

## Sacrament of Reconciliation and Growing closer to God

### **Preparation**

If you are reading this, you are likely interested in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). Let us take a moment to pause and rejoice with God who has brought you to this point in your spiritual path! God takes great joy in your spiritual journey and tells us that there is more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents, than over 99 righteous persons (Luke 15:7). Let us also thank Him for giving you the grace to approach this sacrament and ask the Holy Spirit to bring this process to perfect completion -- for we can do nothing without God's grace.

### **Examination of Conscience**

The next step to make an *examination of conscience*. When we do this, we examine how we have lived our lives according to what the Gospel teaches us. We should begin with the Ten Commandments. We may also look to *The Beatitudes* which give us an image not merely of the sins we should avoid, but also the virtues we should aspire to. Virtues also include humility, kindness, love, and many more.

### **Contrition**

We must come to this sacrament with a truly repentant heart, wishing to be changed and renewed. We must bring what is called *contrition*. Contrition is defined as a "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1451*). In other words, we acknowledge that what we have done is wrong before God, and we desire to rectify this. We seek mercy from God, as well as grace from the Holy Spirit, so that we may not only be forgiven, but also strengthened in the future. We resolve to not commit these sins again and to restore the damage they have caused. We acknowledge that all of this is possible only with God and we come to Him in this sacrament, trusting in His infinite love and power to make all of this possible. Since we resolve to love God with our whole heart, we must repent with our whole heart. When we ask God for the strength to turn away from sins and to not commit them in the future, we ask for this grace in such a way that we want the Holy Spirit to make us firm in this resolution whatever the cost. We acknowledge sin as the greatest of all evils and ask for the grace to resist it regardless of what difficult circumstances may present themselves.

### **Confession**

Having prepared in this way, we are supposed to confess in this Sacrament *all our mortal sins in number and kind (canon 988 section 1)*. That is, we must name the sin and share our best guess of how many times we've committed it. While it may only be possible for us to remember an approximate number, we should be as precise as we

can. Mortal sins are (a) serious matter (they break any of the ten commandments - except in an *extremely* minor way), (b) committed with full knowledge of how sinful they are, and (c) committed intentionally. To go to Heaven, we must repent of all mortal sins before our death. To withhold any mortal sins in confession, or to deliberately avoid confessing them, is itself a very serious sin. You can confess any venial sins as well, but the *mortal* sins are the ones that God especially wants us to confess.

### **Afterwards**

When all this is done you will receive absolution through the priest. God has pardoned your sins and they are no more! You now complete the penance the priest has given you, and if there is any direct harm caused by your sins you are supposed to try to undo such harm as best you can. For example, if you had stolen something, you must now return the stolen good. If this is not possible due to particular circumstances, ask the priest to help you find a suitable way of restoring what was lost or making restitution.

### **Daily Spiritual Practices to grow closer to God**

You might wonder, how can I get closer to God? Think about making a daily *morning offering* – here is a simple one you could pray each morning. “O God, I offer you this day, with all of its parts, through Mary’s Immaculate Heart, for all the needs of the Church and the world. Guide and bless my day. Use me as you will today!” Read the Bible every day – especially some part of the New Testament (especially the Gospels). Try to pray at least part of the rosary every day. Do some spiritual reading each day – something from the writings of the saints, or other great spiritual classics. Go to daily Mass if you can, perhaps even just once extra a week in addition to the Sunday Mass we are required to attend (Saturday evening counts too). Spend time in Eucharistic adoration in front of Jesus who loves you and seeks to heal you. Pray to your guardian angel each day, and ask them to help you. Try being involved in your parish. Pray together as a family (even a simple *Our Father* or 3 *Hail Mary*’s before bed), perhaps going around in a circle where each person thanks God for one thing, and then each person asks God for one thing. Adapt this as works best for you and your family. Perhaps before going to bed, you could talk to God from the heart about your day, and do an examination of conscience – looking at how well you followed God, and how you can follow Him better in the future. “God please show me how you see this day - is there anything you want me to see?” Consider having holy and blessed items around your home, making time for solitary prayer each day, and if it helps you, journal with God about your life. May God continue to draw you close to Himself!