

A Guide for Preparing to Make your Confession

“The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (*Book of Common Prayer*, pg 855). This mission is something that features very prominently in the life and ministry of Jesus. Often his encounters with people turned to the issue of sin and its forgiveness. This was a vital part of his healing ministry. Jesus “came into the world to save sinners” (*1 Tim 1:15*). He came to “heal the broken-hearted” (*Psa 147:3*).

Jesus personally released people from their sins by declaring their forgiveness in the name of God. Taking the reconciliation of a sinner to God to this personal level was a radical step. It often did not sit well with the religious establishment. Pharisees and scribes objected, saying, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God

alone?” (*Lk 5:21*). But Jesus insisted that he was right to do so as he is both God and man.

Often this was demonstrated to others through the power of healing. Jesus responded, “That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ . . . He said to the paralyzed man, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home’” (*Lk 5:24*).

When Jesus ascended into heaven, his desire was that this ministry of reconciliation would continue in his Church. St Paul made note of the same when he wrote, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (*2 Cor 5:18*).

This happens in various ways. First, by sharing the gospel, we extend the reconciling work of Christ throughout the world. Second, when we sin against others, we apologize and ask for forgiveness, being ready to forgive others who sin against us. St James exhorted the Church, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (*James 5:16*).

Third, we bring our faults to God and ask for his forgiveness. St John wrote, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us

our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8-9). Before he ascended into heaven, the risen Christ appeared to the apostles and imparted the final and most significant part of their ministry. He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (Jn 20:22-23).

The priests of the Church would continue the healing ministry of Jesus in this sacramental way, by absolving penitents of their sins. This is what we commonly call the practice of confession and absolution. The Prayer Book defines it this way: “Reconciliation of a Penitent, or Penance, is the rite in which those who repent of their sins may confess them to God in the presence of a priest, and receive the assurance of pardon and the grace of absolution.” That grace of absolution is fresh forgiveness—the application of Christ’s atonement anew in the life of an individual for the forgiveness of their sins.

The part of the person approaching this sacrament is repentance. True repentance has three elements:

1. **CONTRITION** or sorrow for sin. This can be obtained only at the foot of the Cross. We may not

have an emotion of sorrow, but when we see what our sins have done to Jesus, we shall be sorry.

2. CONFESSION of all known sin. This requires a careful examination of our conscience. We cannot confess our sins until we see how we look to the all-seeing eye of God.

3. SATISFACTION and AMENDMENT OF LIFE. We must intend to lead a new or better life. This intention is shown by our acceptance and performance of the penance imposed by the Priest in confession.

In order to repent, it is necessary to examine our lives in the light of conscience and the will of God revealed in the Scriptures to see where we have transgressed and for what we need to repent and ask forgiveness. Look through the following guide, based on the capital sins, to examine your conscience in the light of God's law.

Think of yourself as our heavenly Father's child, and of the wickedness of following Satan rather than your loving Father. Do not be in a hurry, and do not vex yourself because you cannot remember everything. Be honest with God and with yourself; this is all God asks of you.

Write down briefly what you remember of your sins. Don't try to depend on your memory. If there is any question you do not understand, let it alone, and go on to the next one.

Do not fret about your sins. Remember, you are trying to recall them in order that you may be forgiven, not that you may be condemned. "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, shall thou not despise" (*Ps 51:17*).

A Prayer before self-examination

Holy Spirit, Source of all light, Spirit of wisdom, of understanding and of knowledge, come to my assistance and enable me to make a good confession. Enlighten me, and help me now to know my sins as one day I shall be forced to recognize them before thy judgment seat. Bring to my mind the evil that I have done and the good which I have neglected. Permit me not to be blinded by self-love. Grant me, moreover, heartfelt sorrow for my transgressions, knowing how deeply they have wounded the loving Heart of my Heavenly Father; and help me to make a good confession that all stain of guilt may be washed away in the Precious Blood of my Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Self-Examination

From the Saint Augustine's Prayer Book: A Book of Devotion for Members of the Episcopal Church

PRIDE is putting self in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or of some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by him in a specific relationship to the rest of his creation.

Irreverence. Deliberate neglect of the worship of God every Sunday in his Church, or being content with a perfunctory participation in it. Disregard of other Holy Days or of additional opportunities for giving God honor. Failure to thank God or to express our gratitude adequately.

Disrespect for God or holy things by deliberately treating them, in thought, word or deed, in a profane, contemptuous or over-familiar manner. Use of holy things for personal advantage, or the attempt to bribe or placate God by religious practices or promises.

Sentimentality. Being satisfied with pious feelings and beautiful ceremonies without striving to obey God's will.

Presumption. Dependence on self rather than on

God, with the consequent neglect of the means of grace—sacraments and prayer. Dispensation of ourselves from ordinary duties on the grounds that we are superior persons. Satisfaction or complacency over our spiritual achievements. Refusal to avoid, when possible, immediate occasions of temptation. Preference for our own ideas, customs, schemes or techniques. Foolish optimism.

Failure to recognize our job as a divine vocation, or to offer our work to God. Unwillingness to surrender to and abide in Christ, to let him act in and through us. Failure to offer to God regularly in intercession the persons or causes that have, or should enlist our interest and support.

Distrust. Refusal to recognize God's wisdom, providence and love. Worry, anxiety, misgivings, scrupulosity, or perfectionism. Attempts to discern or control the future by spiritualism, astrology, fortune-telling or the like. Magic or superstition.

Over-sensitiveness. Expectation that others will dislike, reject or mistreat us; over-readiness so to interpret their attitude, or quickness to take offense. Unfounded suspicions.

Timidity in accepting responsibility, or cowardice in facing difficulty or suffering. Surrender to feelings

of depression, gloom, pessimism, discouragement, self-pity, or fear of death, instead of fighting to be brave, cheerful and hopeful.

Disobedience. Rejection of God's known will in favor of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of the legitimate (and therefore divinely ordained) laws, regulations or authority of the Church, state, husband, parents, teachers, etc.; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfill responsibilities or to consider the best interests of those under us.

Refusal to learn God's nature or will as revealed in Scripture, expounded in instructions or expert advice, or discernible through prayer, meditation or the reading of religious books. Absorption in our own affairs, leaving little time, energy or interest for the things of God.

Violation of confidence. Breaking of legitimate promises or contracts.

Irresponsibility. Treachery. Unnecessary disappointment of another, or the causing of shame or anxiety to those who love us.

Impenitence. Refusal to search out and face up to our sins, or to confess and admit them before God. Disregard of our sins or pretense that we are better

than we are. Self-justification or discounting our sins as insignificant, natural or inevitable. Self-righteous comparison of ourselves with others.

Refusal to accept just punishment or to make due reparation when possible. Deceit or lying to escape the consequences of our sins, or allowing another to suffer the blame for our faults. Overcompensation or attempts at self-reform or self-vengeance, to avoid surrender to God in humble penitence.

Shame (hurt pride), sorrow for ourselves because our sins make us less respectable than we like to think we are, or because we fear punishment or injury to our reputation, rather than sorrow for what sin is in the eyes of God. Refusal to admit we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can or would forgive our sins, or failure to use the means of getting assurance of his forgiveness when we need it. Unwillingness to forgive ourselves.

Vanity. Crediting to ourselves rather than to God our talents, abilities, insights, accomplishments, good works. Refusal to admit indebtedness to others, or adequately to express gratitude for their help. Hypocrisy. Pretense to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgments on others for faults

we excuse in ourselves.

Boasting, exaggeration, drawing attention to ourselves by talking too much, by claiming ability, wisdom, experience or influence we do not have, or by eccentric or ostentatious behavior. Undue concern over, or expenditure of time, money or energy on looks, dress, surroundings, etc., in order to impress others; or deliberate slovenliness for the same purpose. Seeking, desiring or relishing flattery or compliments.

Arrogance. Insisting that others conform to our wishes, recognize our leadership, accept our own estimate of our worth. Being overbearing, argumentative, opinionated, obstinate.

Snobbery. Pride over race, family, position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions.

ANGER is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person.

Resentment. Refusal to discern, accept or fulfill God's vocation. Dissatisfaction with the talents,

abilities or opportunities he has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint at the circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals of the blame for our maladjustment; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity or grumbling.

Pugnacity. Attack upon another in anger. Murder in deed or desire. Combativeness or nursing of grudges. Injury to another by striking, cursing or insulting him; or by damaging his reputation or property. Quarrelsomeness, bickering, contradiction, nagging, rudeness, or snubbing.

Retaliation. Vengeance for wrongs real or imagined, or the plotting thereof. Harsh or excessive punishment. Hostility, sullenness or rash judgment. Refusal to forgive, or to offer or accept reconciliation. Unwillingness to love, to do good to, or to pray for enemies. Boycotting or ostracizing another for selfish reasons. Spoiling others' pleasure by uncooperativeness or disdain, because we have not

got our way, or because we feel out of sorts or superior.

ENVY is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging his gifts and vocation to others.

Jealousy. Offense at the talents, success or good fortune of others. Selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or distress. Belittling others.

Malice. Ill-will, false accusations, slander, backbiting. Reading false motives into others' behavior. Initiation, collection or retailing of gossip. Arousing, fostering or organizing antagonism against others. Unnecessary criticism, even when true. Deliberate annoyance of others, teasing or bullying.

Contempt. Scorn of another's virtue, ability, shortcomings, or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. Ridicule of persons, institutions or ideals.

COVETOUSNESS is the refusal to respect the integrity of other creatures, expressed in the inordinate accumulation of material things; in the

use of other persons for our personal advantage; or in the quest for status, power or security at their expense.

Inordinate Ambition. Pursuit of status, power, influence, reputation, or possessions at the expense of the moral law, of other obligations, or of the rights of others. Ruthless or unfair competition. Putting self or family first. Conformity to standards we recognize as wrong or inadequate in order to get ahead. Conspiracy for self-advancement.

Domination. Seeking to use or possess others. Over-protection of children; refusal to correct or punish lest we lose their affection; insistence that they conform to our ideal for them contrary to their own vocation. Imposing our will on others by force, guile, whining, or refusal to cooperate. Over-readiness to advise or command; abuse of authority. Patronizing, pauperizing, putting others under a debt of gratitude, or considering ourselves ill-used when others' affection or compliance is not for sale. Respect of persons, favoritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth to fulfill duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked, because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the

favor or approval of others. Leading, tempting or encouraging another to sin.

Avarice. Inordinate pursuit of wealth or material things. Theft, dishonesty, misrepresentation, or sharing in stolen goods. Cheating in business, taxes, school or games. Making worldly success the goal of our life or the standard for judging others.

Prodigality. Waste of natural resources or personal possessions. Extravagance or living beyond our income, to impress others or to maintain status. Failure to pay

debts. Gambling more than we can afford to lose, or to win unearned profits. Unnecessary borrowing or carelessness with others' money. Expenditure on self of what is needed for the welfare of others.

Penuriousness. Undue protection of wealth or security. Selfish insistence on vested interests or on claimed rights. Refusal to support or help those who have a claim on us. Sponging on others. Stinginess. Failure to give due proportion of our income to Church and charity, or of our time and energy to good works. Failure to pay pledges promised to the Church or charities, when able to do so.

GLUTTONY is the overindulgence of natural

appetites for food and drink, and by extension the inordinate quest for pleasure or comfort.

Intemperance. Overindulgence in food, drink, smoking, or other physical pleasures. Fastidiousness, fussiness, demanding excessively high standards, or dilettantism. Condemnation of some material things or pleasures as evil in themselves, attempting to prohibit their use rather than their abuse.

Lack of Discipline. Negligence in keeping the days of fasting or abstinence, or failure to use other needed means of self-discipline. Neglect of bodily health—not getting sufficient rest, recreation, exercise, or wholesome nourishment. Failure to use or to cooperate with available medical care when ill. Use of sickness as a means of escape from responsibilities.

LUST is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us.

Unchastity. Violation of the Church's marriage laws. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfill the purpose of Holy Matrimony in the bringing forth and giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities or work involved.

Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence out side matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others.

Immodesty. Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress or actions; or in oneself by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting dirty stories.

Prudery. Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil in itself. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempt to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex.

Cruelty. Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals.

SLOTH is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service or sacrifice.

Laziness. Indolence in performing spiritual, mental or physical duties, or neglect of family, business or social obligations or courtesies. Procrastination of disliked tasks. Busyness or triviality to avoid more important commitments. Devotion of excessive time to rest, recreation, amusement, television, light reading or the like. Waste of employer's time, or shoddy or inadequate work.

Indifference. Unconcern over injustice to others, especially that caused by currently accepted social standards; or unmindfulness of the suffering of the world. Failure to become adequately informed on both sides of contemporary issues or on the Christian principles involved. Neglect of duties to state or community. Failure to provide adequately for, or to treat justly those in our employ. Ignoring of needy, lonely or unpopular persons in our own or the parish family, or in the neighborhood; or unwillingness to minister to them. Insufficient attention to the religious and other needs of our family. Failure to fulfill our obligation of Christian missionary witness, or to take a full and informed part in the effort to make the Church's unity and holiness a manifest reality on earth.

A Prayer After Self-Examination

My God, how great are my sins! Would that I had never offended thee. If by carelessness or ignorance I have forgotten anything in my self-examination, show it to me now that I may make a good confession; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of Contrition

My God, I cry unto thee with the prodigal: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But now, O God, give me true sorrow of heart for my many sins whereby I have grieved thee, and enable me to make a full confession to thy priest, that I may receive perfect remission of them, through thine infinite goodness. Amen.

⊕ God, I am sorry that I have sinned against thee who art all good. Forgive me for Jesus' sake, and I will try to sin no more. Amen.

⊕ God, I love thee with my whole heart and above all things and am heartily sorry that I have offended thee. May I never offend thee any more. O may I love thee without ceasing, and make it my delight to do in all things thy most holy will. Amen.

Confession

When your turn comes, kneel and say,
Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

The Priest says

The Lord be in thy heart and upon thy lips that thou mayest truly and humbly confess all thy sins: **U** In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. **Amen.**

The Penitent continues,

I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever-Virgin, to all the Saints, and to thee Father, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, by my fault, by my own fault, by my own most grievous fault; especially [since my last confession on _____] I confess . . .

Then, without exaggerating or extenuating the offenses of which you may be conscious, tell them, as if to God himself, with a humble, sorrowful, and contrite heart.

When you have finished telling your sins, say

For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy upon me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly ask pardon and forgiveness of God

and his Church, and I ask thee for, penance, counsel, and absolution.

Here the Priest may offer counsel, direction, and comfort.

The Priest then pronounces this absolution

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive you all your offenses; and by his authority committed to me, I absolve you from all your sins: **u** In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Priest may add other prayers and a blessing.

℣. The Lord has put away all thy sins.

℟. **Thanks be to God.**

The Priest concludes

Go in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.

Return to your place in the church and make a thanksgiving for your absolution.

I thank thee, my God, for giving me the forgiveness of my sins, through the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ my Savior. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy Name. Amen.

O most merciful God, who in forgiving our sins, rememberest them no more against us forever, accept my unworthy thanks for thy great goodness in blotting out my transgressions. Let the grace of this absolution strengthen and sustain me, and may the pitifulness of thy great mercy defend me evermore from all assaults of the enemy. Amen.

Then perform the penance the Priest assigned to you as follows:

Lord God, I desire to offer thee the penance which thou hast given me by the word of thy minister. It is as nothing compared to the sins which I have committed: nevertheless, I unite it to the sufferings of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and offer it as an act of adoration of thy divine majesty, of sorrow for my sins (especially _____), and of supplication for the virtues of _____.

Then say or do your penance.

Additional Prayers after Confession

My God, I resolve to show my thanks to thee for receiving me as thy forgiven child, by fighting against sin in the future. I resolve by thy grace to avoid what is wrong, to believe what is true, to do what is right, and to continue thy faithful soldier and servant unto my life's end. Amen.

May the holy Mother of God, my Guardian Angel, and my holy Patron, join with me in giving thanks unto the Lord for his great goodness, and loving-kindness, in pardoning mine iniquity. And may the eternal Father, of his boundless mercy and by the life and death of his dear Son, enable me to persevere unto the end, and die in his favor. Amen.

Appendix A: Other self-examination resources

The Decalogue

God spake these words, and said:

I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods but me.

Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them.

Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

Honor thy father and thy mother.

Thou shalt do no murder.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet.

The Precepts of the Church

It is expected that a faithful, regular Christian will:

1. Attend Mass on Sundays and other Principal Feasts, where possible.
2. Fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. Make a confession at least annually.
4. Receive Holy Communion annually during the Easter season.
5. Contribute to the ministry of the Church.
6. Abide by the laws of Christian marriage.

Ways of being an accessory or participant in the sins of another:

1. By counsel.
2. By command.
3. By consent.
4. By provocation.
5. By praise or flattery.
6. By concealment.
7. By partaking.
8. By silence.
9. By defense of the sin committed.

Appendix B: Considering some objections

1. I thought it was not required for Anglicans. Why do it? You are right to say that private confession is not required by any law or regulation in the ACNA, the Episcopal Church, or in the Church of England. It is also true that when you have a heart attack, you are not *required* to go to a hospital. However, is the question about requirement the right question to ask? Would it not be better to ask: Have I sinned? Would making a confession be pleasing to God? Would it help me grow in holiness? Is it the right thing to do? What would life be like if I were to be a regular penitent? There is no surer path to sinning less in the future than to taking account of your sins of the past with repentance and confession.

2. It is rather embarrassing to confess my sins to someone else. Why do it? You are right to say that it is embarrassing, and that is a good thing. It means that you have a sense of shame, which like pain in the body, is the conscience's way of telling you something is wrong in your soul. It also means there is great relief when we experience the grace of absolution.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that because of the joy that was before him (of obtaining our forgiveness and sharing a risen life with us), Jesus endured the agony and shame of the cross. Trust your priest—he has been there before as one who has knelt on the other side of the confessional, and he will be there again. He has a listening ear and a tender heart for you. One thing is certain, it will be all worth it to one day refuse a temptation and say, “Thank God I don’t have to tell anyone I did *that!*”

3. I might be treated differently by what I confess, or word might get out about it. Why do it? Private confession grew out of the Celtic monastic tradition. The thought was that people would be more willing to confess if what was said there stayed there. The Prayer Book states: “The content of a confession is not normally a matter of subsequent discussion. The secrecy of a confession is morally absolute for the confessor, and must under no circumstances be broken” (BCP, 447). If a priest divulges the content of a confession, he is defrocked and likely excommunicated. The screen also gives an added comfort of anonymity. And if people observe that you go to confession regularly, would they see it as an indication that you are a greater sinner, or would they

see it as a mark of humility?