

PREPARING FOR YOUR CONFESSION



A BRIEF INTRODUCTION



SAINT JOHN'S IN THE VILLAGE

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PREPARING FOR CONFESSION

PERHAPS THE WORST PART OF MAKING A CONFESSION IS THE PREPARATION. We focus on all the things we think are wrong with us, we focus on sins, we focus on shame or guilt, we focus on consequences, or what the confessor will think of us. With all that negativity, in all likelihood, we will give up on the confession and possibly even ourselves. The proper emphasis in preparation is on our sustaining relationship with God, who will never abandon us, loves us unreservedly, and is closer to us than our own souls. Our preparation focusing on that relationship and God's infinite holiness and love will, obviously, make us reflect upon where it is we have fallen short in the relationship. However, *we must focus not on the sin, but on the virtue that is missing.* And then we can sort out *why* we have erred or sinned.

IT IS IN THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US THAT WE BEGIN to ask ourselves why and how we have not lived toward that Love and that relationship. And, of course, when we are in relationship with God, we are equally in relationship with all his creation, which includes those bothersome people we find so objectionable, but whom he loves every bit as much as ourselves. We also remember that the people we do love so much are also in relationship with God, and when we let them down in some way, we also have compromised our relationship with God. And so, ask yourself what you have done- in thought, word, or deed -which has disrupted or distorted your relationship with God, a person, or group of people, or some aspect of God's creation. Write these things down, all of them that you can remember. Reflect on why these things have happened. What are the virtues that, had they been lived, would have prevented this?

WHEN IT IS TIME TO MAKE YOUR CONFESSION, use Form One (BCP page 447) if you habitually make your confession. Use Form Two (BCP page 449) if this is your first confession, or if it has been very long since your last confession. In either case, mention how long it has been since your last confession. If this is your first, say, "This is my first confession since my Baptism." Confess your sins simply, accurately, and with a penitent heart. Use your list. No one is there to judge you- certainly not the confessor. You have come to be forgiven, and if you are penitent and intend to change your ways, you most certainly are forgiven already. Hear and accept the counsel, and then the absolution, which the priest pronounces in God's Name. Accept the penance assigned as a mere token and promise of amendment of life. Pray for your confessor, who is an equally sinful person, and who knows this only too well. Then, go in peace to love and serve the Lord. When home, joyfully burn the list that you made of your former sins.

BELOW ARE SOME TOOLS that can be helpful in assessing your relationship to God, your neighbour and creation. Reflect on what they mean for your relationships. Compare your life to a life reflecting:

The Baptismal Covenant. *(Adapted from the BCP)*

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. *(In what follows, if you find that you have not done so, be very specific: in what way[s] have you not?)*

Have you continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

Have you continued to resist evil, and, whenever you have fallen into sin, repented and returned to the Lord?

Have you proclaimed by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Have you sought and served Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

Have you striven for justice and peace among all people, and respected the dignity of every human being?

The Decalogue. *(Have I kept these?)*

I. 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.

II. 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.

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

IV. Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

V. Honour thy father and thy mother.

VI. Thou shalt do no murder.

VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VIII. Thou shalt not steal.

IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

X. Thou shalt not covet.

The Litany of Penitence. *(Adapted from the BCP)*

(If I find things here that resonate with my life, what virtues must be missing, and why?)

Most holy and merciful Father: We confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ.

We have grieved your Holy Spirit.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people,

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbours, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us.

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us; favourably hear us, for your mercy is great.

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation, that we may show forth your glory in the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son our Lord, bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.

These are good Reminders for a living Christian Life:

The Beatitudes. *(The Christian elucidation of The Decalogue)*

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

7. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

8. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.

9. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

10. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

The Theological Virtues. *(Do I understand and live in these?)*

Faith. Hope. Charity.

The Cardinal Virtues. *(Do I understand and live in these?)*

Prudence. Justice. Temperance. Fortitude.

The Christian Duties. *(Do I understand and do these?)*

Prayer. Fasting. Almsgiving.

The Ecclesiastical Duties. *(Do I understand and do these?)*

To keep the Festivals and Fasts of the Church.

To observe the discipline, customs, and ceremonies of the Church.

To attend public worship and receive the Holy Communion.

The Godly Virtues.

(Do I understand and live in these?)

Humility.

Forgiveness.

Generosity.

Purity.

Love.

Temperance.

Diligence.

The Capital Sins.

(Do I understand and avoid these? Have I lived these?)

Pride.

Anger.

Covetousness.

Lust.

Envy.

Gluttony.

Sloth.

The Spiritual Works of Mercy. *(Do I understand and do these? Have I chosen not to do these?)*

To instruct the ignorant.	To endure injury.
To counsel the doubtful.	To forgive wrong.
To correct offenders.	To pray for others.
To comfort the afflicted.	

The Corporal Works of Mercy. *(Do I understand and do these? Have I chosen not to do these?)*

To feed the hungry.	To visit the sick.
To clothe the naked.	To help prisoners.
To shelter the stranger.	To bury the dead.
To visit the widows and orphaned.	

Ways of Sharing in the Sins of Others. *(Do I understand and do these? How?)*

By evil counsel.	By command.	By defence.
By provocation.	By silence.	By praise.
By concealment.	By flattery.	By consent.

The Stages of Sin. *(Do I see these in my life? You won't be able to see the seventh one!)*

1. Suggestion.
2. Pleasure.
3. Consent.
4. Act.
5. Habit
6. Slavery
7. Spiritual blindness

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit. *(Do I experience these in my life?)*

The Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding.
The Spirit of Counsel and Spiritual Strength.
The Spirit of Knowledge and True Godliness.
The Spirit of Holy Fear.

The Fruits of the Holy Spirit. *(Do I see these in my life?)*

Love.	Gentleness.	Patience.
Joy.	Goodness.	Modesty.
Peace.	Truth.	Temperance.
Longsuffering.	Meekness.	Chastity

The Four Last Things. *(Have I contemplated these things?)*

Death. Judgement. Heaven. Hell.

The Sacraments of the Church.

(As sure and certain means of grace, do I avail myself of these when appropriate? If not, why not?)

Of Christ's Command: Holy Baptism. Holy Communion.

Of the Holy Spirit's inspiration: Holy Absolution. Holy Confirmation. Holy Matrimony.
Holy Orders. Holy Unction.



"Now when it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: Peace be to you. And when he had said this, he shewed them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord. He said therefore to them again: Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." ...John 20:19-23

For those who desire an old-fashioned, thorough-going, no-holds-barred, let's-get-to-the-sin examination, well, the following might be helpful:

A Self-Examination

Adapted from Saint Augustine's Prayer Book, Holy Cross Publications, First Edition, 1947

Before self-examination say this prayer:

O 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 Your judgment seat. Bring to mind the evil which 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 Saviour Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Think of yourself as God's child, born in his Image, and of the futility of following ways contrary to the image of you which is revealed in your loving Father and his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. 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. 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 God, shalt thou not despise."

PRIDE is putting self in the place of God as the centre 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 honour. 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 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 abide in Christ, to let him act in and through us. Failure to offer 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 favour of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of the legitimate laws, regulations or authority of the church, state, parents, teachers, etc.; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfill responsibilities or 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 them or admit them before God. Disregard of our sins or pretence 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 that we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can 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. Pretence to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgment 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 behaviour. 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 insult or injury to our person.

Resentment. Refusal to discern, accept or fulfil 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 behaviour.

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 ostracising 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 vocations to others.

Jealousy. Offence 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' behaviour. Initiation, collection or re-telling 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. Intrigue or 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, favouritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth to fulfil duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked, because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the favour 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 or 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 or 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, debasing it from the holy purposes 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. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual promiscuity, in thought or act. Neglecting in Christian marriage to reflect to the world the faithful love in the union between Christ and his Church.

Immodesty. Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress, or actions; or in one's self by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting salacious 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, 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 neighbourhood; or unwillingness to minister to them. Insufficient attention to the religious and other needs of our family. Failure to fulfil our obligation of Christian missionary witness, or to take a full and informed part to make the church's unity and holiness a manifest reality on earth.

Prayer After Self-Examination

O my God, how many 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 make a good confession, and thereby be restored to full communion with thee, my neighbour, thy Church, and all of thy holy creation. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



HAVE mercy upon me, O God, after thy great goodness; * according to the multitude of thy mercies do away mine offences.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, * and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my faults, * and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; * that thou mightest be justified in thy saying, and clear when thou shalt judge.

5 Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, * and in sin hath my mother conceived me.

6 But lo, thou requirest truth in the inward parts, * and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly.

7 Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; *
thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness, * that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Turn thy face from my sins, * and put out all my mis-deeds.

10 Make me a clean heart, O God, * and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence, * and take not thy holy Spirit from me.

12 O give me the comfort of thy help again, * and stablish me with thy free Spirit.

13 Then shall I teach thy ways unto the wicked, * and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou that art the God of my health; *
and my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness.

15 Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord, * and my mouth shall show thy praise.

16 For thou desirest no sacrifice, else would I give it thee; * but thou delightest not in burnt-offerings.

17 The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: * a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise. ...Psalm 51