

# The Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation

For those who are in the autumn of their life,  
who face a life-threatening disease or surgery,  
or who simply wish to make a thorough  
examination of conscience.



*“To those who have been far away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation and forgiving love I make this appeal: come back to this source of grace; do not be afraid! Christ is waiting for you. He will heal you and you will be at peace with God!”*  
Blessed Pope John Paul II

*“If we say, ‘We are without sin,’  
we deceive ourselves,  
and the truth is not in us.” 1 John 1:8*

## ***“Conversion requires convincing of sin.”***

Blessed Pope John Paul II

*“To do its work grace must uncover sin so as to convert our hearts.”* Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 1848

*“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 conscience.”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 1493

*“There is no offense, however serious,  
that the Church cannot forgive.*

*‘There is no one, however wicked and guilty,  
who may not confidently hope for forgiveness,  
provided his repentance is honest.*

*Christ who died for all men  
desires that in his Church  
the gates of forgiveness should always be open  
to anyone who turns away from sin.’”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 982

**Note:** This is intended as a thorough examination of conscience. If you have any questions or uncertainty about something when you examine your conscience, you should discuss it with the priest when you go to confession.

## Why Confession?

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, through confession of sins to a priest, is essential for those who are now in the autumn of their lives or who are in any danger of death. For it would be unwise for us to take any unconfessed grave sin with us to the next life, when the mercy of God is so readily available to us in this life, in this sacrament, given to us by Christ.

Let us be reconciled today, to God and his Church, while we yet have breath, so that we may enjoy the peace of a happy death. Tomorrow may be too late!

### **I can't think of any sins!**

The reality of our situation is not that we are without sin, but that we are not *aware* of our sins. For, Sacred Scripture assures us: “*All have sinned*” (Romans 3:23).

Blessed John Paul II often spoke of how the modern age has lost a “*sense of sin.*” Just as we can have cancer or another type of serious illness and not be aware of it, we can also have sin on our soul and live in a state of unawareness or even, denial. This is the same *spiritual blindness* that Jesus accused the Pharisees of having.

What is needed to insure our spiritual health is the same thing we do routinely to insure our physical health – an examination. We need to make a thorough examination of our conscience, at the very least, on an annual basis.

When we prepare to make an examination of conscience, we should remember that the standard, by which we

measure our lives, is not the holiness of our neighbor, but rather, the holiness of God.

*“You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Matthew 5:48

This raises the bar for us! When we reflect on the holiness and perfection of God, and compare our lives to His holiness, we become more aware of our own sinfulness. The contrary is also true:

*“The loss of the sense of sin is... a form or consequence of the denial of God.”* Blessed Pope John Paul II

Let us then examine our lives in the light of the commandments of God and his call to holiness.

Listen anew to these words of Jesus:

*“Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.”* Matthew 5:22

*“I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* Matthew 5:28

## **Why confess to a priest?**

The simple answer to this is that this is how Jesus set it up! When Jesus comes to meet us, to grant us his saving graces, it is not we who chose the time and the place. We must meet Jesus where he has asked us to meet him – in the sacraments. He took on flesh so that he might meet us in bodily form. He continues to do so in the sacraments, in things and people that we can see, hear, and touch.

## Why can't I just confess my sins to God?

When you confess your sins to a priest, you *are* confessing your sins to God. *The priest is merely the "meeting place" that God has established.* God comes to meet you in the person of the priest. Christ instituted this sacrament as the "meeting place" where he desires to grant you the forgiveness of sins. The priest, as minister of this sacrament, acts in the person of Jesus Christ. When the priest gives you absolution, it is God who is forgiving you.

God became Man so that his saving grace would be more readily available to us "in the flesh." Jesus took on flesh to make his grace more accessible for us in a tangible manner. Because we have bodies, and are not merely spiritual beings (like the angels), Jesus comes to us in *bodily* form. It is for our benefit that God has chosen to work through visible, tangible signs that we can see, hear, and touch.

Imagine what it would have been like if the apostles had told our Lord, "Why do we have to speak and talk to you in the flesh, when we can always speak to God the Father in the spirit?!" When God comes to us in the flesh, it is not for us to tell him that the means he has chosen to communicate with us is unacceptable. Jesus has chosen to communicate his graces to us through the sacraments, which are tangible, physical realities that communicate supernatural graces. It is not for us to tell God that we don't need for him to do this because we feel we are capable of getting these spiritual graces straight from him!

## **1. You shall not have other gods before Me.**

- \_\_\_ Is there any grave sin in my past (since I was baptized) that I have never confessed to a priest?
- \_\_\_ Have I made a bad confession by deliberately withholding or avoiding the confession of a mortal sin of which I was aware?
- \_\_\_ Have I received Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin? (Example: deliberately missing Mass on Sunday for no good reason, and then going to Holy Communion the next time I go to Mass, before going to confession.)
- \_\_\_ Have I neglected to prepare myself properly to receive Holy Communion? Received without reverence?
- \_\_\_ Have I neglected to make proper thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion?
- \_\_\_ Have I ever shown disrespect or indifference toward the Eucharist?
- \_\_\_ Have I been ungrateful to God for his benefits?
- \_\_\_ Have I loved God with my whole heart?
- \_\_\_ Have I sought to know & follow God's will for my life?
- \_\_\_ Do I lack peace of soul because I fail to trust in God?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed or been slow or reluctant to perform the duties required by my state in life with regard to my Catholic faith?
- \_\_\_ Have I prayed morning and evening?
- \_\_\_ When I pray, do I really raise my mind and heart to God or is it a matter of words only? Do I offer God my difficulties, my joys, and my sorrows? Do I turn to God in time of temptation?
- \_\_\_ Have I refused to accept any teaching of the Church?

- \_\_\_ Have I received Holy Communion in a state of rebellion against the teaching authority of the Church?
- \_\_\_ Have I received sacraments when I was unable to do so because of being in a marital relationship that is not considered valid by the Catholic Church?
- \_\_\_ Have I sought to nourish & protect my Catholic faith?
- \_\_\_ Have I practiced superstition or engaged in occult practices, such as: consulting mediums or horoscopes, palm reading, tarot cards, Ouija boards, séances, contacting or conjuring of the dead, magic or satanic rituals?
- \_\_\_ Have I belonged to or supported anti-Catholic organizations? Attended their meetings or gatherings?
- \_\_\_ Have I put my soul in danger by entertaining material that attacks the teachings of the Catholic Church in matters of faith or morals?
- \_\_\_ Have I inappropriately participated in a non-Catholic worship service (for example: receiving communion or professing different beliefs)?
- \_\_\_ Have I ever joined a non-Catholic church?
- \_\_\_ Have I damaged the faith of others by speaking ill of religion, the Church, her priests, ...?
- \_\_\_ Have I presumed on God's mercy, acting as if it is not necessary for me to turn away from serious sin in order to be saved?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to go to confession at least once a year?
- \_\_\_ Have I examined my conscience regularly & often?
- \_\_\_ Have I sought to grow in virtue and holiness of life?
- \_\_\_ Have I given in to the sin of despair, abandoning my hope in God's love for me and the promise of salvation for all those who turn to God with a sincere heart?

## **2. You shall not take the Name of the Lord Your God in vain.**

- \_\_\_ Have I spoken God's Name carelessly or in anger?
- \_\_\_ Have I been irreverent or disrespectful toward God?
- \_\_\_ Have I spoken about, or treated any sacred person, place or thing, with irreverence or disrespect?
- \_\_\_ Have I called down evil on anyone or anything?
- \_\_\_ Have I been a baptismal or confirmation sponsor in a non-Catholic ceremony?
- \_\_\_ Have I broken any promise(s) in which I invoked God's Name (oaths)?

## **3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.**

- \_\_\_ Have I failed to attend Mass on Sundays or holy days of obligation without a just cause (for example, serious illness or impassible roads)? How often?
- \_\_\_ Have I arrived at Mass after the Liturgy of the Word or left Mass early, without just cause?
- \_\_\_ Have I deliberately failed to pay attention at Mass?
- \_\_\_ Have I worn improper attire to Mass, or otherwise distracted others from paying attention at Mass?
- \_\_\_ Have I supported the Church by regularly contributing a portion of my earnings, according to my means?
- \_\_\_ Have I fasted (ages 18 to 59) and abstained from meat (age 14+) on the days appointed by the Church, except when prevented by health reasons?
- \_\_\_ Have I neglected my yearly Easter duty of receiving Holy Communion during the Easter season (between Easter and Trinity Sunday), going to Confession beforehand if needed?
- \_\_\_ Have I observed Sunday as a day of rest?

\_\_\_ Have I performed (or required others to perform) unnecessary labor on Sundays (not including church activities, charity work, labor as a public servant, hospital worker, necessary care of farm animals...)?

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

\_\_\_ Have I disobeyed my parents in my younger years, or been disrespectful toward them in other ways?

\_\_\_ Have I failed to express my love for my parents? Grandparents? Siblings? Spouse? Children?

\_\_\_ Have I failed to help my parents when they were unable to meet their basic needs? Did I care for them in their old age?

\_\_\_ Is there any broken relationship in my family for which I bear responsibility? What have I done to correct this?

\_\_\_ Have I neglected to pray daily for family members?

\_\_\_ Have I been a source of disunity in my family?

\_\_\_ Have I raised my children in the faith, having them baptized, confirmed, & educated in the Catholic faith?

\_\_\_ Did I train my children to practice their faith by taking them to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation?

\_\_\_ Did I train them by word and example to pray daily? To value their Catholic faith? To avail themselves of the sacrament of Confession on a regular basis? To be active in their parish, with time, talent and treasure?

\_\_\_ Have I encouraged my children to continue to practice their faith as they have grown up?

\_\_\_ Have I neglected my children's physical, spiritual, emotional, or educational needs?

- \_\_\_ Have I nursed angry feelings or resentment toward my parents or any family member?
- \_\_\_ Have I mistreated, belittled, or abused any family member?
- \_\_\_ Am I content with the blessings I have received from God in my family, or do I nurture a selfish or an unwholesome desire to be free of them?
- \_\_\_ Have I been responsible with regard to the financial concerns of my family?
- \_\_\_ Have I cared for my family as God would have me?
- \_\_\_ Have I kept all the precepts of Holy Mother Church?
- \_\_\_ Have I been a source of disunity in my parish family?
- \_\_\_ Have I disobeyed the lawful demands of my superiors, teachers, employers, or civil law?
- \_\_\_ Have I neglected my work or my studies?

## **5. You shall not kill.**

- \_\_\_ Have I murdered anyone?
- \_\_\_ Have I recommended, consented to, advised, or actively taken part in an abortion? Am I aware of Church teaching that abortion is a mortal sin, and that those who actively take part (ie.: doctor, nurse, mother, driver...) in an abortion are excommunicated? Am I aware that many forms of oral contraception include abortion inducing drugs (abortifacients)?
- \_\_\_ Have I killed anyone through neglect or carelessness?
- \_\_\_ Have I tried to commit suicide or entertained the idea?
- \_\_\_ Have I sought to hasten prematurely the death of someone in pain (Euthanasia) by removing ordinary care (like hydration and nutrition) or by deliberately increasing medication to a lethal dosage?

- \_\_\_ Have I used immoral fertility methods (such as, In Vitro Fertilization, or artificial insemination) to achieve pregnancy? Have I sought to know and understand the Church's teaching in this regard?
- \_\_\_ Have I endangered lives by reckless driving, driving under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or while texting?
- \_\_\_ Have I unjustly injured or done violence to anyone?
- \_\_\_ Have I wished serious harm on anyone?
- \_\_\_ Have I lost my temper or become unjustly angry at others?
- \_\_\_ Have I gotten drunk or intoxicated on alcohol or other substances?
- \_\_\_ Have I intentionally overindulged in food or drink (gluttony)?
- \_\_\_ Have I consented to a sterilization (vasectomy, tubal ligation, or medically unnecessary hysterectomy), encouraged others to do so, or participated in someone else's sterilization?
- \_\_\_ Have I practiced contraception or encouraged others to do so? Have I tried to understand Catholic teaching in this regard?
- \_\_\_ Have I participated in surrogate motherhood?
- \_\_\_ Have I mutilated myself or someone else?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to take proper care of my health?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to help someone in danger or in need?
- \_\_\_ Have I fulfilled my duty as a voting citizen to elect government officials, where possible, who uphold God's law, particularly with respect to the sanctity of human life from conception until natural death?
- \_\_\_ Have I tempted others to sin by my bad example, immodest dress, or sinful conversation?

- \_\_\_ Have I encouraged others to read or watch sinful materials or programs or to do sinful things?
- \_\_\_ Have I tried to make up for or repair any scandal (bad example) I may have given others?
- \_\_\_ Have I sought pardon of those I have offended?
- \_\_\_ Have I hated or nursed bad feelings (resentment) or refused forgiveness toward any person?
- \_\_\_ Have I attributed bad motives to others when I could not be certain of their motives?
- \_\_\_ Have I taken revenge or desired to take revenge?
- \_\_\_ Have I participated in gang violence or illegal gang activities?
- \_\_\_ Have I sold or distributed illegal drugs?
- \_\_\_ Have I picked fights with or quarreled with anyone?
- \_\_\_ Have I bullied, maliciously teased, or insulted others?
- \_\_\_ Have I endangered or harmed anyone by speech, actions, or carelessness?
- \_\_\_ Have I cooperated with another in committing a sin?
- \_\_\_ Have I stood by and done nothing when I could have prevented evil?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to report to appropriate authority actions that are harmful to the innocent or the community?

**6. You shall not commit adultery, and (9) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.**

- \_\_\_ Have I deliberately entertained impure thoughts?
- \_\_\_ Have I committed impure acts with myself (masturbation)?
- \_\_\_ Have I been involved in acts with someone other than my spouse which arouse sexual desires (such as inappropriate conversation, looks, necking, petting, passionate kissing, or prolonged embraces)?

- \_\_\_ Have I had sexual relations with a member of the opposite sex, when neither of us was married (fornication)?
- \_\_\_ Have I had sexual relations with a married person who is not my spouse (adultery)?
- \_\_\_ Have I committed impure acts with someone else, either of the opposite sex or the same sex (homosexual acts)?
- \_\_\_ Have I refused my spouse the marriage right without a good reason or made an unreasonable demand for it?
- \_\_\_ Have I contributed to the break-up of a marriage?
- \_\_\_ Have I entered into a marital relationship contrary to the laws of the Catholic Church?
- \_\_\_ Have I dated someone who is civilly divorced but still bound by a valid marriage?
- \_\_\_ Have I encouraged or supported a Catholic in getting married in a wedding not approved by the Church?
- \_\_\_ Have I joined in impure or vulgar conversations or jokes?
- \_\_\_ Have I placed myself in near occasions of sin, such as sensual dancing; sexually suggestive movies, plays, or reading material; immoral company or establishments; sharing of a room with a member of the opposite sex; being alone with a person with whom I have continually sinned, or deliberately taken them to a secluded place?
- \_\_\_ Have I neglected to dress modestly or to otherwise safeguard purity?
- \_\_\_ Have I willfully looked at immodest pictures, movies or websites?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to investigate beforehand if watching a particular movie, show or reading a particular book or magazine might be a source of temptation?

- \_\_\_ Have I given or encouraged immodest looks or glances?
- \_\_\_ Have I led others to commit the sins of immodesty or impurity? Specifically speaking, what were they?
- \_\_\_ Do I have improper or immoral friendships? Have I taken steps to break these friendships?
- \_\_\_ Have I engaged in immodest conduct or conversation with someone I am seriously thinking of marrying?
- \_\_\_ Have I tended to use this person as an object for my pleasure, rather than a person created in God's image and likeness whom God has placed in my life to respect and reverence?

**7. You shall not steal, and (10) You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.**

- \_\_\_ Have I stolen anything? What was it worth? Have I returned the stolen item or intend to return it?
- \_\_\_ Have I seriously entertained temptations to steal?
- \_\_\_ Have I cheated?
- \_\_\_ Have I helped anyone steal?
- \_\_\_ Have I smuggled goods?
- \_\_\_ Have I refused to seek the owner of property that I have found?
- \_\_\_ Have I damaged or been responsible for the damage of another person's property? What would be the cost of repairing or replacing it?
- \_\_\_ Have I been dishonest in business dealings?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to pay employees on time or a just amount?
- \_\_\_ Have I been dishonest in paying my taxes?
- \_\_\_ Have I caused harm to anyone in business dealings by means of fraud, deception, or coercion?

- \_\_\_ Have I bribed anyone or accepted a bribe?
- \_\_\_ Have I filed an unjust lawsuit or made unjust claims in a lawsuit?
- \_\_\_ Have I been irresponsible with the money or other means of wealth which God has entrusted to me?
- \_\_\_ Have I spent irresponsibly or beyond my means?
- \_\_\_ Have I been generous with the poor?
- \_\_\_ Have I measured my charity only by what others have given, instead of my ability to give and the need of others?
- \_\_\_ Have I been envious of the wealth or material goods of another person?
- \_\_\_ Do I take delight in other's misfortunes?
- \_\_\_ Have I honored my debts?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to return something I have borrowed?
- \_\_\_ Have I gambled excessively or irresponsibly?
- \_\_\_ Have I been lazy with respect to my employment, household chores, work, or studies?
- \_\_\_ Have I been greedy?
- \_\_\_ Have I indulged in self-pity?
- \_\_\_ Am I vain?
- \_\_\_ Have I placed too high a value on material goods?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to do my part to help those whom I know are truly needy?
- \_\_\_ Have I set my heart primarily on earthly pleasures and possessions, and not on the true treasures of Heaven?

## **8. You shall bear false witness.**

- \_\_\_ Have I lied deliberately? Under oath?
- \_\_\_ Have I broken vows or oaths?
- \_\_\_ Have I been dishonest?
- \_\_\_ Have I sworn to do something sinful or illegal?

- \_\_\_ Have I deliberately tried to overhear someone's confession?
- \_\_\_ Have I sought to make up for the damage caused by my lies?
- \_\_\_ Have I made rash judgments or harbored false suspicions about others?
- \_\_\_ Have I accused, slandered, or hastily judged others of wrongdoing without sufficient evidence?
- \_\_\_ Have I been guilty of detraction (that is, speaking about the faults of others without a good reason)?
- \_\_\_ Have I been guilty of calumny (that is, to falsely accuse someone of sinful conduct)?
- \_\_\_ Have I gossiped about another person?
- \_\_\_ Have I been excessively critical, negative, and uncharitable in my speech?
- \_\_\_ Have I boasted of my sins?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to honor the confidences or secrets entrusted to me by another? Have I revealed them to someone else without permission or without due or serious cause?
- \_\_\_ Have I failed to defend the good name or honor of others?
- \_\_\_ Have I betrayed someone's trust?

“There are no limits to the mercy of God, but anyone who deliberately refuses to accept his mercy by repenting, rejects the forgiveness of his sins and the salvation offered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>137</sup> Such hardness of heart can lead to final impenitence and eternal loss.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1864

## ***Conversation of the Merciful God with a Despairing Soul***

[An Excerpt from Saint Faustina's Diary]

**Jesus:** O soul steeped in darkness, do not despair. All is not yet lost. Come and confide in your God, who is love and mercy.

*But the soul, deaf even to this appeal, wraps itself in darkness.*

**Jesus:** My child, listen to the voice of your merciful Father.

In the soul arises this reply: "For me there is no mercy," *and it falls into greater darkness, a despair which is a foretaste of hell and makes it unable to draw near to God.*

Jesus calls to the soul a third time, but the soul remains deaf and blind, hardened and despairing. Then the mercy of God begins to exert itself, and, without any co-operation from the soul, God grants it final grace. If this too is spurned, God will leave the soul in this self-chosen disposition for eternity. This grace emerges from the merciful Heart of Jesus and gives the soul a special light by means of which the soul begins to understand God's effort; but conversion depends on its own will. The soul knows that this, for her, is final grace and, should it show even a flicker of good will, the mercy of God will accomplish the rest: My omnipotent mercy is active here. Happy the soul that takes advantage of this grace.

**Jesus:** What joy fills My Heart when you return to me. Because you are weak, I take you in My arms and carry you to the home of My Father.

**Soul** (as if awaking, asks fearfully): Is it possible that there yet is mercy for me?

**Jesus:** There is, My child. You have a special claim on My mercy. Let it act in your poor soul; let the rays of grace enter your soul; they bring with them light, warmth, and life.

**Soul:** But fear fills me at the thought of my sins, and this terrible fear moves me to doubt Your goodness.

**Jesus:** My child, all your *sins* have not wounded My Heart as painfully as your present lack of trust does— that after so many efforts of My love and mercy, you should still doubt My goodness.

**Soul:** O Lord, save me yourself, for I perish. Be my Savior. O Lord, I am unable to say anything more; my pitiful heart is torn asunder; but You, O Lord...

Jesus does not let the soul finish but, raising it from the ground, from the depths of its misery, he leads it into the recesses of His Heart where all its sins disappear instantly, consumed by the flames of love.

**Jesus:** Here, soul, are all the treasures of My Heart. Take everything you need from it.

## **Above all, we must avoid the sins of Presumption and Despair:**

“The first commandment is also concerned with sins against hope, namely, despair and presumption:

By *despair*, man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from God, for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins. Despair is contrary to God's goodness, to his justice - for the Lord is faithful to his promises - and to his mercy.

There are two kinds of *presumption*. Either man presumes upon his own capacities, (hoping to be able to save himself without help from on high), or he presumes upon God's almighty power or his mercy (hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit). “

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2091-2092

Let us not commit the sin of presumption by refusing to confess our sins to a priest, when a priest is available to us.

But whatever our situation, we should never despair of God's mercy, even if a priest might not be available to hear our confession. In the absence of a priest, pray these two simple prayers from your heart, with sorrow for your sins:

**Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner!**

**Jesus I trust in You!**

## Steps to a Make Good Confession

1. Carefully examine your conscience in the light of God's commandments.
2. Be sincerely sorry for your sins.
3. Make a firm resolution to not sin again and to avoid the near occasions of sin.
4. Confess your sins to the priest. All unconfessed mortal sins, of which you are aware, must be confessed by kind and number as best you can.
5. Say an Act of Contrition when asked to do so.
6. Receive absolution.
7. Do the penance the priest gives you.

### Suggested Dialogue

**Penitent** (*after the priest greets you*): Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been \_\_\_\_\_ since my last confession.

*Here state your sins, telling all unconfessed grave sins by kind and number. Priest gives counsel and penance.*

**Penitent says an Act of Contrition:**

**Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because they have offended Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.**

*Receive absolution*

**Priest:** Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

**Penitent:** His mercy endures forever.