

Coming Clean: Why we need to tell our sins

Why should we go to confession? When we were baptized, God completely forgave all our sins. Because of this, we have access to Communion with God and we are members of His Body, the Church. When we turn away from God by committing a serious sin, we break this union and damage our relationship with God. It must be restored before we can return to Communion. We need to go to confession to restore our relationship with God, with the people who make up the Body of Christ and with ourselves. We also go to confession to strengthen us in our struggle against our tendencies toward sin that keep us from growing closer to God. Even though we were freed from sin through baptism, we need God's continuing help to grow in our faith and our relationship with God.

What is sin? We sin when we think, do or say things that damage our relationship with God, with other people or with ourselves. The Byzantine Church does not focus on categorizing sins as venial and mortal. We open ourselves to God with all our sins and weaknesses realizing that any sin offends God's goodness and severs, in some way, the bond of love between us.

Why do we confess to a priest? Our priest stands before us as the sign of the truth and grace of God. He has been given to us to help us. He hears our confession in Christ's place and he forgives us in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When we go to our priest to confess, we are going to God. We are confessing to God, not the priest. The priest's role is not that of a judge. He is a witness, a healer and a counselor.

He reminds us of God's mercy and love. He instructs, encourages and guides us towards living a fuller Christian life. He prescribes a penance, not as a punishment, but as a way for us to be purified and consoled.

How often should I go to confession? We are encouraged to confess our sins whenever we realize that we have seriously strayed from the Lord's way, but at least once per year. Because we receive so much grace from this mystery, it is a shame not to take advantage of it when it is available to us.

How should I prepare for confession?

1. Pray that the Holy Spirit guide you as you prepare for this mystery.
2. Give thanks to God for the many gifts and graces you have received.
3. Examine your conscience using a prepared examination of conscience or by reviewing how you have acted toward all people, creatures, and creation, what you have talked about and what you have neglected to do.
4. If you have done any good, give the thanks and glory to God. Pray that you will be strengthened and that you will continue to do good.
5. If you have done anything sinful, i.e. anything to damage or strain your relationship with God or others, admit that this comes from you and your weakness, from bad habits and a weak will. Repent (express sorrow and have the intention of not doing these things again) and pray for forgiveness. To participate in this mystery, you must be sorry for your sins and you must have a change of heart. You must decide that you will avoid these sins in the future as well as the people, places and things that prompted you to sin in the first place.
6. Resolve to ask forgiveness of anyone you may have offended by these actions.

Examination of Conscience for Adults

MY FAITH:

- Does God take first place in my life?
- Do I spend time each day with God, praying and asking God to strengthen my faith?
- Do I actively and whole-heartedly worship God each Sunday and Holy Day, or do I place more value on work, sports or other commitments?
- Do I arrive at church late and/or leave early?
- Do I avoid doing unnecessary work and shopping on Sunday?
- Do I try to make Sunday a family day and day of rest?
- Do I remember God's goodness and the gifts He has given me – my faith, my family, my health, my mind, and my friends?
- Do I misuse God's Holy Name through vulgar speech?
- Have I truly accepted Jesus as my Saviour and the Church as the means to eternal salvation?
- Do I stand up for my faith and for those in positions of faith leadership, or do I join in negative criticism?
- Have I made an effort to inform my conscience, to educate myself about the teachings of the Church?
- Have I denied or been ashamed of being Catholic?
- Have I been involved with the occult or superstitious practices?
- Have I been responsible in my use and care of the earth and its resources?
- Have I ever received Holy Communion while my relationship with God has been damaged by serious sin?
- Have I withheld or covered up my sins in confession?

MY FAMILY:

- Do I communicate respectfully with my parents, always speaking the truth?
- Do I thank my parents for their goodness and concern?
- Have I neglected my duties to my spouse and children?
- Am I helpful in keeping peace and harmony in my family?
- Have I been a good religious example to my family?
- Have I neglected my children's spiritual upbringing?
- Have I failed to take my children to worship at church each Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation?
- Do I care for my aged and infirm relatives?
- Do I do anything to excess (gamble, work, drink...) that would deny my family their needs, either material or emotional?

MY FRIENDS, OTHERS AND SELF:

- Do I respect those in authority (priests, sisters, law enforcement, teachers, government, supervisors, etc)?
- Do I take my job seriously?
- Do I apologize quickly when I have wronged someone?
- Do I forgive quickly when I have been wronged?
- Am I selfish with my time, my things, and my talents?
- Am I too focused on material things?
- Do I share my time, my talent, my treasure with those less fortunate?
- Am I always truthful and honest in what I say?
- Am I jealous or envious of others' possessions, talents, or achievements?
- Do I hurt others by spreading rumours or speaking unkindly?
- Have I led others into sin by my bad example?
- Do I abuse my health or the health of others by the misuse of drugs or alcohol?
- Have I planned to or broken the law by using drugs?
- Have I driven under the influence of chemicals?
- Do I respect the gift of purity in myself and my spouse?
- Do I dress modestly?
- Am I preoccupied with myself by giving into masturbation or pornography?
- Am I lustful in my thoughts, words or actions?
- Have I been reckless with my choice of books, movies, internet and music?
- Has each sexual act in my marriage been open to the transmission of new life?
- Have I participated in homosexual activity?
- Have I been unfaithful to my spouse in thought, word or deed?
- Have I practiced any form of artificial birth control or contraception?
- Have I been sterilized for reasons of birth control?
- Have I damaged or stolen property?
- Have I cheated anyone?
- Have I destroyed human life by assisting or encouraging in any way with an abortion?
- Have I deliberately harmed anyone or wished them harm?
- Have I harmed myself?
- Has anything I have said or done caused another to sin?
- Am I trying to grow in awareness of God's call in my life?
- Am I resentful or bitter about where I am in life?

How to Celebrate the Mystery of Repentance

After you have prepared for your confession, go to the confessional:

Penitent: (+)In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Glory to Jesus Christ! (Slava Isusu Khrystu!) I confess to Almighty God, one in the Holy Trinity, to Mary the Mother of God, to all the saints, and to you, Father, all my sins.

Tell your sins to the priest. Remember to make a full and honest confession. Everything you say is confidential. You may choose to list your sins or to talk about where you are struggling in your life. Don't make excuses. Don't try to disguise or minimize. Let go of your pride. When you are finished say: **These are all the sins I remember. I am truly sorry for all my sins.**

Father will speak to you, giving you advice and guidance. He will give you a penance. When he is finished he will ask you to make your act of contrition while he absolves you through the power of Christ. Know, with certainty, that at this time, God is forgiving you, healing you and giving you strength to become like Jesus:

(+) God, be merciful to me a sinner.

(+) God cleanse me of my sins and have mercy on me.

(+) I have sinned without number, forgive me, O Lord.

The priest will dismiss you with a blessing. Try to spend some time in prayer, thanking God for his love and mercy. Perform the penance as soon as possible.

The Mystery of Repentance A Ukrainian Catholic Guide to Confession For Adults

“Confession is an act of honesty and courage – an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God. It is an act of the prodigal son who returns to his Father and is welcomed by him with the kiss of peace... To all the young people of the Church, I extend a special invitation to receive Christ's forgiveness and his strength in the Sacrament of Penance. It is a mark of greatness to be able to say: I have made a mistake; I have sinned. Father, I have offended you; my God, I am sorry; I ask for pardon; I will try again, because I rely on your strength and I believe in your love.” (John Paul II)



Behold, my child, Christ stands here invisibly and receives your confession. Therefore do not be ashamed, do not be afraid, hide nothing from Him; but tell Him without hesitation all the things you have done, and so you shall have pardon from our Lord Jesus Christ.