

Guide to CONFESSION &
EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE
For Adults

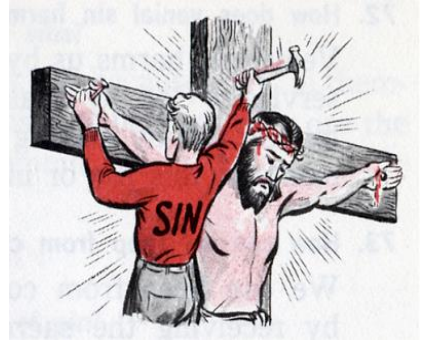


“Conduct yourself in holiness and devotion.”

2 Peter 3:11

What is sin?

Sin is the deliberate violation of God's law. Accidents are not sins, since they are not deliberate. All sins hurt our relationship with God. There are two kinds of sin: mortal and venial. **Mortal sin** is a serious offense against one of the Ten Commandments or Church precepts that destroys our friendship with God and separates us from Him. (1 John 5:16-17) For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be met: (1) it must be serious; (2) it must be done knowing that it is wrong; and (3) it must be done with full consent. If a sin does not meet all three criteria, it is called a venial sin. **Venial sin** harms our relationship with God but does not destroy it.



Who gave priests the authority to forgive sins?

Jesus did. Immediately after rising from the dead, Jesus appeared to the Apostles, who were the first priests, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (John 20:22-23) God gave us the Sacrament of Confession so that we could hear Him say, "You are forgiven" through the mouth of His priest and know that we are truly forgiven.

Do I have to confess all my sins?

To make a good Confession, you must tell the priest all the mortal sins you can remember, and how often you committed them. (You are not required to confess venial sins, but doing so will help you grow in holiness.) If you choose not to confess a serious sin, none of the sins you confess are forgiven, you remain in a "**state of mortal sin**," and you commit an additional sin of sacrilege (disrespecting God's sacraments). Some sins are embarrassing, and you might not want to tell them to anyone. But do not be afraid! Priests also sin and must confess their sins. They will not be shocked by anything you say, because they hear many confessions, and they are absolutely forbidden to reveal what is confessed – no exceptions. A priest would rather die than break the seal of Confession.

Examination of Conscience

To make a good confession, take some time with this guide to examine your conscience. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember your sins and to be truly sorry for them.

Preliminary questions: Begin by first asking yourself

- What weighs on my conscience? What sins do I especially regret?
- Have I avoided confessing a serious sin in past Confessions? Have I disguised or hidden any such sin, or have I lied about anything in Confession?
- Did I complete the penance given to me by the priest from my last Confession?
- Do I have habits of serious sin to confess first (missing Sunday Mass, impurity, drunkenness, etc.)?

Have I kept the 10 Commandments?

1st Commandment *I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods.* **Have I...**

- Put other priorities or pleasures before God (e.g., choosing to miss Sunday Mass for sports)?
- Rejected any teachings of God and of my Catholic faith (even if I may not understand them all)?
- Denied my Catholic faith in any way or avoided sharing it with others?
- Stopped believing that God exists? Despaired of God's forgiveness or taken it for granted?
- Believed in non-Christian doctrines (reincarnation, horoscopes, tarot cards, "Ouija" boards, etc.)?

2nd Commandment *You shall not take the Name of the Lord in vain. Have I...*

- Used God's name out of anger or carelessly? ("Oh my G - -" etc.)
- Spoken irreverently of God or of sacred things? Used lewd or foul words?
- Given scandal to the Church by what I said or did, especially to my friends?

3rd Commandment *Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. Have I...*

- Missed Mass on Sunday or a Holy Day of obligation?
- Done unnecessary work on Sunday, which is the Lord's Day and a day of rest?
- Required employees to work unnecessarily on a Sunday?
- Received Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?
- Failed to observe the fast before Mass (one hour before Holy Communion)?
- Eaten meat on a Friday of Lent? Failed to do some penance on other Fridays of the year?

4th Commandment *Honor your father and your mother. Have I...*

- Failed to love, respect, and obey my parents and other people in authority?
- Abused or neglected my children? Deserted my spouse or family?
- Neglected my relatives, the lonely, the homebound, or the elderly?
- Failed to pray for the dead? Failed to bury all the remains of the dead (including ALL ashes)?
- Failed to baptize my child within the first few weeks after birth?

5th Commandment *You shall not kill. Have I...*

- Killed or physically harmed anyone (including harming myself)? Considered or attempted suicide?
- Become unjustly angry, impatient, envious, or hateful? Engaged in race-based hatred?
- Had an abortion? Assisted or encouraged others to do so? Willingly voted for a person or supported an organization that promotes abortion? Taken part in or approved of euthanasia ("mercy killing")?
- Used artificial birth control (even in marriage)? Been sterilized or encouraged another to be?
- Employed immoral fertility methods (in vitro fertilization or surrogate motherhood)?
- Taken or sold illegal drugs? Gotten drunk or high? Driven under the influence of drugs or alcohol?
- Driven dangerously or recklessly? Texted while driving?
- Mistreated my body through excessive tattoos or piercings?

6th & 9th Commandments *You shall not commit adultery. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. Have I...*

- Not loved, honored, and obeyed my spouse as Christ loves his Church? (Ephesians 5:21-28)
- Masturbated? Viewed pornography or indecent media? Entertained impure thoughts?
- Engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage (including intimate kissing or touching)? Cohabited?
- Engaged in unnatural sexual activity (cross-dressing, homosexual acts, incest, polygamy, bestiality)?
- Divorced and remarried without an annulment? Married outside of the Church?
- Been overly preoccupied with my own image (vanity)? Intentionally dressed to incite lust?

7th & 10th Commandments *You shall not steal. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods. Have I....*

- Stolen or cheated? Encouraged others to do so? Failed to make amends for stolen goods?
- Envied others or their possessions? Failed to assist the poor or support the Church (e.g., tithing)?
- Willfully engaged in scams, frivolous lawsuits, etc.?

8th Commandment *You shall not bear false witness. Have I...*

- Lied? Gossiped? Unnecessarily revealed embarrassing information or sins of others?

How to go to Confession

1. Prepare yourself by reviewing the examination of conscience above.
2. When you come into the confessional, the priest will make the sign of the cross, and you should cross yourself, too.
3. Then say, **“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been _____ weeks/months/years since my last confession. Since that time I have committed these sins...”**
4. Tell the priest all the sins you can remember and how many times you have committed them. First tell him your serious (mortal) sins, then the lesser (venial) sins. If you are not sure about a sin, ask the priest about it. He may give you advice and may ask you some questions. Be as open as possible. The priest is there out of care and concern for you.
5. After you finish telling the priest your sins, say, **“For these and all the sins of my past, I am truly sorry.”**
6. The priest will then give you a penance to do. (For example, “Pray 3 Hail Marys.”) It is important to do the penance as soon as possible after leaving the confessional.
7. Then the priest will ask you to say the **Act of Contrition:**

O 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.

or you can use the shorter version:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner.

8. The priest absolves you from your sins, and you are FORGIVEN.
9. The priest says, “Go in peace.” You respond, **“Thanks be to God. Thank you, Father.”**
10. Remember to do your penance as soon as you leave the Confessional. Doing penance shows our true sorrow for our sins, and it helps to repair the damage done by them.

Parish of
Saints Joachim & Anne



and Shakopee Area
Catholic School

Images:

(Cover) “The Nativity,” window at the Church of St. Mark, Shakopee, photo by Jeremy McColm, used with permission.

(Inside) “Sin,” *St. Joseph Baltimore Catechism*, Official Revised Edition (Totowa, New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2011), p. 41.