

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 15

CONFESSION OR THE RECONCILIATION OF PENITENTS

http://www.stvincentscathedral.org/page/basic_christianity_course_document_files

INTRODUCTION

Revised 7/1/15

The Book of Common Prayer, 1979, page 316

An Exhortation

This Exhortation may be used, in whole or in part, either during the Liturgy or at other times. In the absence of a deacon or priest, this Exhortation may be read by a lay person. The people stand or sit.

Beloved in the Lord: Our Savior Christ, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood as a sign and pledge of his love, for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of his death, and for a spiritual sharing in his risen life. For in these holy Mysteries we are made one with Christ, and Christ with us; we are made one body in him, and members one of another. Having in mind, therefore, his great love for us,

and in obedience to his command, his Church renders to Almighty God our heavenly Father never-ending thanks for the creation of the world, for his continual providence over us, for his love for all mankind, and for the redemption of the world by our Savior Christ, who took upon himself our flesh, and humbled himself even to death on the cross, that he might make us the children of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, and exalt us to everlasting life.

But if we are to share rightly in the celebration of those holy Mysteries, and be nourished by that spiritual Food, we must remember the dignity of that holy Sacrament. I therefore call upon you to consider how Saint Paul exhorts all persons to prepare themselves carefully before eating of that Bread and drinking of that Cup.

For, as the benefit is great, if with penitent hearts and living faith we receive the holy Sacrament, so is the danger great, if we receive it improperly, not recognizing the Lord's Body. Judge yourselves, therefore, lest you be judged by the Lord.

Examine your lives and conduct by the rule of God's commandments, that you may perceive wherein you have offended in what you have done or left undone, whether in thought, word, or deed. And acknowledge your sins before Almighty God, with full purpose of amendment of life, being ready to make restitution for all injuries and wrongs done by you to others; and also being ready to forgive those who have offended you, in order that you yourselves may be forgiven. And then, being reconciled with one another, come to the banquet of that most heavenly Food.

And if, in your preparation, you need help and counsel, then go and open your grief to a

discreet and understanding priest, and confess your sins, that you may receive the benefit of absolution, and spiritual counsel and advice; to the removal of scruple and doubt, the assurance of pardon, and the strengthening of your faith.

To Christ our Lord who loves us, and washed us in his own blood, and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory in the Church evermore. Through him let us offer continually the sacrifice of praise, which is our bounden duty and service, and, with faith in him, come boldly before the throne of grace [and humbly confess our sins to Almighty God].

The Church is a community. What makes it a community is that it has an overriding purpose which is more important to its members than anything else. If that were not true it would be only an organization, and in time would self-destruct.

The overriding purpose of the Church is the worship of God. The worship of God means that we love him and we love each other. This is the commandment, the assigned purpose, which Jesus gives the Church: “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.” [St. John 5:17]

We receive whatever identity we have from the community(s) to which we belong, for good or for ill. The community’s rejection of a person can destroy him.

At his baptism Jesus deliberately unites himself with his sinful people in order to take on their burden of sin. As St. Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” [II Cor. 5:21]

Baptism means death and resurrection. At his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness and he rejected the identity which the world was trying to give him. He came out of the wilderness with that identity intact which he already had by virtue of participation in the heavenly community of the Holy Trinity.

At our own baptisms we reject the same false identity which he rejected, and we enter into the community of heaven. We receive a new identity. Jesus’ identity becomes our identity. We take on the purpose of the new community — the love of God and the love of neighbor. We cannot do the one without the other.

Whenever we stop trying to do both, or either, by that act we fall out of the community. We fall out of the community, because we have abandoned the common purpose which makes it a community.

Sin separates me, and you, from the community of faith, even if only God and I know that I have sinned. So the rubric on page 409 of the 1979 Prayer book says:

“If the priest knows that a person who is living a notoriously evil life intends to come to communion, the priest shall speak to that person privately, and tell him that he may not come to the Holy Table until he has given clear proof of repentance and amendment of life . . .”
[cf BCP 1928, p. 84f]

Furthermore, as St. Paul tells us, to eat and drink at the Lord's table unworthily is to eat and drink damnation to ourselves. [I Cor. 11:27-32] So excommunication is really to protect the sinner and to raise his consciousness to the seriousness of his state — to the fact that he has rejected the community and God.

In a sense, God cannot forgive a sinner — cannot remove the barrier — if the sinner is not repentant. Because sin is not the breaking of a law but the breaking of a comradeship: “You are my friends if you do what I command you... to love one another.” [St. John 15:14, 17]

The penalty for sin is isolation, because sin is choosing to be outside. God's punishment is to let us have what we choose. The cure for isolation is to get back inside the community—to knock on the door and say, “Can I come back in? It's cold out here!”

But if the sin was not obvious to other people, perhaps no one but you will realize that you are outside.

To come back in requires nothing more than to ask. But even the asking is like dying, like being baptized all over again.

One does not have to be a saint to be admitted again. But one does have to want to be a saint, to want to be a lover of God and his neighbor—and himself in the process.

BACKGROUND

In the Old Covenant any violation of the moral or ritual Law was an offense against the nation as well as against God, because the covenant relationship was between God and the entire people. If any member failed to keep the Law, the covenant was broken for the whole people. Remember the story of Achan at Jericho. [Lecture #5]

In the New Covenant, for the first three centuries, until the “Edict of Milan” in 313 AD allowed the Church to go public, the sinner confessed his sin to the bishop in the presence of the entire congregation. Then he assigned him a period of fasting, perhaps from two to seven weeks depending on the seriousness of the sin. On some occasions the period was much longer.

During that time he was allowed to be present during the service only through the sermon, and then he would have to go outside until the Eucharist was over. When the period of fasting was over, if he was judged to be really repentant, he was restored to Holy Communion .

After the Edict of Milan by the new emperor Constantine in 313 made the Church legal, however, the practice I just described was restricted more and more to those sins which everyone knew about. The other sins were dealt with in private with the bishop or priest alone. That was in order to prevent scandal as well as to make it easier for the congregation to be accepting of the forgiven sinner.

By about the seventh century, the sacrament of forgiveness was administered in much the way it is today. Today public penance is only rarely imposed, and then it is the bishop alone, not the priest, who does it.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CONFESSION

- You may have heard people say things like: “The Bible says no man can forgive sins.”

Well, the Bible does say that. Actually, certain characters in the Bible are quoted as saying that. To be more specific, that is what the skeptical pharisees said when the paralyzed man was brought to Jesus on a stretcher.

There were so many people in and around the house that the men carrying him tore a hole in the roof and lowered him down into the room where Jesus was. And Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

And the pharisees said, “Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone.”

Then Jesus said, “Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk?’ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—“I say to you, rise take up your pallet and go home.”

And to the amazement of everyone, he got up, picked up his pallet, and walked out. [St. Mark 2:1–12]

Jesus teaches us to say in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

The Sacrament of Confession was instituted by Jesus on the day of his resurrection when he said to the disciples, “As the Father has sent me, even so send I you. Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven unto them; and whose soever sins you retain, they are retained.” [St. John 20:21–23]

The successors to the Apostles, the bishops, have continued saying such words as they ordain men to the priesthood. Bishop Joseph Harte said them to me on December 21, 1957, in Commerce, Texas, when he ordained me a “priest in the Church of God”.

It is in the Bible. And the Church continues demonstrating that, indeed, the Son of Man “has power on earth to forgive sins,” today!

- You may have heard people say things like this: “All a person has to do is confess to God alone.”

And that is true . . . for those sins which are against God alone. But there aren’t any! For every time I sin, my relationship with God is damaged and, as a result, I am a weakening and contaminating influence in the community. So every sin against God also is a sin against my neighbor because it hurts him also.

And the consequences of my sins do not stop even with my death, as far as society is concerned. Society keeps them going for generations, however slightly. There are no sins which

are “only against God.”

The Sacrament of Confession is the direct way which God has provided for us to receive his forgiveness. So it is the reasonable way for a person to seek his forgiveness

A person may say, “I prefer to seek forgiveness from God alone,” meaning not through the sacrament. But if that person had been in Jerusalem when Jesus was there, and if he had been really sorry for his sins, he would not have been content to trust in the mercy of Jehovah.

His repentance would have driven him to the feet of Jesus so that he could hear out loud those words of pardon and peace.

In fact, “Confess your sins to one another” is the rule in the New Testament. [St. James 5:16] Confessions of sin in the New Testament were open and heard by others as well as by God.

Until I apologize to my neighbor, he and I are still separated by my sin. The Church is all my neighbors in Christ. If a person sees that he has hurt his neighbors and is really sorry about it, he will try to tell them about it.

There are three ways to tell them about it:

1. You can go stand in the middle of Times Square in New York City. And then you can buttonhole everybody you meet for the rest of your life and tell each one of them that you are sorry. Of course, you will never get done. And in the meantime, you will neglect all the rest of your duties to God and your neighbor.

Although this approach is really impossible, some people try a version of it. They tell their sins to perfect strangers wherever they meet them, in bars, or on busses and airplanes — over and over again.

2. Another way is to stand up in front of the whole congregation, as representing mankind, and confess his sins publicly.

In theory this way is possible. But there are a number of obvious practical pastoral reasons why this is rarely wise, and why it is rarely done.

3. A third way is to come in absolute privacy and confidence to one of Christ’s priests, confess your sins, and receive the assurance in spoken words that you are sorry enough, that God forgives you, and that the Church forgives you.
- You may have heard people say things like: “Confession makes sin easy, because you know that all you will have to do is go tell the priest and then you can do it all over again.”

But as a matter of fact, the reverse is closer to the truth. The attempt to get by on confessing to God alone, in your private prayers, is much more likely to make sin easy. That is because it is very hard for us creatures of body as well as soul (not to mention sin) to maintain a strong sense of God as a real person.

For example, let's say that I have committed one of those sins which I was sure I would never be guilty of. I go into my "closet" to pray and tell God that I have done it and I am sorry. It might go something like this:

"Dear God, I did so and so, and I am terribly sorry. Please forgive me!"

Silence.

"God, are you there?"

Silence.

"God, didn't you hear me? Please say something. Tell me you forgive me!"

Silence.

On the other hand, when I am faced with a particular temptation, if I realize in the back of my mind that I will have to kneel down behind Father So-and-so with the wart on the back of his neck, and tell him that I have done such a thing, then I may think twice about it.

The very thought of going to Confession acts as a deterrent to sin.

A CLEAN START

When I was in high school, the Holsum Bread Company used to give us white dust jackets for our textbooks. There was one word on the cover, "Holsum."

For the first week or so I would keep all my books spotless.

Then one day, perhaps a warm fall afternoon, I would be bored and I would start doodling on one of my books. And before I knew it, I would have filled in the "O" in Holsum!

Within the next twenty-four hours I would have drawn pictures of airplanes all over it. By the weekend it would be covered with all sorts of things. And then I would wish that I had a clean dust jacket for my book.

"One more lie" added to a thousand lies is a drop in the bucket. But one lie added to none is a different matter.

The Sacrament of Confession lets you start from zero all over again.

MORAL EROSION REVERSED

Repeated sins, even venial sins, produce moral erosion. The good news is that it is reversible.

The regular use of the Sacrament of Confession has a cumulative effect on a person's character. From one confession to the next, there usually will not be much noticeable difference. But after a number of years, a person's confessions may no longer contain at all some of the grosser or

more obvious sins which were prominent in the earlier days.

He will probably be dealing with subtler and deadlier sins, sins of the spirit — the kind of sins which are accepted by most people as simply normal behavior and “just being human.”

For example, a priest friend of mine wound up as chaplain to a convent. He said listening to the confessions of some of those older nuns was like “being bombarded with marshmallows.” But those “marshmallows” were the really serious sins.

THE ANATOMY OF REPENTANCE

There are three parts or steps to repentance:

- There is *Contrition*, which means being sorry for your sins. It is repentance in the heart.

Contrition does not mean, “I am sorry I beat up my wife and broke her arm, because now I will have to cook my own breakfast.” That is being sorry because of the consequences to *myself*. Technically, that is called *remorse*. And remorse is not enough to receive forgiveness. Remorse is totally self-centered. And the barrier remains.

Contrition does not mean, “I am sorry I beat up my wife and broke her arm, because now everybody knows that I am a wife-beater.” That is being sorry for the injury to my pride which has resulted. The technical name for that kind of sorrow is *attrition*. And attrition is not enough. Attrition leaves the barrier between me and my wife.

But attrition can spur me to go on to real contrition.

Contrition means, “I am sorry that I beat up my wife and broke her arm, because it hurts her and makes life miserable for her, etc . . .”

Contrition is not necessarily a matter of *feeling* sorry. God does not require us to feel a certain way. He does require us to recognize the nature of what we have done, and to choose to have it matter that the other person is injured. The desire to be contrite is itself the beginning of contrition although it's not the deepest form of it.

Genuine contrition leads to the next step in repentance: *confession*.

- Confession is repentance on the lips.

St. John tells us that “if we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” [I John 1:9]

Open confession of our sins is an act of great humility and a hard test by which we can tell the sincerity of our contrition. Confession also has the effect of deepening our sorrow.

Confession leads to the practice of repentance.

- *Satisfaction with amendment of life* is repentance in practice. It is the final test of true con-

trition. Unless a person firmly intends to stop doing the sin and to repair the damage, if possible, his contrition is not genuine; he is not really sorry.

HOW TO PREPARE TO MAKE A CONFESSION

Begin with prayer. Ask God to help you see your sins and to appreciate their consequences, not only for yourself but for others. You can find suitable prayers in St. Augustine's Prayer Book and other devotional manuals, to which I plan to introduce you when we come to the subject of prayer.

Make a list of all the sins you can remember that you have committed since your last sacramental confession. If this is your first confession, then list all your sins since your baptism. St. Augustine's Prayer Book has a list of "suggested sins", sometimes called a laundry list, to help you jog your memory.

Be sure to include all mortal sins. It is a good idea to include all the venial sins you can remember. When in doubt include it. Do not worry about the sins you cannot remember. You are not likely to forget your mortal sins.

Once you have confessed a particular instance of sin in one confession, do not confess that instance again. That would be like saying that God had not already taken that sin away.

But if you become aware of something which happened before your baptism, or something you wish you had remembered to include in a previous confession, you may include it. That is referred to as a "confession of devotion".

In order to make a self examination in preparation for a first confession, do the following:

Divide a sheet of paper in thirds from left to right with two vertical lines. Draw a line across the paper near the top. Above it, at the head of the first column write the word "sin". At the top of the middle column, write "first time." At the top of the right column, write "how often."

In the first column list all your sins from the previous twenty four hours, in the second when you first did them (since your last confession or your baptism), and in the third how often.

Draw a line across the page. Then list all your sins from the last seven days in the same way, leaving out the ones you have already listed.

Draw another line and list the sins from the last month besides the ones you have already.

Draw another line and list the sins from the past year besides the ones you already have. By this time you will probably have listed all your besetting sins.

Next go back five years and then a larger interval, etc.

MAKING A CONFESSION

In some parishes there are regularly established times when the priest is in the church prepared

to hear confessions. Usually it is on Saturday afternoon. Before major feasts such as Easter, it is common in many parishes for the priest to announce certain hours when he will be “sitting for confessions.”

Confession is always available by appointment.

There are three different physical arrangements which are common:

- In one very common arrangement the priest sits just inside the altar rail facing the altar, with his back to the nave of the church. The penitent kneels at the rail just to the right of the priest. If you see this going on, be sure to stay far enough away, even outside if necessary, so that you cannot overhear what is being said.
- In some churches, there are booths, called confessionals, usually near the entrance. They are divided into two compartments with a grill in the partition. The priest sits in one side and the penitent kneels in the other. He makes his confession by speaking through the grill.
- In some churches, the priest will sit in a special room with a prayer desk behind him. The penitent kneels facing the priest but behind him and just to his right.

In the Prayer Book, beginning on p. 447, there are two forms for the actual confession. Either form may be used. The first is the older form and the most commonly used. But the new one is excellent.

Bring a prayer book with you as well as your written list. When you come to the point in the form where you are to list your sins, state when your last confession was, or, if it is your first confession, when your baptism was.

Then read your list of sins in a matter of fact way, as “clinically” as you can. You are there for moral “surgery” to have a malignant growth removed. State when you began committing each sin and how often you did it just the way you have it on your list.

When you have finished your confession, the priest will do three things:

- He will give you counsel or advice, if he thinks it appropriate.
- He will assign you a symbolic act to perform to demonstrate that you are sorry. And he may require you to make restitution if that is possible and appropriate.
- He will pronounce absolution, which gives you the assurance that all your sins are forgiven by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He will not require you to turn yourself in for a crime you have committed. But he will require you to take the necessary steps to prevent someone else from being punished for your sin.

The priest is forbidden to act in any way on what you have told him during confession. He is not allowed even to bring the subject up with you later unless you have arranged for him to. Of course you may bring the subject up later.

But you should not discuss what he has said to you with anyone else, because he is not free to do so. He is not in a position to give his side of the matter.

During confession, hide the identity of anyone else involved in your sin. Even when referring to another member of your family, it may be sufficient to say, “someone close to me.”

At the end, the customary courtesy, even though it is not written in the book, is to say to the priest, “Thank you, Father.”

Then go immediately to a pew, or some other quiet place and say or do your penance. If there is restitution to be made, attend to that without delay.

If you have not been baptized when you make your confession, the baptism itself will constitute both your penance and your absolution.

In the Anglican Communion, sacramental confession is not optional;

In the Anglican Communion, sacramental confession is not compulsory;

In the Anglican Communion, sacramental confession is *voluntary*.

That is to say, it is up to the individual member of the Church to decide when and if he needs to make his confession. But if he does need to, it makes a big difference whether he does or not.

THE NEED TO MAKE YOUR CONFESSION TO A PRIEST

When does one *need* to make his confession to a priest? When you have committed *mortal* sin.

How do you tell if that is the case?

Everyone of us has had the experience of something we have eaten disagreeing with us and *repeating* on us. It is bitter and leaves a bad taste in the mouth.

Likewise, everyone of us has had the experience of remembering something we have done in the past which we would like to forget. And every time it comes to mind it leaves a bad taste in the mouth. We try to rationalize it, to lay it to rest, but it keeps coming back anyway no matter what we do.

Those sins which repeat on us that way are most likely mortal sins. But no matter how serious they are, the good news is that there is something we can do about them which will successfully lay them to rest: the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession.

GOD’S GIFT

Confession is a means of grace which God has given us for our benefit—because he loves us. And if we neglect it when it is what we need, that is a very serious matter. It is a little like saying: “God, I want your forgiveness, but I want it on my own terms.”

No matter what you may confess, the priest will not be shocked, anymore than a physician is shocked by a boil or a ruptured appendix.

You probably won't even surprise your own pastor. Most of your besetting sins will be well known to everyone who knows you. The one new thing your pastor will learn about you is not that you are a sinner, but that you have decided to do something serious about your sins.

Priests try not to have favorites, but that is not always possible. Even Jesus is said to have been especially close to St. John. But when a priest does have a favorite, it is likely to be someone whom he knows is making his confession on a regular basis.

It is perfectly permissible to go to some priest other than your pastor for confession. The important thing is whatever helps you feel the most free to make your confession.

So your pastor can never be sure you are not making your confession to some other priest, unless, of course, you tell him. So he tries to give you the benefit of the doubt.

If your pastor must give you the benefit of the doubt, it is only right that you give your brother Christian the benefit of the doubt. Because you do not know what he is doing about his sins. This is one more reason why we are told not to judge one another. For all you know, he may have just come from confession.

Our Lord tells us that there is "more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." The same is certainly true of your parish priest.

Appendix

Concerning the Rite of Reconciliation

The ministry of reconciliation, which has been committed by Christ to his Church, is exercised through the care each Christian has for others, through the common prayer of Christians assembled for public worship, and through the priesthood of the Church and its ministers declaring absolution.

The Reconciliation of a Penitent is available for all who desire it. It is not restricted to times of sickness. Confessions may be heard anytime and anywhere.

Two equivalent forms of service are provided here to meet the needs of penitents. The absolution in these services may be pronounced only by a bishop or priest. Another Christian may be asked to hear a confession, but it must be made clear to the penitent that absolution will not be pronounced; instead, a declaration of forgiveness is provided.

When a confession is heard in a church building, the confessor may sit inside the altar rails or in a place set aside to give greater privacy, and the penitent kneels nearby. If preferred, the confessor and penitent may sit face to face for a spiritual conference leading to absolution or a declaration of forgiveness.

When the penitent has confessed all serious sins troubling the conscience and has given evidence of due contrition, the priest gives such counsel and encouragement as are needed and pronounces absolution. Before giving absolution, the priest may assign to the penitent a psalm, prayer, or hymn to be said, or something to be done, as a sign of penitence and act of thanksgiving.

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.

The Reconciliation of a Penitent

Form One

[1979 BCP p. 447]

The Penitent begins

Bless me, for I have sinned.

The Priest says

The Lord be in your heart and upon your lips that you may truly and humbly confess your sins:
: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Penitent:

I confess to Almighty God, to his Church, and to you, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially _____. For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I pray God to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly beg forgiveness of God and his Church, and ask you for counsel, direction, 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: : In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

or this

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, and who conferred power on his Church to forgive sins, : absolve you through my ministry by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and restore you in the perfect peace of the Church. Amen.

The Priest adds

The Lord has put away all your sins.

Penitent : Thanks be to God.

The Priest concludes

Go (or abide) in peace, and pray for me, a sinner.

Penitent: Thank you, Father.

The Reconciliation of a Penitent

Form Two

[1979 BCP p.449]

The Priest and Penitent begin as follows

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving-kindness; in your great compassion blot out my offenses. Wash me through and through from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions only too well, and my sin is ever before me.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One,
have mercy upon us.

Penitent: Pray for me, a sinner.

Priest:

May God in his love enlighten your heart, that you may remember in truth all your sins and his unfailing mercy. **Amen.**

The Priest may then say one or more of these or other appropriate verses of Scripture, first saying

Hear the Word of God to all who truly turn to him.

Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. [Matthew 11:28]

God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. [John 3:16]

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. [1 Timothy 1:15]

If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the perfect offering for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. [1 John 2:1-2]

The Priest then continues

Now, in the presence of Christ, and of me, his minister, confess your sins with a humble and obedient heart to Almighty God, our Creator and our Redeemer.

The Penitent says

Holy God, heavenly Father, you formed me from the dust in your image and likeness, and redeemed me from sin and death by the cross of your Son Jesus Christ. Through the water of baptism you clothed me with the shining garment of his righteousness, and established me among your children in your kingdom. But I have squandered the inheritance of your saints, and have wandered far in a land that is waste.

Especially, I confess to you and to the Church . . .

Here the penitent confesses particular sins.

Therefore, O Lord, from these and all other sins I cannot now remember, I turn to you in sorrow and repentance. Receive me again into the arms of your mercy, and restore me to the blessed company of your faithful people; through him in whom you have redeemed the world, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Priest may then offer words of comfort and counsel.

Priest: Will you turn again to Christ as your Lord?

Penitent: I will.

Priest: Do you, then, forgive those who have sinned against you?

Penitent: I forgive them.

Priest: May Almighty God in mercy receive your confession of sorrow and of faith, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

The Priest then lays a hand upon the penitent's head (or extends a hand over the penitent), saying one of the following

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself to be sacrificed for us to the Father, and who conferred power on his Church to forgive sins, absolve you through my ministry by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and restore you in the perfect peace of the Church. **Amen.**

or this

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: : In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The Priest concludes

Now there is rejoicing in heaven; for you were lost, and are found; you were dead, and are now alive in Christ Jesus our Lord. Go (or abide) in peace. The Lord has put away all your sins.

Penitent: Thanks be to God.

Self-Examination

[From *St. Augustine's Prayer Book*]

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 thy judgment-seat. Bring to my 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, 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, shalt thou not despise."

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 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. 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, 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 outside 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 worldly 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.

Prayer After Self-Examination

O 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 good confession. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contrition

O 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.

O GOD, I am very sorry that I have sinned against thee who art so good. Forgive me for Jesus' sake, and I will try to sin no more. Amen.

O 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. Oh, may I love thee without ceasing, and make it my delight to do in all things thy most holy will. Amen.

Satisfaction [After Confession]

Return to your place and make your 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 Saviour. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy Name.

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 Saviour 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 your penance.

O 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.

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.