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Confession: A Step-by-Step Guide

In this short guide you will find help to prepare yourself to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation fruitfully: it includes an explanation of the steps for going to Confession, some examinations of conscience and texts to meditate on the greatness of the forgiveness that God wants to give us.

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Saint Josemaría used to call **Confession** the sacrament of joy, because through it, you recover the joy and peace that friendship with God brings, a gift that only sin is capable of stealing from the souls of Christians.

Summary on Confession

—What is confession?

—Why go to confession?

—Is it complicated to go to confession? Steps to a good confession

1) Examination of conscience;

2) Contrition (or repentance), which includes the determination not to sin again (purpose of amendment);

3) Confession (telling of one's sins to the confessor);

4) Satisfaction (or the carrying out of certain acts of penance).

What is confession?

“The Sacrament of Reconciliation is a Sacrament of healing. When I go to confession, it is in order to be healed, to heal my soul, to heal my heart and to be healed of some wrongdoing”
[1].

Why go to confession?

Pope Francis explains that “forgiveness of our sins is not something we can give ourselves. I cannot say: I forgive my sins. Forgiveness is asked for, is asked of another, and in Confession we ask for forgiveness from Jesus.

Forgiveness is not the fruit of our own efforts but rather a gift, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit [2].

Is it complicated to go to confession? Steps to a good confession

It is very easy to go for confession, just follow this guide. In its Catechism, the Church proposes four steps for a good confession [3]:

- 1) Examination of conscience;
- 2) Contrition (or repentance), which includes the determination not to sin again;
- 3) Confession;
- 4) Satisfaction (or the carrying out of certain acts of penance).

These are four steps that we take to be able to receive the great embrace of love that God our Father wants to give us with this sacrament: “God is

waiting for us, like the father in the parable, with open arms, even though we don't deserve it. It doesn't matter how great our debt is. Just like the *prodigal son*, all we have to do is open our heart" [4].

We explain below these four steps, which will help to live in all its grandeur this sacrament of God's mercy.

1. Examination of conscience

“What advice would you give a penitent so that he can give a good confession?

–Pope Francis ask himself-. He ought to reflect on the truth of his life, of what he feels and what he thinks before God. He ought to be able to look earnestly at himself and his sin. He ought to feel like a sinner, so that he can be amazed by God” [5].

The examination of conscience consists of reflecting on those actions, thoughts or words, which may have distanced us from God, offended the others or harmed us internally.

It is the moment to be *sincere* with oneself and with God, knowing that He does not want our past sins to oppress us, but that He wants to free us from them so that we can live as His good children.

We offer some questions to help you reflect on what you can ask God for forgiveness for. They serve only as a guideline: the most important thing is to enter into your own heart and admit your faults. If you wish, during confession you can ask the priest to help you by suggesting other questions.

- Examination of conscience for children

- Examination of conscience for teens

- Examination of conscience for adults

2. Contrition and resolution not to sin again

Contrition, or repentance, is a sorrow of the soul and a detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again. It is a gift of God: so, if you still feel that you are attached to sin - that, for example, you do not feel strong enough to give up a vice, forgive a person or make amends for a wrong done - ask Him to work in your heart, so that you may reject evil.

Sometimes repentance comes with an intense feeling of pain or shame, which helps us to make amends. However, it is not essential to feel that kind of pain or shame: the important thing is to understand that

we have done wrong, to have a desire to improve as Christians and to make a resolution not to commit those faults again.

“*Contrition* –the Pope explains– is the way to repentance, that favoured path that leads to the heart of God, which embraces us and gives us another chance, which always opens us to the truth of atonement and by his mercy allows us to transform.”
[6].

There are various prayers that can be used to manifest contrition, for example the following:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

3. The confession of sins

Confession consists of the accusation of sins made before the priest.

“Confessing to a priest is a way of putting my life into the hands and heart of someone else, someone who in that moment acts in the name of Jesus. (...) It is important that I go to confession, that I sit in front of a priest who embodies Jesus, that I kneel before Mother Church, called to dispense the mercy of Christ. There is objectivity in this gesture of genuflection before the priest; it becomes the vehicle through which grace reaches and heals me” [7].

Sometimes we can be ashamed of saying our sins to another person. It should not be like that. We don't say our sins to another man, but to Jesus Christ, who is the one absolving us. The priest is just a channel which Jesus Christ uses to forgive our sins.

In the case of confessing mortal sins, it is important for the completeness of the confession, that we say the number and the important circumstances related to the sin. If we do not remember how many times, it is enough to say few times or many times. It is not the same to say *I have not attended Mass on Sundays this month, four times, because I was sick or because I was lazy*; it is not the same to say *I have committed slander or detraction with one person or with more people, or in a group of WhatsApp or in a video of YouTube that I uploaded*. The gravity is greater or lesser depending on the number and circumstances, and therefore it is good to mention them.

At the same time, the confession does not need to be long. It is said that a good confession has “4 Cs”:

1. Clear: pointing out what the specific fault was, without adding excuses.
2. Concrete: stating the precise action or thought, not using generic phrases.
3. Concise: avoiding giving unnecessary explanations or descriptions.
4. Complete: without keeping silent about any grave sin, overcoming shame.

The confession is a sacrament and its celebration includes certain gestures and words on the part of the penitent and the priest. Here we explain how it is carried out with the aid of an infographic ***that you can download here.***

Once you have confessed your sins from the last confession, it is also good to make a general accusation of

the sins of your past life; maybe mentioning a particular kind of sin or referring to one of the *Ten commandments*, without being explicit about the specific sin, as for instance, *I accuse myself of the sins of my past life especially against the 8th commandment or against the virtue of sincerity, or charity, etc.*

Afterwards, the priest will give you some advice for your struggle to improve your spiritual life or maybe he will also ask you some questions to clarify some aspects of the sins you confessed. Then he will give you the penance and the absolution. Keep in mind that it is very important to know the penance and to hear the absolution from the priest saying “... and ***I absolve you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen***”. This “I”, is the fact that Jesus is the one forgiving our sins; the priest is only the

channel through whom the pardon of God comes to us.

4. Doing the penance

The satisfaction consists in the performance of certain acts of penance (a few prayers, some mortification, etc.), which the confessor indicates to the penitent in order to repair the damage caused by the sin.

It is also an occasion to give thanks to God for the forgiveness received, and to renew the resolution not to sin again.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please write to us at info@opusdei.ng.

[1] Pope Francis, General Audience, 19 February 2014.

[2] Idem.

[3] Cf. *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 303.

[4] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 64.

[5] Pope Francis, *The name of God is mercy*.

[6] Pope Francis, Letter 30 May 2014.

[7] Pope Francis, *The name of God is mercy*.

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