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GUIDE TO THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE OR RECONCILIATION

The sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation is a sacrament of forgiveness, mercy, healing, and renewal. Through this sacrament, entrusted to the Church, God offers us the assured forgiveness of our sins and the strength to become more faithful followers of Jesus Christ. We approach the sacrament with a sincere sorrow for our sins and a desire to change. We leave the sacrament with the joy of repentance, gratitude for God's gift of forgiveness, and a resolution to move forward as more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Prepare for the sacrament by first praying for the grace of the Holy Spirit's enlightenment, so that you may truly know your need for God's forgiveness and acknowledge God's great and generous willingness to forgive you.

For example: *Holy Spirit, lead, guide and direct me as I reflect on my life and seek the forgiveness of my sins through the sacrament of Penance. Amen*

An Examination of Conscience: A Look at Your Life and Decisions

Love the Lord your God with all your mind, with all your heart, with all your strength...

- ✦ Have I kept the gift of faith in God? Have I tried to grow in my faith? Not worshipped anyone or anything but God?
- ✦ Do I trust in God? Have I allowed discouragement to take hold of me?
- ✦ Do I pray regularly? Do I thank God? Do I try to listen to God in prayer?
- ✦ Have I observed the Lord's Day by worshipping at Mass and resting from unnecessary work to pay attention to God and to my family?
- ✦ Have I respected God's holy name?

Love your neighbor as yourself...

- ✦ How have I extended love and respect to my family, my parents, my children, my friends, my community, and my nation?
- ✦ Have I respected life from conception to natural death? Done no harm to anyone? What about anger or resentments or endangering others or myself? Have I driven safely? Not intoxicated myself with drugs or alcohol? Tried to be a peacemaker?
- ✦ Have I respected God's gift of my sexuality? Reserved that gift's full expression to marriage and been open to generating new life? What about thoughts about others? Or acting out with them or with myself? Have I sought out indecent images? What about a general sense of respect for sexuality and reverence for this gift of God?
- ✦ Have I respected the goods of others? Not taken anything nor damaged anything? Worked honestly and justly compensated those who worked for me? Upheld principles of justice? Have I respected world and its environment as God's gift?
- ✦ Have I respected the truth by not lying and not damaging the reputation of others?
- ✦ Have I been respectful of others and what they have in my thoughts or have lust, envy, and jealousy held a grip on me?

- ✦ Have I cared for those in need through outreach and support? Have I been a merciful and compassionate presence in this world? Have I contributed to the common good of the society in which I live?

In Confession, begin by saying:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was...

These are my sins... Make your confession of sins. Feel free to ask for help from the priest. Receive your penance from him.

Pray an act of contrition, a prayer of sorrow and repentance. Speak from your heart or recite the formal prayer below:

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 resolve with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.

Amen.

Afterwards, do your penance, which may be a prayer or an action that the priest offers to you. Your penance is a sign to yourself and to God of your willingness to change and to repair whatever damage you may have done to yourself or others. Finally, thank God for the gift of his mercy and forgiveness.