doubted or denied my faith? Was I careless in saying my prayers? Do I give God time everyday in prayer? Do I make a god out of my work, my possessions, or my image in the eyes of others so that these rule my life instead of God? Am I angry toward God because of illness or misfortune? Have I been involved with magic, horoscopes, Quija boards, or fortune telling?

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

Did I curse or swear? Did I use God's name in vain, lightly, carelessly, by blasphemy? Have I used foul language or jokes? In conversation, have I passively listened to slander and to jokes demeaning to the Church, or God's authority?

## **Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.**

Have I deliberately missed Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation? Did I leave Mass early without a good reason? Did I receive Holy Communion in the state of serious sin? Have I deliberately concealed something from the priest? Have I allowed myself to become so dominated by my work and chores that I have not set aside Sunday for my spiritual and family activities?

## **Honor your father and your mother.**

Did I honor and obey my parents? Did I respect my siblings? Did I respect others with lawful authority, especially teachers? Have I talked back? Did I fail to help at home or to spend time with my family? Do I blame my parents for my own faults?

## **You shall not kill.**

Did I give in to feelings of anger or jealousy? Did I keep hatred in my heart? Have I ever struck anyone in anger, intending to injure the person? Did I fight, give a bad example or cause scandal? Have I abused alcohol or drugs? Have I had or in any way permitted or encouraged abortion? Have I thought about suicide?

## **You shall not commit adultery.**

Did I consent to impure glances? Passionate kisses? Sinful touches? Did I give my mind over to lustful thoughts or fantasies? Was I immodest in dress or Behavior? Did I look at pornography, impure books, magazines or videos? Am I guilty of impurity with premarital sex adultery, contraception by pills, devices etc., or myself? Do I live chastely according to my state in life (married, single, ordained)? Do I avoid laziness, gluttony, idleness and the occasions of impurity?

## **You shall not steal.**

Have I stolen what is not mine? Did I return it or make up for what I have stolen? Have I cheated on tests or homework? Did I waste time at work? Have I written graffiti? Have I been extravagant in my manner of life, to the neglect of the poor at home and abroad?

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

Have I lied, gossiped? Talked about another behind their back? Do I always tell the truth? Am I sincere? Did I reveal secrets that should have been kept confidential? Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my talk? Have I injured the reputation of others by speaking about their failures and sins with little desire or intention to help them? Have I condoned prejudice and hatred toward people of other nationalities, races, or religions?

## **You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.**

Have I consented to impure thoughts? Have I encouraged them by stares, curiosity, or impure conversations? Did I neglect to control my imagination or desire of other people? Have I rejected my family in my heart, wishing to distance myself emotionally and personally from them?

## **You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.**

Is my heart greedy? Am I jealous of what another has? Am I envious of others because I don't have what they have? Do I habitually compare myself with others? Do I work, study and keep busy to counter idle thoughts? Am I critical, negative, or uncharitable in my thoughts of others? Is my heart set on earthly possessions or on the treasures in Heaven?

## **Act of Contrition**

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you,  
and I detest all my sins because of your just punishment,  
but most of all because they offend you, my God  
who is all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve  
with the help of your grace to sin no more, to do penance for my sins,  
and to avoid the near occasion of sin.

Amen.