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I have sinned
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I HAVE SINNED

*Helps for adult lay persons
to confess worthily*

By

Bernard A. Sause, O.S.B.



A GRAIL PUBLICATION

St. Meinrad

Indiana

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by Bernard Sause, O.S.B.

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PREFACE

Some confessions reward penitent sinners with the deep satisfaction of restored peace with God and broken attachment to past offenses. For men and women striving to honor their Maker and keep their souls clean by frequent confession, the sacramental grace gives renewed vigor for combating temptations, added firmness of resolve, and hope's calm confidence in the divine assistance.

These wonderful consolations are often forfeited. Hasty preparation based on little more than what one learned in the catechism as a child, routine examination of conscience, thoughtless acknowledgment of the same faults, and mechanical performance of the penance destroy appreciation for the sacrament of mercy. When such lack of care becomes habitual, serious spiritual disorders soon follow.

As with most serious undertakings, making a good confession calls for sufficient time and reflection. This booklet has been composed for persons willing to devote a few extra minutes to their preparation for the sacrament.

Endlessly the great saints made sorrow for their faults a keynote of their prayer. As they were privileged to draw more closely to the Divine Light, even their slightest imperfections stood boldly revealed to them. They sought every means of expressing their love of God and dependence on His grace. Nothing in all that they wrote stands out more sharply than their dread of offending so loving a Father. Their prayer shows what made them saints. From their humble petitions we learn how we may best prepare for and profit by sacramental forgiveness.

The purpose of this book, which includes numerous passages from Sacred Scripture and the writings of the Doctors of the Church, is to help the penitent get ready for confession after the manner of the saints, and as far as possible in their words.

All prayers are printed in large type so that after the reader has gone through the book once, he can readily pick out those portions which appeal to him for actual use in church. More extensive preparation is recommended for retreats, missions, and general confessions.

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PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

Sin is a mystery. It is man's wilful violation of God's holy law. Weakened in nature through Adam's fall, man easily succumbs to temptation and offends his Maker.

Repentance is a great deal more difficult. In fact, St. Ambrose did not hesitate to state that it is easier to find persons who have preserved their (baptismal) innocence than those who have practiced a fitting spirit of penance.¹

Effective sorrow for sin depends largely on realizing to some degree how a human act can stand in opposition to the Divine Will. And that is a gift, to be prayed for humbly.

For that reason, preparation for the sacrament of penance logically begins with petition to the Holy

¹ St. Ambrose. All exact references that are not of immediate interest to the general reader are given at the end of this book. The complete list constitutes the principal bibliography employed in this work. Scripture citations accompany the text without footnotes. Because of its familiarity through devotional use, the traditional Douay Version has been retained.

Ghost for the grace to know one's sins, and especially to know the malice of their disregard of God's holy law.

Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

(Versicle) Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created;

(Response) And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray: O God, who didst teach the hearts of Thy faithful people by sending them the light of Thy Holy Spirit, grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things, and evermore to rejoice in His holy comfort. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(An indulgence of 5 years. A plenary indulgence on the usual conditions, when this prayer is recited daily for an entire month.)²



How warm, and consoling, and strong love is!

Because their love is so pure, parents overlook the faults of the repentant child even before the child has asked forgiveness. Among friends who truly love one another in Christ, an apology is as painful to him who receives it as it is to its offerer. For that reason few apologies are ever fully presented among friends:

charity rushes to cut short embarrassment and to assure the offender of forgiveness. On a less exalted plane even ordinary good breeding strives to imitate this noble disposition.

But where parents and friends *have* love and are moved by it, your Heavenly Father *is* love.

Before you go to confession, you must be absolutely sure of a truth which is so great that you can never wholly understand it. In all His dealings with you, God acts according to His nature—while answering the needs you have expressed in prayer. He is love, infinite love. There can be no barriers to that love, nothing of weakness or limitation in it, no object to which it does not extend.

Because of this boundless goodness, God wills, infinitely more, to forgive you than you can possibly desire to be forgiven! Because He is all good and merciful, He instituted the sacrament that you are about to receive. He asks little in return, only that you love Him enough to be truly sorry for having offended Him, and to want to avoid your evil thoughts, words, and deeds in future.

Beg of Him to make your love of Him strong enough to turn your soul from everything that is displeasing to Him.

The following prayer touches points you would probably omit in your preparation. They need not be mentioned in your confession. Your mindfulness of

them in a general way will perfect your worthiness in receiving absolution.

In Thy loving kindness mercifully forgive, O Lord, the sins I have committed through ignorance, or with knowledge, or out of contempt. And all those in which I have acted wilfully, or through human weakness, or of set purpose. And the sins that result from deception or scheming, and all my failings of thought, word, or deed.

Forgive all my secret offenses, and those committed in the presence of others, whether their malice remains unrecognized by my soul—these too—or is known. Destroy those which gnaw at my conscience, as well as those that are disregarded out of a false sense of security.

Do not abandon my soul without the hope of pardon. So great is Thy love, that even after many serious and mortal offenses Thou dost instill in me the need to hasten to Thine infinitely kind mercy.

When Thou makest me think of the torments of future punishments, mayest Thou also always grant with the pardon of sins the hope of eternal life.

Do not permit my conscience, now cleansed of lies and vices, ever again to separate itself from Thee, or be stained beyond the possibility of being cleansed. Banish all folly from my heart, O Lord. Purify me of secret vices. Fortify my heart with Thy holy anointing to enable me to subdue the passions. Strengthen my senses for gaining the victory in my battles against temptation. Make me worthily, justly angry at my sins: that I may obtain the forgiveness of them all.³



Despite its simplicity, the following brief prayer of St. Thomas reveals the full power of mind that composed the great master work of sacred knowledge, the *Summa Theologica*, when those mental gifts were focused on the humble petition for divine forgiveness.

Every word mirrors the perfection of the dispositions you should try to bring to your confession. The prayer must be said slowly and with reflection. It is like a rare fruit that has been grown with skill and care, and prepared by loving hands. To pass it by, or to glance over it rapidly, is to dispense with the aid of one whose privileges included not only a life of heroic holiness, but also the zeal to inspire others to strive for the same freedom from sin.

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

I, a sinner, approach Thee, my God, source of mercy: deign to cleanse me who am unclean.

Sun of justice, give light to my blindness!

Eternal physician, heal me of my wounds!

King of kings, clothe the nakedness of my utter destitution before Thee!

Mediator between God and men, wipe away my guilt and restore me!

Good Shepherd, carry me back as the sheep that wandered from Thee.

O God, have mercy on my misery; pardon my crimes; restore life to one who is dead; renew the innocence I lost; and give again the anointing of Thy grace to my heart that is hardened in its sinfulness.

Most merciful Lord, I would run away from Thee by my sinfulness, call me back to Thee! My weakness would resist Thee, draw me to Thee! I live in constant danger of falling: raise me up! How weakly I stand before Thee: support me! Lead me as I follow the path Thou hast pointed out for me.

Do not forget me in my forgetfulness of Thee; do not abandon me when I desert Thee; do not despise me in my misery.

By committing sin I have outraged Thee, my God, I have injured my fellow man, I have not spared myself. O God! Through my weakness I have sinned against Thee, all-powerful Father; by my ignorance I have sinned against Thee, Son of Divine wisdom; in my malice I have sinned against Thee, Holy Spirit of infinite mercy. I have offended Thee, most adorable Trinity.

How miserable I am! How many and how great are the sins of which I have been guilty!

I have abandoned Thee, Lord. I complain of Thy goodness in the presence of evil love, and under the humiliation of evil fear. I have preferred to lose Thee than lack what I loved and wanted. I have chosen to offend Thee rather than miss what I should have feared.

O my God, how much harm I have caused by word and deed, sinning secretly, openly, stubbornly.

I most humbly beg that because of my weakness Thou wilt not dwell on my iniquity, but rather contemplate Thine own immense goodness, and forgive in Thy clemency what I have done, granting me sorrow for my past offenses and an effective caution against them in future. Amen.⁴

Few persons have ever received the many wonderful gifts that were bestowed on the great king David. But even this holy and privileged ruler, so dear to his Maker, fell into great sin. He scandalized his people with murder and adultery. (2 Kings, 11: 1 f) God gave David the chance of repentance, sent His prophet Nathan to the king to excite him to contrition and reparation. And because of his deep and abiding sorrow, David was forgiven: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin: thou shalt not die." (2 Kings, 12: 13)

Then, under divine inspiration, King David composed Psalm 50, the *Miserere*, which the Church has always employed as her favorite plea for forgiveness. These sacred verses word more simply and worthily than almost any other prayer the ideal dispositions for approaching confession: deep contrition tempered with unlimited confidence in the divine goodness.

THE MISERERE

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

And according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity.

Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me.

To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee: that thou mayest be justified in thy words, and mayest overcome when thou art judged.

For behold I was conceived in iniquities; and in sins did my mother conceive me.

For behold Thou hast loved truth: the uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me.

Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.

To my hearing Thou shalt give joy and gladness: and the bones that have been humbled shall rejoice.

Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels.

Cast me not away from Thy face; and take not Thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and strengthen me with a perfect spirit.

I will teach the unjust Thy ways: and the wicked shall be converted to Thee.

Deliver me from blood, O God, Thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall extol Thy justice.

O Lord, Thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare Thy praise.

For if Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings Thou wilt not be delighted.

A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. (*Psalm 50: 1-19*)



Perfect contrition is humble love: it is not the product of many words. The woman known as the sinner in the city did not open her lips, but her love was so intense that it drew forth her Savior's praise and merited His pardon.

And one of the Pharisees desired Him to eat with him. And He went into the house of the Pharisee, and sat down to meat.

And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that He sat at meat

in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment;

And standing behind at His feet, she began to wash His feet, with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

And the Pharisee, who had invited Him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying: This man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, that she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering, said to him: "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." But he said: "Master, say it."

"A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.

"And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loveth him most?"

Simon answering, said: "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." And He said to him: "Thou hast judged rightly."

And turning to the woman, He said unto Simon: "Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest Me no water for My

feet;⁵ but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hair hath wiped them.

“Thou gavest Me no kiss; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

“My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she with ointment hath anointed My feet.

“Wherefore I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less.”

And He said to her: “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves: “Who is this that forgiveth sins also?”

And He said to the woman: “Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace.”

(Luke, 7: 36-50)



Right after receiving his First Communion, St. Peter denied Jesus three times. So intense was Peter's sorrow, so great Christ's love in the hour of the proof

⁵ Washing the feet of a guest who had traveled the dusty highway was an ordinary courtesy of the time. This and the following statements of Jesus are a severe rebuke.

of His love for all men, that He made St. Peter realize with a single glance that his sin was forgiven.

The same infinite love awaits you in the sacrament of pardon.

“Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death.”

And He said: “I say to thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, till thou thrice deniest that thou knowest Me. . . .”

And apprehending Him, they led Him to the high priest’s house. But Peter followed afar off.

And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were sitting about it, Peter was in the midst of them.

Whom when a certain servant maid had seen sitting at the light, and had earnestly beheld him, she said: “This man also was with Him.”

But he denied Him, saying: “Woman, I know Him not.”

And after a little while, another seeing him, said: “Thou art one of them.” But Peter said: “O man, I am not.”

And after the space, as it were of one hour, another certain man affirmed, saying: “Of a

truth, this man was also with Him; for he is also a Galilean."

And Peter said: "Man, I know not what thou sayest." And immediately, as he was yet speaking, the cock crew.

And the Lord turning looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, as He had said: "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

And Peter going out, wept bitterly.

(Luke, 22:33-34, 54-62)



And one of those robbers who were hanged, blasphemed Him, saying: "If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us."

But the other answering, rebuked him, saying: "Neither dost thou fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation?"

"And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man hath done no evil."

And he said to Jesus: "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom."

And Jesus said to him: "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."

(Luke, 23: 39-43)

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

The examination of conscience is your mind's practical judgment helping you to decide the morality of your past behavior. As part of your preparation for confession, it is prayerfully made to ask for light to judge according to God's law the offenses you have committed, and within human limitations, to see them as He sees them.

In the examination of conscience your soul seeks to see itself as it stands before God. It strives to recognize sin for what sin is—and to unburden all that has been offensive to God in your life. It recognizes virtue for what virtue is, too, and humbly acknowledges that only the Divine Goodness has made such conduct possible.

You can never make a good confession without sorrow for your sins. Neither can you receive the sacrament worthily without a firm purpose of amendment, nor ordinarily without submitting your sins as you know them to the priest.

On the other hand, the examination of conscience is *not* an essential part of the sacrament. It is only a preparation for receiving absolution, and at times need not necessarily be made.

If you have *mortal* sins to confess, then an examination of conscience is necessary to enable you to fulfil the essential parts of the sacrament. You must

know all your mortal sins; you must be sorry for them with a supernatural contrition; and you must be firm in your purpose of amendment of life. In such a condition an examination of conscience is necessary to the extent that these purposes make it necessary.

If you do not remember whether you have offended God mortally, or are in doubt as to whether you have done so, either because of the length of time since your last confession, or because of a lax conscience (which is generally a kind of spiritual blindness resulting from past offenses), or because of indifference, you certainly need to go over those virtues where past experience has shown that you are weak, and endeavor to call your failures to mind.

Venial sins *need not* absolutely be mentioned in confession, ever; there is not a *strict obligation* to confess any sins that are not mortal.

Because you have not lost sanctifying grace by committing venial sins, and can perform works that remain pleasing to God, despite your imperfections, there are many other ways in which those same imperfections and venial sins can be forgiven. Any prayer that you recite or act that you perform out of intense love of God is an indirect repentance—and if it is intense enough, it forgives venial sins. So also does an act of perfect contrition.

Particularly powerful are works of penance that

are undertaken to win the divine pardon, and humiliations willingly suffered for the same purpose.

Because It brings you into immediate union with the Author of divine forgiveness, and the fullest share in the Memorial of His Passion, the worthiest possible reception of Holy Communion is a guarantee of the forgiveness of venial sins and imperfections.

Of course, the surest and safest means always remains that instituted by Christ for forgiving all that is offensive to Him, the sacrament of penance.

Even in the case where the penitent has only venial sins to confess, especially where the sacrament is frequently received (once a month, or oftener), a rather thorough examination of conscience is periodically recommended. It gives you the assurance of not skipping too lightly over the religious issues of your life. It prevents the routine of stating the same faults over and over to the point where confession becomes mechanical.

The examination of conscience outlined in the following pages is quite different from most similar helps found in prayer books. Usually they consider the Ten Commandments, the Commandments of the Church, and the so-called capital sins, and offer helpful suggestions to the penitent in order to enable him to call to mind what he has done wrong.⁶

⁶ See page 55.

In its main lines the present examination follows the treatment of virtues by St. Thomas,⁷ more or less presenting the ideal attempt to make our lives as God intended them to be lived, and offers suggestions of possible or probable failures.

It does not pretend to be a complete catalogue of the virtues, nor to touch upon all the areas of human sinfulness. Such an attempt would be neither necessary nor advisable for present purposes. What these pages try to do is to draw your attention to the more common failings. Any such effort is certain to be provocative. If you consider a virtue, you will generally see your failings in it quite clearly, even though the questions do not directly touch your case.

That is the whole purpose of an examination of conscience, to study one's life under the light divinely granted in order to know your standing before God, and to confess humbly whatever is not as it should be.

PRAYER BEFORE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

God of spotless holiness! Sun of justice! Grant me the grace to draw close to Thy light, that I may see more sharply than ever how the stains that disfigure my soul appear before Thee. Let the judgment I pass on my offenses be clear in its strong faith and deep love of Thy goodness. Allow me to understand how my sins, offenses, and negligences have separated me from Thee, or have weakened my union with Thee.

Do not permit me to consider any failing unimportant, nor to make excuses, nor blame others, even in my own mind. I desire to present my miserable condition to Thy priest as Thou knowest me to be guilty: only in so doing may I derive the full help of the sacrament of Thy mercy.

May my examination lead to humility and the realization of my present unworthiness before Thee, without concern about what the confessor

may think of me. Let it result in deep sorrow for sin and hatred of every offense.

Stamp my conscience with supernatural delicacy and attachment to Thy holy Will. Make it help me to grow in the love and generosity with Thee that will repair my sinful past and protect me for the future. Let its faithful exercise, as an oft-repeated preview of the last judgment, prepare me for my final account before Thee, my Divine Judge.

Thy servant, St. Paul, teaches that in heaven we shall know Thee as we are known. (I Corinthians, 13: 12) I humbly trust that my hope of that future reward will always do honor to Thee. But I make bold, even now, to beg to know the state of my soul as I am known—at least as far as I can bear the knowledge, and to the degree that it will help me to make a perfect confession.⁸



A SHORTER EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE ON THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD, THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH, AND THE CAPITAL SINS, BEGINS ON PAGE 55.

FAITH

Faith is a divine gift. Through it we are enabled to give an habitual assent to the truths revealed by God and proposed for our belief in the teaching and practice of the Church. Faith is an act of worship in which God takes pleasure, and which He demands of us. To show a proper appreciation for so wonderful a privilege, which is denied to others, our faith must be fostered, intensified by practice, and protected as our most precious heritage.

Have I thanked God since my last confession for my faith; expressed my submission in prayer, *because* God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, has revealed the truths of my religion; defended my faith when occasion arose?

Have I remained in voluntary ignorance of truths necessary for salvation?

Have I given way to sinful indifference in prayer; grown remiss with regard to the sacraments?

Have I participated in any superstitious practices,

such as fortune telling; affiliated myself with secret or other forbidden societies?

Have I entertained serious doubts in matters to be believed according to my faith? (Sometimes individuals who are earnestly striving to please God by their lives are tempted in the practice of their faith even about the divinity of Christ, about the Real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament, the priesthood, or the Immaculate Conception. These persons must realize that these are only temptations, which are to be rejected as promptly and uncompromisingly as temptations against chastity. A thousand temptations do not make a doubt. Sin is committed only by denial or *deliberate* doubt. If the temptations are particularly revolting, or extend over a prolonged period of time, it is helpful simply to mention them in confession, *as temptations.*)

Have I participated in the worship of non-Catholics? (For good reasons, such as going to the funeral of a close friend, or taking one's place in professional groups or among fellow workers who attend in a body to show their regard for their former member, or a convert's accepting an invitation to a relative's wedding, Catholics may be present at non-Catholic religious services. But they are never allowed to take an active part in them. In case of doubt, a priest should be consulted *beforehand.*)

Have I omitted any act of my religion from fear, or from lack of love for my faith, such as absenting myself from Mass while spending the week end with non-Catholics; eating meat on Friday to avoid comment; or neglecting prayer?

Have I exposed my faith, and that of others, to

danger: by reading books inimical to faith; by procuring, keeping, or circulating any kind of reading matter offensive on moral grounds, or that defends heresy, or is intended to create doubts about the Church's doctrine; by sending my children to public schools when they could easily have been sent to Catholic schools; by keeping company, dating with persons who are, or may well become, a danger to my faith?

HOPE

As with faith and charity, hope comes from God and leads back to Him. It is that virtue by which a person confidently awaits eternal happiness and the means necessary for achieving that reward. Hope is based on the firm conviction of God's omnipotence and His love.

You know that He *can* lead you to everlasting life, despite all the temptations you encounter, and all your human weakness. You know that He wills to do so because of the many evidences of His infinite goodness to you. The rest, which consists in your cooperation with His grace, is in your hands.

Am I attached to material possessions to the extent of loving God less than I am bound to love Him, or forgetting Him almost entirely?

Have I remained for a long time in the state of sin, refusing to go to confession?

Have I despaired of my eternal salvation; of God's forgiveness of my offenses; or of ever overcoming my sinful habits through divine grace? (As with

faith, the penitent must not be too greatly disturbed by *temptations* against hope; he acts wisely in mentioning them as temptations when confessing, because bringing them out into the open is one of the best ways of ridding himself of them.)

Have I gone to the opposite extreme and presumed on God's mercy by assuring myself of eternal salvation, based on no other causes than God's omnipotence and love; by expecting the divine reward without cooperation on my part; by expecting extraordinary help from God without doing anything to merit the same; by deliberately placing myself in the occasions that have led me into sin in the past; or by deciding that as I already had lost sanctifying grace and had to go to confession anyway, I would tempt God further?

LOVE OF GOD, CHARITY FOR NEIGHBOR

Love of God for His own sake, and as our highest good is a gift that can come only from God. Love of neighbor is in harmony with the love of God. It gives expression to the higher love. More than that, it grows out of it. The divine goodness impels us to that love. Gratitude for God's wonderful gifts and graces helps to give expression to it, and can easily become identified with it.

Because He loves His creatures as He does, God sent His only begotten Son to redeem them. But *all* His relations with us are expressions of His love.

He makes it possible for us to return to Him in the same manner that He comes to us, through love. The contrition for which you must strive before confessing is really an expression of love: perfect contrition is perfect love of God. The same is true, to a certain limited extent, whether it is a question of receiving Holy Communion, performing an act of obedience, warding off temptation, praying for persons who will die today, or engaging in holy reading: they are all forms of the love of God.

When did I last confess and receive Holy Communion? Is the infrequency or lack of fervor of my reception of the sacraments an indication that there is something seriously wrong in my love of God's goodness to me?

Have I in any manner whatever been guilty of hatred of God? (This is most rare and unlikely.) Have I complained of my lot, murmured against God's providence?

Have I been guilty of indifference and neglect in prayer; prayed carelessly and with wilful distractions; been unattentive at the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and other spiritual duties?

Have I willed evil against my enemies; cursed them?

Have I sought vengeance against those who have done me harm; bided my time until I had a chance to "pay them back"?

Have I refused to speak to anyone; rejected my neighbor's attempt at an apology, or to enter into ordinary relations again; otherwise shown that I wanted

to have nothing to do with those who had offended me? (The penitent must be willing to give up all real hatred for another; otherwise he cannot be absolved. He could not even pray the *Our Father's* "Forgive us as we forgive." External reconciliation may not always be easy to bring about. It may not even be possible. But sincere prayer for enemies and the removal of scandalous hatred are always possible. As long as the penitent sincerely desires to be reconciled, and is willing to pray for his enemy, there can be no reasonable doubt about his worthiness in confessing. St. Anselm's prayer for one's enemies is recommended. See page 117.)

Have I corrected, and when necessary, punished the children, patiently, prudently, and without anger?

Have I helped the needy; contributed to charity according to my means; visited the sick; prayed for the dying; had Masses offered for the souls in Purgatory; encouraged and prayed for those who were in trouble? "As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew, 25: 40)

GIVING SCANDAL

To give scandal is in any manner to bring about the sin of another. Generally speaking it is any evil action, omission, or word that leads to another's spiritual ruin. Our Lord used one of His most severe threats against the person who would lead the innocent into sin: "He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck,

and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandals. For it must needs be that scandals come: but nevertheless woe to the man by whom the scandal cometh." (Matthew, 18: 6, 7)

Have I given a command to do evil; imparted sinful advice; deliberately placed temptation in the way of another; induced or argued anyone into wrong-doing; committed sin in the presence of another, despite the fact that I foresaw that my evil action or word would lead him to imitate me, with possibly greater harm to him than to myself; allowed my attachment to evil pleasure to drag another into sin; committed sin for the express purpose of offending those who are of delicate conscience? Have I tried to excuse myself in these matters by maintaining that the other person has free will, and that the sin is his, not mine?

Have I failed in my duty to give good example to children, or to those spiritually dependent on me?

Have I made any attempt to repair serious scandal? (*Public* reparation of scandal is not often demanded by the Church. In more serious and complex cases the confessor will advise. Otherwise the public approach to the sacrament of penance, and the reception of Holy Communion in the parish church normally do away with public scandal. In secret and private instances, the one who caused the scandal must ordinarily do what he can to see to it that the state of sin which he caused, and especially the continued attachment to evil habits, be broken.)

The more common occasions of scandal will be considered under the separate following headings.

COOPERATION IN EVIL

In a broad sense cooperation is a sharing in some manner or other in the evil action of another. The share may be in the form of influencing the *will* of a person by issuing a sinful command, by giving harmful advice, by commanding an evil act, or by flattering one who has committed some wrong. The cooperation may also take the form of actually sharing in the sin, where two or more unite their efforts in wrong-doing. The third possibility consists in furnishing the means for committing the evil, or by receiving any form of benefit from it.

Have I given sinful commands to children, employees, persons subject to me in any capacity, or over whose will I wield any influence?

Have I given harmful advice that helped to make up a person's mind to sin?

Have I made over, flattered, cajoled, dared, paid attention to, pretended to be scandalized by persons who would have avoided, or would in all probability not have repeated their sins without this attention? Have I pretended to make little of sin in such circumstances when I knew that I should either take a definite stand against it, or ignore it in such a positive manner that my disapproval could not be mistaken?

Have I tolerated evil when my position demanded that I correct it? (This applies especially to parents, teachers, superiors, employers, and public officials.)

Have I offered drink to those who have a weakness for alcohol, or were already partially under its influence?

PRUDENCE

Prudence is the virtue of balance, a sense of rightness and correct judgment carried into act. It goes to the trouble of finding out what is to be done or omitted, and conscientiously uses the means to do what is called for in the particular case. It places a proper value on eternal salvation and all the means that lead to it. It is the virtue of the humble: if the prudent person does not know, or is in doubt, he studies, inquires, investigates, and is not satisfied until he finds the right answer; then he judges what is best to do in a particular instance; and finally, his will, under the most important practical operation of prudence, impels him to right action.

Sins caused by lack of prudence are numerous. They result from failure to perform any one of the three operations of prudence just mentioned (investigating, judging, courageously undertaking what is right). Pride, vanity, or unworthy ambition may keep a person from seeking necessary information. Dishonesty, worldliness, undue attachment to what is material, will cause lack of judgment. Evil attachments and unbalanced love of pleasure, which give rise to inconstancy and weakness of the will, prevent the in-

tellec from presenting the proper appealing argument to the will.

Have I rushed headlong into action, scornful of seeking advice; lacked the humility to accept the guidance of the Church's law and regulations (for example, on mixed marriages, on keeping company with persons whose companionship is dangerous for me, on harmful reading, and places of unworthy amusement); paid little attention to my confessor's exhortations; disregarded sermons and written Catholic doctrine; considered myself capable of handling my own affairs?

Have I indulged in too great a solicitude for the things of this world, and shown that I have too little confidence in Divine Providence?

Have I attended immoral shows, movies on the "C" list of the Legion of Decency; looked at television for the sole purpose of gratifying lower inclinations, or indulged in the same if the program turned out to be suggestive to me; danced immodestly; been an occasion of sin for others? Have I deliberately gone back to places of amusement that have been proximate occasions of sin for me in the past? Have I engaged in "recreational" reading offensive to good morals, or harmful to faith (a common cause of temptation and sin)?

Have I read evil books, papers, magazines; anything listed in the *Index of Prohibited Works*; looked at indecent pictures; circulated them?

JUSTICE

The virtue of justice is that disposition of the soul which impels one to render to each person, and to preserve for him, what is his due. The virtue is more far-reaching than it is generally thought to be. It is not restricted to questions of money and material property, but includes many other forms of personal rights. It regulates one's relations to inferiors, to equals, to superiors, and even to God, because the virtue of religion is a part of the virtue of justice. St. Thomas speaks of justice as the most beautiful of the strictly moral virtues.

Theft: Have I taken anything that I knew did not belong to me: from parents, relatives, employers, the poor? What was its value?

Have I *repeatedly* taken articles of no great value, or small amounts of money, from my employers or from any other person? Do these thefts form a series, either because they are not separated by longer intervals of time, or because I have not broken my will in the matter, so that taken together they add up to a large sum? (Example: if a person stole an average of twenty-five cents a day from his employer for a year, the total would be a serious offense.)

Have I knowingly received stolen goods and retained them?

Have I paid my bills on time?

Have I restored stolen property? Am I now prepared to give it back? Have I promised in past confessions to make restitution, and then failed to do

so? (When there is doubt about the obligation of making restitution, or the possibility of doing so, the penitent should consult his confessor.)

Have I damaged my neighbor's property; paid for the damage, or that caused by my children; returned borrowed articles in good condition?

Justice toward employers: Have I given my employer a just day's work; reported for duty on time; remained on the job until quitting time; put in my scheduled hours in conscientious effort, carrying out all reasonable demands; cared for the property of my employers; cooperated in preserving favorable working conditions with my fellow employees; avoided grumbling, discontent, and stirring up discord?

Justice toward employees: Have I paid just wages, such as will enable those who work for me to live in frugal comfort and provide for their families properly? Have I set up decent working conditions; been considerate and understanding?

Justice toward clients, patients, students, and those who have sought professional services: Have I given my best efforts; been faithful and exact, fulfilled all professional obligations without discrimination; acted only when I had acquired sufficient knowledge in each case; devoted the proper attention and study to each individual case? Have I taken any unfair advantage of persons who have engaged my services; otherwise been guilty of any breach of professional conduct; violated professional secrecy?

Justice toward community: Have I paid my taxes; unjustly claimed exemptions, to the extent that such misrepresentations would place me in a lower bracket, and amount to a considerable sum of money?

Justice toward racial groups: Have I in any manner discriminated against racial groups; resented their inalienable rights; made disparaging remarks about them or to them; shown my ill will and refused to cooperate when they were granted the same privileges as I; resented their presence in church, on trains, in restaurants, at theatres, and public gatherings?

Cooperation in injustice: Have I unjustly harmed my neighbor, even though I received no personal benefit, by my commands; by giving advice; by consenting to what was unjust without making the effort I was under obligation to make; by praising any kind of wrong-doing, thus confirming the evil-doer in his attitude; by shielding or protecting a person who had done wrong; by remaining silent when my office or other form of obligation demanded that I speak or take definite action; by timidly failing to oppose those whom it was my duty to oppose; by refusing to make known evil-doers when there was an obligation for me to do so? How serious was the harm I caused? Can it be remedied?

Injustice to neighbor's life and well-being: Have I struck anyone unjustly; injured him seriously?

Have I driven my car in disregard of traffic regulations; endangered the lives of others by driving when under the influence of liquor; permitted the children to drive the car even though I realized that they should not be allowed to do so? Have I otherwise been culpably negligent with regard to my neighbor's well-being?

Have I in any way been involved in the crime of abortion? (Abortion is punished with an excommunication reserved to the bishop: as a general rule the

confessor must obtain special powers to absolve anyone who has had direct part in the commission of this crime. Some confessors have special faculties in such cases.)

Injustice in speech: Have I been guilty of perjury (falsehood under oath which, in the one act, violates the virtues of truthfulness, justice, and religion)?

Have I taken away my neighbor's good name or the honor in which he is held? (This can be done even by statements that are *true* in themselves, a form of injustice that is properly called detraction, in the case of one whose sin is secret, or not commonly known, and whose good name is still intact. He is entitled to his reputation: no one, normally, has the right of taking it away.) Of course, the offense is all the more vicious if a lie has been circulated: this form of injustice is called calumny.

Have I spent time in gossip; caused ill will by my tale-bearing; otherwise been uncharitable in speech (which often involves the idea of, or borders on injustice)?

Have I endeavored to restore the good name I have destroyed? (Sometimes the person who has taken away the good name of another is excused from restoring it, if the lapse of time has caused others to forget the matter; if the person so harmed has expressly or tacitly forgiven the defamation this is a truly virtuous act; if reparation is impossible, as when the hearers are unknown or otherwise cannot be approached, or if reparation would cause evils out of proportion to the good to be effected. Otherwise the injustice should be made good.)

TRUTHFULNESS

Have I told lies? (A lie is knowingly and wilfully to state what is opposed to the truth. Generally speaking, a lie is, in itself, a venial sin, that is, insofar as it is simply opposed to the truth. If at the same time it violates other virtues, like justice or religion, it can easily be a mortal sin.)

Have I violated secrecy; read other persons' mail without permission?

Have I been guilty of rash judgment, mentally attributing evil, or unworthy motives to my neighbor, without sufficient reason; have I been suspicious in my dealings with others?

VIRTUE OF RELIGION

By religion we understand, generally, man's relation to God. The virtue forms a broad part of justice. Justice, strictly, is between equals. There is no equality between God and man. Nevertheless, religion is the sum of what man *owes* God: it is like justice to that extent.

Devotion is a kind of generosity in dealing with God: it prompts its possessor to willing performance of those acts of religion that are known to be pleasing to God. Many causes contribute toward building up this disposition: the operation of grace in the soul; training and virtuous example in the home; the inspiration of associating with morally good persons; spiritual reading; knowledge and realization of our dependence on God's goodness.

Prayer: Have I sought to honor God in prayer; resorted to prayer in the time of spiritual danger and temptation; been faithful in the practice of a morning on rising and at night when retiring; before and after meals? (The omission of morning and night prayers or meal prayers is not strictly sinful, since the obligation of prayer is not specified as regards time, but these prayers should not be omitted, because otherwise the person is deprived of many graces that are necessary for daily life.)

Have I prayed for my own spiritual needs; for those of my family; for persons who have spiritual claims on me; for the parish; the diocese; the Holy Father; the Church?

Have I prayed with attention to what I was saying; with confidence and perseverance; with submission to God's will? Have I deliberately entertained distractions?

If I add up all the time I have spent in prayer since my last confession (morning and night prayers, an occasional Rosary, ejaculatory prayers, those prayed with the congregation in church), can I honestly say that I am giving God a worthy portion of my effort?

Vows: Have I pronounced a vow, a solemn promise made to God to perform a particular virtuous work, or avoid a sinful association of the past? (This is generally not advisable without the specific permission or approval of one's confessor.) Have I faithfully fulfilled what I have promised? If observance of the vow has become a hardship, have I taken the matter up with my confessor?

Oaths: An oath is calling upon God to witness the

truth of what one says. Have I sworn falsely; failed to fulfil the promises made under oath?

Observance of the Lord's day, and feasts of obligation: Have I sanctified the Lord's day; shared in the offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass; spent some time during the course of the day in prayer or holy reading?

Have I missed Mass through my own fault; more than once; been late in coming to Mass; how late; habitually? Have I laughed, talked, or otherwise conducted myself in an unbecoming manner in church, or caused others to do so?

Have I missed Mass on a holy day of obligation: Circumcision of our Lord (January 1); Ascension Thursday (fortieth day after Easter); Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven (August 15); All Saints' day (November 1); Immaculate Conception (December 8); Christmas (December 25)?

Have I abstained from servile work (manual labor, buying, selling) that was not necessary?

Have I violated the holiness of the Lord's day by *sinful* drinking, associating with unworthy companions, attending sinful amusements?

OBSERVANCE OF FAST AND ABSTINENCE:

The following regulations on fast and abstinence bind the majority of the faithful at the times specified. There are amazingly few exceptions possible under these modified regulations. They are to foster the spirit of penance and reparation for sin, to encourage self-denial and mortification, and to guide one's life in the footsteps of Our Divine Savior.

ABSTINENCE

Everyone over seven years of age is bound to observe the law of abstinence.

Complete abstinence is to be observed on Fridays (fifty-two days) Ash Wednesday, the Vigils of Assumption (August 14) and Christmas (December 24), and on Holy Saturday morning. (Total: fifty-five and one half days.) On days of complete abstinence, *meat and soup or gravy made from meat may not be used at all.*

Partial abstinence is to be observed on Ember Wednesdays and Saturdays (eight days), and on the Vigil of Pentecost (Saturday before Pentecost Sunday), and the Vigil of All Saints' day (October 31). (Total: ten days.) On the days of partial abstinence, meat and soup or gravy made from meat may be taken *only once a day, at the principal meal.*

FAST

Everyone over twenty-one and under fifty-nine years of age is also bound to observe the law of fast.

The days of fast are the weekdays of Lent (forty days), Ember days (twelve days), the Vigils of Pentecost, the Assumption (August 14), All Saints' (October 31), and Christmas (December 24). (Total: fifty-six days.)

On days of fast *only one full meal is allowed*. Two other meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs; but together they should not equal another full meal.

Meat may be taken at the principal meal on a day of fast *except* on Fridays (fifty-two days), Ash Wednesday, and the Vigils of Assumption (August 14) and Christmas (December 24). (Total: fifty-six exceptions.)

Eating between meals is not permitted on fast days; but liquids, including milk and fruit juices, are allowed.

When health or ability to work would be seriously affected, the law of fasting does not oblige. In doubt concerning fast or abstinence, a parish priest or confessor should be consulted. These modified regulations (effective February 27, 1952) are issued by the Bishops of the United States, and are practically universal for our country.

Have I observed these regulations conscientiously?

REVERENCE FOR GOD'S NAME

Have I used the Holy Name irreverently? Was this abuse joined with cursing (wishing evil to another); frequently; in anger; in jest; habitually; in the presence of others, especially children?

Have I blasphemed (contemptuous, insulting speech to God or about Him)?

SACRILEGE

Have I laid violent hands on, or struck, or sued in court, or violated the chastity of a person consecrated to God in the priesthood or in religion?

Have I violated the holiness of places dedicated to sacred worship (church, chapel, altar, cemetery) by any kind of external sin committed within their boundaries; by theft committed within a sacred place?

Have I treated sacred things irreverently: the sacraments (a bad confession; a sacrilegious Communion; marrying in the state of mortal sin); sacramentals; vessels of the altar; vestments; other church furnishings?

OBEDIENCE, LOVE, RESPECT

Obedience is the submission of the will leading a person to fulfil the will of another, who commands with authority as one holding the place of God.

Have I refused to obey my parents; pastors; teachers; civil authorities; regulations of the Church?

Have I been in contempt of authority; deliberately led others into disobedience?

Have I shown a proper expression of love (for example, toward parents) and signs of respect and general regard for those placed in authority over me?

For parents: Have I shown my love for my children; created the environment of a Catholic home

for them (Crucifix, sacred pictures, sacramentals in habitual use, religious reading material, guidance of conversation); fostered an atmosphere of religion in which they may grow up; accompanied them to confession if the school children do not go together at school; knelt beside them in the family pew, unless the parochial school children are together at Mass; received Holy Communion with them frequently; seen to it that they receive the sacraments regularly and given them a worthy example in this regard; prayed with them in the home; attended to their full education in Catholic schools according to my means; taken an interest in their problems; welcomed their questions and comments; prepared them for a sensible understanding of puberty and trained them for chastity and virtue generally; encouraged them to come to me with their doubts and difficulties, especially about their vocation, and what they want to accomplish in life; taken an interest in their recreation and their young friends; watched the company they keep, the books and magazines they read, the shows they go to?

For older sons and daughters: Have I obeyed my father and mother; performed faithfully the things they have requested of me; cooperated with them, helping to lighten their burden, and taking my full share of the responsibility at home according to my ability; shown my love of my parents and our home; been proud of my home and family; wanted my parents to be proud of me, and wanted them to know that I am grateful for their sacrifices and love (otherwise mother's day and father's day observances are quite meaningless); borne patiently with the things

they have said and done which annoy me; cared for them when they needed my help?

For husbands and wives: Have I helped my husband (wife) to lead a good Catholic life: by worthy example, by praying together, by mutual sharing of our responsibilities? Have I been considerate in the exercise of the marital rights and privileges; have I unjustly refused these rights or made them distasteful under whatever pretext? Have I argued, quarrelled, especially in the presence of the children; used abusive, vulgar, or impure language before them; drunk to excess so that the children saw me under the influence of liquor; been guilty of thoughtless and inconsiderate conduct toward relatives and friends, embarrassing my family? Have I been willing to make allowances for human shortcomings?

FORTITUDE

Fortitude is the supernatural virtue that makes the soul strong in pursuing moral goods that are hard to acquire, firm in bearing hardships when it is difficult to be firm, and courageous in duty when the opposition is severe. It conquers fear, but balances the books by putting a check on rashness. Fortitude does not mean the absence of fear, but it *controls* fear, even in the face of death. Fortitude is more passive than aggressive, that is, it shows more brightly in defense than in attack, it has more in common with the martyrs for the faith than the boldness of the great soldier.

Have I put my trust in God, submitted to His will

courageously in bearing the crosses that He has sent me: sickness in the home; death of loved ones; poverty; physical handicaps; the ridicule and contempt that moderns hold for large families?

Have I the courage to live my state of life and assume its responsibilities as I know God wills me to live it; to practice my religion fearlessly and without being concerned about what others think; not to be intimidated by threats in the performance of my duty?

Have I omitted duties out of human respect?

Have I shown my regard for this virtue by consoling, encouraging, and helping others to bear their crosses with courage and out of love for God?

Have I feigned illness to get out of unpleasant work; excused myself too lightly from my Christian duties, such as hearing Mass; complained because of headaches; sought sympathy?

PATIENCE

Fortitude always touches the heroic to some degree, and has furnished the most interesting chapters of world literature. But patience, too, has its importance in God's plan. It never appears to be exciting, usually draws little attention. But it must be practiced a thousand times to merit the great grace of fortitude.

As a supernatural virtue it has the same motive as all other virtue, union with Christ. St. Benedict presented it to his followers for what it is, the guarantee

of life-long faithful service of the Lord: “. . . so that never departing from God’s guidance, but persevering in His doctrine in the monastery until death, *we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ*, in order that we may deserve to be partakers of His kingdom.”⁹ The motive for patience must always be an exalted one: it must stand many, many tests.

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, teaches how far-reaching and important patience is. The following words are part of one of his sermons, and are read in the Divine Office on the fourth Sunday after Easter: “By our patience God draws us to Himself, and keeps us as His own. Patience soothes anger, bridles the tongue, controls the mind, preserves peace, governs self-mastery, quickly conquers temptations to lust, keeps down one’s temper, puts out the fire of hatred, makes the wealthy meek, and makes bearable the distress of the poor. Patience guards virgins in their blessed integrity, protects widows in their arduous purity, and keeps married persons in their single-hearted love for each other. Patience teaches the successful and prosperous to be humble, the unfortunate to be brave, and all to be gentle, even when they are wronged and insulted. Patience induces a person to forgive those who trespass against him, and if he has wronged another, to ask his pardon humbly. Patience fights down temptation, bears persecution, and endures suffering to the end. . . . Patience is the moat

that guards the foundations of the castle of our faith.”¹⁰

Penitents often ask for help in acquiring this virtue. There is no better means than to kneel where they can glance at their favorite Station of the Cross, calmly reflect for a few minutes on the patience of their Savior in His suffering, and then try to imitate Him on the humble plane of every-day problems and annoyances.

Have I allowed my impatience to break forth in anger, bitter words, uncontrolled conduct; been intolerant, ungracious, sullen because the actions of others irritated me?

Have I tried to make my home a pleasant place in which to live, making allowances for the shortcomings of those about me? “Bear one another’s burdens, and thus you will fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians, 6: 2)

Has St. Paul’s motive, which echoes the fifth petition of the *Our Father*, guided my relations to others: “Bear with one another, and forgive one another, if anyone has a grievance against any other; even as the Lord has forgiven you.” (Colossians, 3: 12)

Have I corrected my children in anger?

TEMPERANCE

Temperance has a broad application in Christian living. It regulates the gratification of the pleasures and desires of the lower senses of taste and touch,

just as prudence controls the enjoyment of the higher faculties. The lower senses are so called because they rebel more against reason, and are enjoyed in a more animal manner.

Temperance governs the intelligent use of God's gifts to sustain the individual (by eating and drinking) and the race (by the acts of reproduction). In its wider application the virtue extends to a right-minded use and enjoyment of all of God's blessings.

Have I been guilty of eating too much; to the point of becoming ill; to the point of endangering my health?

Have I drunk to excess; habitually; appeared before my children under the influence of liquor; profaned the Sunday with excessive drinking; missed Mass as a result of Saturday night's indulgence?

Have I observed the spirit of Advent, Lent, the Ember seasons; created the atmosphere of a "*well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family*"¹¹ that Pope Pius XI describes as necessary for training children to virtuous lives?

Have I lived in contentment with the frugal comfort of a just, family living wage? Have I bought things on time that I should have denied myself; made necessities out of luxuries? In his Encyclical Letter "On the Condition of Labor," which has done so much to help modern laboring men and their families, Pope Leo XIII stated: "If a workman's wages be sufficient to enable him to maintain himself, his wife, and his children in *reasonable* comfort, he will not find it difficult, if he is a sensible man, to study

[that is, practice] *economy*; and he will not fail, by *cutting down expenses*, to put by a little property: nature and reason would urge him to do this.”¹² Forty years later Pope Pius XI issued a plea along the same lines. He desires that the laborer “by skill and *thrift* acquire a certain moderate ownership.” As he points out, “These goods should be sufficient to supply all needs and an honest livelihood, and to uplift men to that higher level of prosperity and culture which, *provided it be used with prudence*, is not only no hindrance but is of singular help to virtue.”¹³

Have I failed to use God’s gifts to me in such a manner that my family has had to pay the penalty of my excesses? Have I failed to teach my children the virtue of temperance, especially by my example?

PURITY, CHASTITY

In His loving design for the preservation of the human race, God established the union of man and woman. Husband and wife are associated in a life-long bond, a vocation that carries with it many heavy responsibilities before God, to society at large (Church and State), to themselves mutually, and to their children. The primary purpose of that union is the procreation and education of children; its secondary purposes are mutual help in serving God and bearing life’s hardships in the closest of all companionships, and the honorable outlet of the physical passions.

Every thought, word, and deed in harmony with that vocation and governed by the virtue of temper-

ance, is virtuous, and is properly called marital chastity.

Purity is most acceptable to God and pleasing to men. It sets its possessor apart from the many who do not live in reverence for God's holy law. It makes little children lovable (their virtue is not merely negative, a state of existence before the awakening of the passions: at a very early age they reflect the holiness of their homes, and the training they have received). In adulthood the virtue of purity makes chaste men and women admirable. It brings them close to God, establishing a union that because of its difficulty is richly rewarded. "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God." (Matthew, 5: 8)

Precisely because of the seriousness of the responsibilities assumed in marriage, God has attached to the union of man and woman the most intense of all physical pleasures. This is His inducement to a vocation in His service that can never fail to present its difficulties.

The contract of marriage, which is entered into in the sight of God, is most explicit. It is the giving and mutual receiving of rights over the body to acts that of their nature (not necessarily in fact), lead to the procreation of offspring.¹⁴ In the case of validly married persons, whatever stands in opposition to, or runs counter to that contract, is sinful, regardless of excuses. Among the unmarried there are none of the rights and

privileges which can have their origin only in the contract that is recognized by God, by the Church, and by the State.

Impurity in all its forms is a disregard of the divinely holy plan. It is a selfish seeking of pleasure, without reference to the natural purpose of the union of man and woman, and without assuming the corresponding obligations, which is the very purpose of marriage.

Every *deliberate* thought, word, deed, is mortally sinful: there is no such thing as a deliberate venial sin against chastity.

A penitent who must accuse himself of any sin against chastity is asked to state it as reverently, briefly, and simply as possible, indicating whatever circumstances would change the nature of the sin. Thus: "I committed adultery once: I am married, and so is the other person." "I wilfully read an immoral book that caused me many impure thoughts in which I took delight." "I twice engaged in immoral kissing for protracted periods of time." "I committed the sin of self-abuse, once."

Have I practiced birth prevention by any artificial means whatever? How long has this practice been continued? Have my past confessions of this sin disregarded the firm purpose of amendment? Am I now firmly resolved to avoid this violation of the sanctity of my marriage? (A firm purpose of amendment is essential to a worthy confession. See page 63.)

Have I in any manner been implicated in procuring an abortion?

Have I agreed to continued practice of rhythm, or so-called natural birth control, without a justifying reason? Regarding this point Pope Pius XII has stated: "Upon couples who perform the act peculiar to their state, nature and the Creator impose the function of helping the conservation of the human race.... The individual and society, the people and the state, the Church itself depend for their existence in the order established by God on fruitful marriage. Therefore, to embrace the married state, continuously to make use of the faculty proper to it and lawful in it alone [the marital rights and privileges], and, on the other hand, to withdraw always and deliberately with no serious reason from its primary obligation, would be a sin against the very meaning of conjugal life."¹⁵

Have I been guilty of fornication (sexual relations where neither party is married); adultery (where either only one party is married, or both are married—this circumstance changes the whole question of justice and should be mentioned); sexual relations with a relative; with a person in sacred orders or religious profession?

Have I committed self-abuse (impure act by oneself)?

Have I engaged in kissing; over an extended period of time; to the point where I had impure desires; to the point where the other person's passions were aroused?

Have I listened to or used impure language; peddled suggestive stories; engaged in immodest con-

versation; sung indecent songs; attended immoral movies or shows; danced immodestly; read suggestive stories?

Have I deliberately entertained impure thoughts; desires; failed to turn away from these thoughts when I became aware of their presence?

Have I dressed immodestly in order to be looked at; otherwise been guilty of indecent exposure?

SHORTER EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

(Most questions treated here have a longer, more positive explanation in the preceding section.)

COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

1. *I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me.* (Exodus, 20: 2)

Have I denied my faith; deliberately doubted any revealed truth; failed to defend my religion when it was attacked; taken an active part in non-Catholic services; read anything that would cause doubts about my faith, which attacked morality, or belittled religion; practiced any form of superstition; neglected prayer or prayed slovenly, with little effort at ridding myself of distractions; misbehaved, laughed, talked in church, or caused others to do so; been guilty of any form of sacrilege?

2. *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.* (Exodus, 20: 7)

Have I used the Holy Name as an idle expression; in swearing (unjustifiably calling on God to witness that I am telling the truth); in cursing (wishing evil to others, asking God to inflict evil on them); in blasphemy (insult to God); in jest; in anger; before children or others who would be scandalized? Have I failed to fulfil vows (promises made to God to perform virtuous acts or avoid sin)?

3. *Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.* (Exodus, 20: 8)

Have I missed Mass on Sunday through my fault; on holy days of obligation (See page 41); come late for Mass; caused my family to be late?

Have I taken part in offering the Sacrifice to the best of my ability?

Have I performed unnecessary servile work on Sundays, holy days?

Have I spent Sunday in such a manner that the holiness of the hour at Mass had little or nothing in common with the rest of the day?

4. *Honor thy father and thy mother.* (Exodus, 20: 12)

Have I refused to obey my parents; pastors; teachers; employers; others who had a right to my obedience; neglected to consult them in making important decisions (for example, my parents, in choosing my vocation in life); failed to love them, or to show that love I should have; failed to give them the proper tokens of respect; neglected to care for them properly in sickness, advanced age, helplessness; been ashamed of them?

(Parents) Have I cared for my children properly;

educated them in the home and in Catholic schools; corrected them when necessary; warned them; instructed them; trained them for chastity and other virtues?

5. *Thou shalt not kill.* (Exodus, 20: 13)

Have I in any way been guilty of another's death or serious physical injury by culpable neglect, evil intent, reckless automobile driving; been in any way involved in procuring an abortion?

Have I given way to anger; wished evil to others; hated them; ridiculed or belittled them; refused to speak to them or to accept an apology; deliberately provoked others to anger?

Have I been biting, caustic, sarcastic, nagging; given to uncharitable speech; lacking in regard for the good name of my neighbor? Have I made good the harm I have caused by these sins?

6. *Thou shalt not commit adultery.* (Exodus, 20: 14)

9. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.* (Exodus, 20: 17)

(More detailed explanation given on page 51.)

Have I committed adultery (sexual relations where either party or both parties are married to others); incest (with relatives); sacrilege (with persons in sacred orders or religious profession); practiced birth prevention by any artificial means; resorted to the practice of rhythm unjustifiably; been in any manner involved in procuring an abortion?

Have I practiced self-abuse (masturbation, sin on one's own body)?

Have I engaged in sinful kissing and embracing, or

any immodesty in touch, causing my passion to be aroused; or causing evil thoughts and desires in my companion; over an extended period of time?

Have I listened to or used impure language; peddled suggestive or immoral stories; engaged in immodest, suggestive conversation; sung indecent songs; attended immoral movies and shows; danced immodestly; read suggestive stories that caused me impure thoughts; looked at or circulated indecent pictures?

Have I deliberately entertained impure thoughts that came upon me from innocent sources; made no honest effort to put them out of my mind as soon as I became aware of their presence; given way to impure desires; looked with evil intent on immodestly dressed persons, or those who conducted themselves improperly?

Have I dressed immodestly in order to be noticed; otherwise been guilty of indecent exposure; sought to lead others into the sin of impurity in any manner whatever?

7. *Thou shalt not steal.* (Exodus, 20: 15)

10. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.*
(Exodus, 20: 17)

Have I stolen what belonged to others; taken small amounts frequently (e.g. from employers) which can add up to a considerable amount; failed to return what I borrowed; been guilty of unfair business dealings?

Have I restored the property I took from others or in any way came by dishonestly?

Have I been unjust to clients, patients, others who have sought my services; cheated in tests?

8. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.* (Exodus, 20: 16; Matthew, 19: 18)

Have I been guilty of perjury (stating what is false when under oath); harmed the good name or reputation of another by calumny (stating what is false) or detraction (robbing my neighbor of his honor, even though what I say is true); encouraged others to commit detraction or calumny; listened to them without protest, or even with eagerness; told lies, harming my neighbor; lied for my own or others' convenience; engaged in gossip?

Have I violated secrecy; made known what was communicated to me in confidence?

Have I made an honest attempt to repair the damage I have caused by the sins of speech?

Have I been guilty of rash judgment; been given to suspicion; attributed false motives to my neighbor?

COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

1. Assist at Mass and abstain from servile work on Sundays and holy days of obligation. (See Third Commandment of God.)

2. Fast and abstain on the days appointed by the Church. (See page 41.)

3. Confess one's sins at least once a year.

4. Receive Holy Communion during the Easter season (from the first Sunday in Lent until Trinity Sunday).

5. Contribute to the support of the Church according to one's means.

6. Observe the laws of the Church on matrimony.

CAPITAL SINS

Pride: Have I been guilty of seeking my own glorification and recognition unduly; even to the point of contempt of God (this would be very rare); giving way to ambition to the excess of disregarding the means employed to achieve my goal; giving way to vanity (complacency in strength, personal appearance, clothing); ostentation; hypocrisy; presumptuousness; overbearing attitude; being constantly critical of the accomplishments of others; being keenly hurt when humiliated, passed by, or when plans did not materialize; stubborn; disobedient?

(Suggested remedies): Know yourself for what you are—the *candid* estimation of others is generally a good gauge; study the humility of Christ; welcome an occasional humiliation.

Covetousness: Have I had an inordinate desire for money; other material goods; sought to keep up with others when they procured something I admired; entertained these attitudes to the extent of complete disregard of the needs of others; to the extent of hard-heartedness? Has my covetous disposition led me to injustice, lack of generosity to the poor; failure in almsgiving according to my means; neglect to cooperate with the works of the Church undertaken in the parish?

(Suggested remedies): Learn to acknowledge the brevity of life; realize that however tightly you hold your fist, God can easily force it open; talk for a while with a person who has courageously borne a cross; meditate on the example of Christ.

Lust: (See questions on the virtue of Purity on

page 51, and the Sixth and Ninth Commandments of God in this shorter examination). Has lust produced in me a distaste for prayer; blindness to moral values; inconsiderateness toward others; inconstancy; coldness and indifference in the practice of my religion?

(Suggested remedies): Engage in humble, frequent prayer; receive the sacraments frequently and regularly; avoid idleness; practice temperance in all things; take immediate flight from every occasion of sin; associate with little children and persons who are impressive for their purity; cultivate a taste for good reading; remember and depend on the presence of your guardian angel.

Envy: Envy is unhappiness at another's good fortune, considering it as one's own misfortune, or at least as one's own lack of a desired good. Have I taken pleasure in the misfortunes of others; discussed their affairs; made unkind remarks about them; tried to discredit their accomplishments; avoided wishing them well; congratulated them insincerely?

(Suggested remedies): Practice charity and humility; go out of your way to congratulate, in all sincerity, others in their good fortune; express sympathy and a willingness to help those who have suffered some misfortune.

Anger: Have I failed to check my temper; said unreasonable things; been disposed to revenge; given to rancor; given to making life unpleasant for those about me (especially after drinking); bullied children; punished them unreasonably; made them and others feel my displeasure?

(Suggested remedies): Practice silence when something you consider offensive has been said or done; immediately crush the inclination to anger; reflect that it is probably no picnic to live with you, either; strive to imitate the example of Christ.

Gluttony: Have I eaten or drunk to excess; to the point of endangering my health; of hampering my work?

Have I been drunk; repeatedly; to the point where it is obvious that I can not drink reasonably any longer, and must avoid liquor in order to avoid sinful excess? (Part of the penalty of this form of excess is to deprive the victim of the humility and courage to acknowledge that he is no longer master of himself, and that his safety is in total abstinence.) Have I been loud, offensive, immodest, and generally dissolute as a result of drinking? Has the problem outgrown the limits of my individual concern and affected my family and others (depriving them of proper support, good example, respect in the community, avoidance of humiliation)? (Again, part of the penalty of excessive drinking is the selfishness that refuses to consider the rights and feelings of others.)

(Suggested remedies): Have the courage of a firm No when invited to drink or, if the temptation is strong, to associate with drinkers; be honest enough to acknowledge the far-reaching evil effects of excess; recognize the humility of dependence on the grace of Christ; strive to please our Lord by gaining a victory over yourself in honor of and in union with His thirst on the Cross.

Sloth: Have I been guilty of laziness; waste of time and talent; failure to keep up on the progress made in my profession; fruitless reading (how much more time have I devoted to newspapers, novels, detective stories, and recreational reading generally, than to works of a nature whose seriousness is in harmony with my education?); failure to pray; distaste for anything spiritual; restlessness; feeling the necessity of being constantly on the go, incapable of sitting down (or kneeling down) in quietude for any length of time; loss of the love of home indicated by the constant seeking of excitement in commercialized amusements; fear of facing stern realities; looking for "whatever will make me forget"?

(*Suggested remedies*): Reflect on the account that God will demand at the last judgment of the time that He allotted to you; of the talents; of the work that needed to be done.

FIRM PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

Many confessions seem to lack permanent fruitfulness. Well-intentioned persons often ask what they can do to keep their confessions from being the same month after month, for years.

The fault lies most frequently in the weakness of the penitent's purpose of amendment.

This purpose of amendment is the *present effective* disposition with regard to *future conduct*. But it is painfully aware of the *past* humiliation of sin.

You can see the necessity and reasonableness of the purpose of amendment by an analogy. Suppose that you have grievously offended a close friend. You acknowledge to yourself that you have been entirely in the wrong. You are unhappy until you can admit your fault and ask your friend's pardon. Your apology covers the *past*, whatever it was that you said or did that injured your intimate; neither he nor you call your *present* sincerity into question; your apology is your guarantee against *future* repetitions of your fault.

Worthiness of confession follows the same general pattern, except that you are begging *God's* pardon, and employing His grace to do so. Your contrition expresses your sorrow for having offended your Creator, your Redeemer, your Sanctifier: the *past* is taken care of in the worthiness of your contrition. The sincerity of your *present* sorrow includes the resolve to avoid in *future* whatever violates God's holy law. For example, if you must now confess that you sinfully absented yourself from Mass last Sunday, your present sincerity includes the firm resolve never to repeat the offense.

But what about human weakness? Must the firm purpose of amendment extend itself to habitual offenses that may have troubled you for years? You would love to rid yourself of them, once for all, but you fear that you will not succeed in doing so. Com-

mon sense tells you that if you have succumbed to temptation against chastity, or committed sins of speech, or have been guilty of envy innumerable times, you will hardly correct the evil attachment in your life by this one confession.

Your confession deals with the *present*. Your confessor must have the assurance that you will try, with God's grace, to avoid the occasions of sin in the *future*. Firm purpose of amendment means that *here and now*, while preparing yourself for the sacrament of penance, and in your actual confession, you propose not to offend God again. This is not a solemn promise; it is not a vow that you will break if you sin again. But it is your resolve to cooperate with God's grace.

You may be miserably conscious of your weakness. Who is not? Remember, your conversion is God's work. His grace often works slowly—because of you. Sudden and complete conversions from vice to virtue are rare. You have no right to expect so great a favor from God. Your part is cooperation with the restoration of grace, or its increase, through the sacrament. You honor God if you have confidence in His goodness to you.

St. Augustine, who had led a life of sin for years, wrote, shortly after his conversion, his beautiful *Confessions*, one of the most profound and humble works ever penned. Many passages of this wonderful

book give confidence to the penitent. It might be called the classic of perfect contrition and firm purpose of amendment. Some of its lines seem particularly helpful in preparation for confession:

Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.¹⁷

What evil has there not been in my deeds, or if not in my deeds, in my words, or if not in my words, then in my will? But You, Lord, are good and merciful, and Your right hand had regard to the profundity of my death and drew out the abyss of corruption that was in the bottom of my heart. By Your gift I had come totally not to will what I willed but to will what You willed. But where in all that long time was my free will, and from what deep sunken hiding-place was it suddenly summoned forth in the moment in which I bowed my neck to Your easy yoke and my shoulders to Your light burden, Christ Jesus, my Helper and my Redeemer? How lovely I suddenly found it to be free from the loveliness of those vanities, so that now it was a joy to renounce what I had been so afraid to lose. For You cast them out of me, O true and supreme Loveliness, You cast them out of me and took their place in me, You

who are sweeter than all pleasure, yet not to flesh and blood; brighter than all light, yet deeper within than any secret; loftier than all honour, but not to those who are lofty to themselves. Now my mind was free from the cares that had gnawed it, from aspiring and getting and weltering in filth and rubbing the scab of lust. And I talked with You as friends talk, my glory and my riches and my salvation, my Lord God. . . .¹⁸

I admit I was terrified, O my Lord, my God, for as far back as my earliest infancy I had never experienced any such thing [the swiftness of God's mercy in answer to prayer]. Thus in that depth I recognized the act of Your will, and I gave praise to Your name, rejoicing in faith. But this faith would not let me feel safe about my past sins, since Your baptism had not yet come to remit them. . . .¹⁹

And we were baptised, and all anxiety as to our past life fled away. The days were not long enough as I meditated, and found wonderful delight in meditating, upon the depth of Your design for the salvation of the human race. I wept at the beauty of Your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved at the sweet

sound of Your Church's singing. Those sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart: so that my feeling of devotion overflowed, and the tears ran down from my eyes, and I was happy in them. . . .²⁰

Some ten years later St. Augustine added the last four books (chapters) to his *Confessions*. Few statements ever made by a sinner that has been forgiven and has cooperated with God's grace, compare with the following words for instilling courage into the heart of today's repentant.

Terrified by my sins and the mass of my misery, I had pondered in my heart and thought of flight to the desert; but Thou didst forbid me and strengthen me, saying: *And Christ died for all: that they also who live may now not live to themselves but with Him who died for them.* See, Lord, I cast my care upon Thee, that I may live: *and I will consider the wondrous things of Thy law.* Thou knowest my unskilfulness and my infirmity: teach me and heal me. He Thy only One, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, has redeemed me with His blood. *Let not the proud speak evil of me,* for I think upon the price of my redemption, I eat and drink it and [as a

bishop] give it to others to eat and drink; and being poor I desire to be filled with it among those that eat and are filled: *and they shall praise the Lord that seek Him.*²¹

PRAYER FOR YOUR CONFESSOR

On the evening of His glorious Resurrection from the dead, Jesus appeared before His apostles. He breathed upon them. He communicated to them His Holy Spirit. He bestowed on them, and their successors in His holy priesthood, the wondrous power to forgive sin in His name. (See John, 20: 22)

It is a power to be used in fear and trembling. No one can ever appreciate the infinite goodness of its Giver, for He is God. It is part of His plan that no one can ever help you so much as your confessor, if you cooperate with him.

The Church recommends that the priest say the following prayer before he enters the confessional. The prayer lists the principal virtues of the worthy minister of the sacrament of mercy. It is the priest's humble petition for the grace to be of spiritual assistance to you.

At the same time the prayer acquaints the penitent with the manner in which the priest hopes to help him. In other words, it shows the penitent how he is to be assisted, and indirectly, how he is to cooperate.

It may worthily be said by the penitent in spiritual union with the confessor.

Grant me, O Lord, the wisdom employed at Thy throne, that I may know how to judge Thy faithful with justice, and Thy poor in judgment. Make me so handle the keys of the kingdom of heaven that I shall not open the door to anyone on whom it should be closed, nor close it on him to whom it should be opened.

Let my intention be pure, my zeal sincere, my charity patient, my efforts fruitful. Let me be gentle without being lax, firm and unyielding without becoming harsh; may I never look down on the poor, nor flatter the rich. Make me kind in winning sinners, prudent in questioning them, and skilled in instructing them.

Grant me, I beseech Thee, expertness in restraining sinners from evil, diligence in keeping them virtuous, perseverance and earnestness in leading them to greater progress.

Bestow on me maturity in my answers, rightness in my exhortations, light in all difficult problems, wisdom in involved situations, and victory over all difficult cases.

Do not permit me to tolerate useless talk, nor to be corrupted by the evils which are made

known to me. May I save others, and not be lost myself. Amen.²²



PRAYER OF ST. GERTRUDE

O sweetest Jesus, in Thy loving desire for our salvation Thou hast instituted the sacrament of confession for the consolation of all sinners, in order that through it we might be cleansed from all our iniquities and recover the grace we have lost. I now come back to Thee once more, a wretched sinner, who have offended Thee again by so many sins, and defiled my soul with many stains.

I am resolved to receive this sacrament of Thy great bounty with most steadfast hope and confidence that Thou wilt grant me remission of all my sins. I desire to accuse myself before the priest, Thy representative, of all my sins, as far as I can recall them, with the most profound humility and contrition. I will not knowingly hide any mortal sin, however vile and shameful it be.

I desire to include in this confession all those sins which I cannot now remember, and all my

venial sins. I confess them all to Thee as to my great High Priest. In the presence of the court of heaven I acknowledge and proclaim myself a faithless and miserable creature, a traitor to Thine adorable majesty.

I beseech Thee, therefore, most merciful Father, deign to look on me, a miserable sinner, with the compassion with which Thou didst look upon Thy Son when He fell on His face in the Garden of Olives, crushed to the earth by the sins of all mankind. Graciously hear me as I implore Thy pardon.

In order to supply what is lacking to my most imperfect contrition, I offer Thee the overwhelming grief which Thine only-begotten Son endured in His Sacred Heart throughout His whole life on earth on account of the sins of the world, especially when in the Garden of Olives the extremity of His anguish wrung from Him His sweat of blood. I beseech Thee to cleanse my soul of all its stains in the stream of that most holy Blood, and to adorn it with a purity whiter than snow. Amen.²³



THOUGHTS WHILE AWAITING YOUR TURN TO CONFESS

In larger parishes you may have to stand in line before you can go to confession. These minutes are not to be wasted: your preparation should continue, if possible, until the moment when you actually address the priest. You will probably find it spiritually profitable to dwell on the following thoughts:

I must not confuse the embarrassment and shame which I may feel keenly, with contrition, which I may not feel at all. Shame has little to do with my confession, but I owe sorrow to God, and it is the perfect disposition for entering the confessional. It is the hatred of sin simply out of the realization that God is infinitely good and because He has extended that goodness to me in so many ways.



A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 50, 19)



Confession cannot be easy for anyone. Our Lord did not intend that it should be anything

but difficult. If it were it would be of doubtful value.



Help us, O God, our Savior: and for the glory of Thy name, O Lord, deliver us: and forgive us our sins for Thy Name's sake: lest they should say among the Gentiles: "Where is their God?" (Psalm 78, 9, 10)



I must not waste valuable moments nor dissipate my efforts in carefully rehearsing what I am going to tell the confessor. All that is necessary is that I know what my sins are, and acknowledge them as humbly and reverently as I can.

I must try to make my confession complete and sincere. At the same time I must realize that it is far more important that I stress the spirit of contrition or hatred of sin, and the firm purpose of amending my life, than that I be concerned about exact numbers, circumstances, and memorized phrases.



My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the just: and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (I John, 2: 1, 2)



The Gospel records that Jesus forgave the sins of several persons. No one of them made a confession in the form that we must use today. That is because these few individuals were privileged to deal directly and personally with Infinite Mercy in the person of their Savior.

The same goodness has made it possible for the same divinely imparted forgiveness to be produced in my soul today. But I must employ the means that Christ established. I must do so with great faith. I must confess to the priest, Christ's representative, fully, completely, with great love of my Savior and profound humility.

St. Ambrose reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who remits sins; but that He does so through the ministry of men; that priests pardon sins, not in their own name, but in the name

of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.²⁴



If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool. (Isaias, 1: 18)



St. Bernard had a most profound appreciation of the power of confession:

In spirit I hear King David confessing, "I have sinned against the Lord," and I hear the answer of the Prophet [Nathan], "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin: thou shalt not die." (2 Kings, 12: 13) I think of Mary [Magdalen] publicly confessing her crimes, at least by her actions, if not in so many words, and I hear the Lord replying to His questioners in her favor, "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much." (Luke, 7: 47) I recall Peter, prince of the apostles, denying his Master in a cowardly manner, then going out to weep bitterly, and I am mindful of how the Lord turned to look upon him in mercy. (Luke, 22: 61) I consider that blessed thief

admitting the justice of his own punishment and protesting against the torture of Christ, and I hear him receiving the Savior's promise, "This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise." (Luke, 23:43)

How sublime that confession by which a condemned and crucified criminal was privileged to ascend from the shame of violent death to the kingdom of glory, from earth to heaven, from the cross to paradise!

The confession which won the apostle Peter absolution from the crime of his threefold denial and prevented his being deprived of his dignity as head of the apostolic group was glorious indeed.

In fact, the practice of confession never fails of its purpose: look how it forgave much to Mary Magdalen who loved much, how it not only admitted her to the group of the Lord's disciples, but honored her with the title of a person of great love.

Following his humble confession, great mercy cleansed the Royal Prophet, David, of his numerous crimes, and restored him to his former glory and grace.

The way of confession, you see, has never yet deceived those who walk in it, nor has it ever been wanting to any but to such as are wanting to it.²⁵



SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTUAL CONFESSION

Place yourself as vividly in God's presence as you can. If there is sufficient light to permit you to glance at the Crucifix, that is helpful.

Begin your confession with this formula: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. My last confession was. . . ." (State the time as accurately as you can: about a month ago, at Christmas time, last Easter.) The first statement is an expression of humility which clearly outlines your purpose and introduces your accusation with simplicity and directness. The approximate time since your last confession helps the priest to judge the state of your soul.

Speak clearly, in a subdued voice, but loud enough to be heard without difficulty or straining. Talk directly toward the grill or small opening. As the minister of Christ the confessor must judge the penitent's dispositions: to do so he must hear every word that is confessed. Otherwise he must ask you to repeat, which only causes needless confusion and embarrassment. Persons who are hard of hearing do well to

make arrangements to confess in the sacristy or at an hour when the church is not occupied: if such an arrangement is not practicable they should state quite simply that they cannot hear well and would appreciate it if the priest were to speak somewhat louder and more distinctly than usual; if they fear that they cannot understand even when the confessor takes greater pains in addressing them, they may ask "Will it be satisfactory if I say as a penance a decade of the Rosary (or other prayers) according to your intention, Father?" If it is not possible to see the priest, they can assume that he has answered in the affirmative.

State your sins as briefly as possible. Try to be well prepared through a careful examination of conscience. If you have had the misfortune to commit mortal sins you must, if possible, indicate their exact number and any circumstances which would change their nature and seriousness. If you have not confessed for some time and find it impossible to give exact numbers, it is sufficient to state habitual offenses in terms of so many times a day or week.

If you have no mortal sins to acknowledge, indicate several (hardly more than four or five) venial sins and imperfections that have the most direct bearing on your spiritual life: to list a greater number would usually throw the emphasis on completeness of statement (which is not at all necessary with venial sins)

rather than on contrition and firm purpose of amendment.

To make certain of the quality of your contrition, include some sin of your past life, especially the former sin or habit which offended God most, or of which you are most ashamed, or which has had the most far-reaching effect in your life. Be certain that you make it clear that this has already been confessed and absolved, and that you are adding it to your present confession.

Accuse yourself. Excuses are entirely out of place: you would not resort to them if you were kneeling in spirit on Calvary.

Close your confession with a statement like this: "For these and all the sins of my past life, especially for having missed Mass on Sunday, I am truly sorry, and beg God's forgiveness through your absolution."

After having stated your sins, listen with careful attention to the advice of the confessor and to the penance he assigns. Although the Church does not teach that the priest is specially aided by the Holy Ghost in his exhortation to his penitents, experience abundantly shows that decisions are made and principles applied with a wisdom that can hardly be accounted for merely by years of study and experience.

It is a courtesy to thank your confessor. "May God reward you, Father," or simply, "Thank you, Father," are in good taste and in common use.

YOUR CONFESSOR'S ABSOLUTION

If you have confessed in parishes where there is no cloth over the grill separating you and the priest, you may have noticed that Father makes the sign of the cross over you as you enter the confessional or as he pulls back the slide. This is not a simple blessing. It is your confessor's prayerful petition that you will perform your part with ideal dispositions in receiving the sacrament.

When you say "Bless me, Father," the priest answers, "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may worthily confess all your sins. In the name of the Father, and of the Son ✠, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The priest listens with great care to what you tell him in the confessional. He is bound in conscience to do so. He acts as a judge and cannot pass sentence in your favor until he has satisfied himself that your part in the sacrament has given evidence of the proper dispositions: sincere contrition, firm purpose of amendment, complete confession, and willingness to perform the penance imposed.

He is also your spiritual father, desirous of guiding your future steps by his instruction and advice, helping you to avoid the occasions of sin, making you realize before you pray the Act of Contrition what your offense to God has meant.

He is a physician in the spiritual order, prescribing necessary remedies, warning you against the dangers to your spiritual well-being, and resorting, if need be, to painful cures.

But more than all else he is in this moment the dispenser of the mysteries of Christ's mercy. He takes part in this consoling sacrament in such a manner that you must realize more deeply than ever that the priesthood is more an identification with Jesus Christ than merely a power received from Him.

After he has assigned your penance, the priest instructs you to pray the Act of Contrition. While you are so engaged he pronounces the formula of absolution. This sacramental action wipes away sin, restores or increases grace, and gives a pledge of eternal life. The penitent should be mindful, in a general way, of what the priest says, but during the actual administration of the sacrament he should devote his full attention to his own prayer, the Act of Contrition. He can read and reflect on the confessor's beautiful prayer at leisure afterward.

May almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you your sins, and lead you to life everlasting. Amen.

May the almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, absolution, and forgiveness of your sins. Amen.

May our Lord Jesus Christ absolve you! And by His authority I absolve you from every bond of ex-

communication and interdict, as far as lies in my power, and to the extent that you have need.

Now, I absolve you of your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, † (sign of cross) and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

May the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, whatever good you have done, and whatever evils you have endured, be for you unto the remission of sins, the increase of grace, and life everlasting. Amen.²⁶



Although no specific form of dismissal is prescribed, the confessor usually turns slightly toward the penitent and uses some phrase from the New Testament like "Go in peace, and sin no more," or simply, "God bless you," or "Say a little prayer for me, too."



On days specified in the grants made by the popes to their respective orders, Oblates of St. Benedict and Tertiaries are privileged to receive a general absolution. A plenary indulgence is attached to the blessing, under the usual conditions. The Tertiary or Oblate may request the General Absolution immediately after the confessor has imparted sacramental absolution. The shorter formula is used in the confessional.

Auctoritate a Summis
Pontificibus mihi
concessa, plenariam
omnium peccatorum tuo-
rum
indulgentiam tibi
impertior. In nomine
Patris, et Filii, ✠
et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

By the authority
granted to me by
the Supreme Pontiffs,
I impart to you a
plenary indulgence of all
your sins. In the name of
the Father, and of the
Son, ✠ and of the Holy
Ghost. Amen.²⁷



YOUR ACT OF CONTRITION

Your effort at praying the Act of Contrition must be for perfection. But it must be in all calmness. You have humbly acknowledged your sins. Your whole purpose in approaching the sacrament has been not only to obtain forgiveness, but also the restoration or the increase of grace, and a pledge of eternal life.

The more humbly and worthily you say this prayer, the greater the guarantee that the confessor's absolution will be received with the ideal dispositions. Although it is so short that it can be recited in a few seconds, the Act of Contrition states perfectly every ideal you need to keep before your mind.

Take your time. Try to mean every phrase of the words you have recited from childhood and know by heart. The priest's formula of absolution is twice as long as your prayer. You can ordinarily pray as slowly as you wish. Do not disturb the confessor by praying aloud: he is concentrating on what he is saying. Do not be upset if he completes the formula of absolution before you have finished; generally he will notice that you are still praying, and will wait. Should he turn to you and say, "Go in peace, and sin no more," simply return to your place in church and complete your Act of Contrition there.

If there is sufficient light in the confessional to see the Crucifix that hangs there, it is helpful to glance at it. Otherwise, hold the cross of your Rosary in your hand, and thus place yourself in spirit before the Crucified Savior.



O my God, I am most heartily sorry for having offended Thee. I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell: but most of all, because they have offended Thee, my God, who art all good, and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and amend my life. Amen.

AFTER CONFESSION

THANKSGIVING

The minutes immediately after your confession are precious. They are a time of great grace. Pardon of offense has just been pronounced. God has reached down through the services of His priest and wiped away your sin. Temptation is still at a distance from you.

Your first thought should be one of humble gratitude. Even ordinary politeness tells you that if you receive a great favor, you must first thank the one who granted it to you.

Spend some moments in silent reflection, simply kneeling before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. If no other thoughts come to your mind, thank our Lord, over and over. At the moment that is an excellent prayer.

Important though it is, saying your penance immediately upon returning to your place in church can hardly be called a thanksgiving: to leave after saying your penance would show little regard for the great sacrament of mercy.



ST. THOMAS' PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

I praise Thee, I glorify Thee, I bless Thee, my God, for the great blessings Thou hast bestowed on me, despite my unworthiness.

I praise Thy mercy that so long and patiently awaited my conversion to Thee; Thy tenderness that pretends to take vengeance on me; Thy kindness in calling me back to Thee; Thy goodness in receiving me; Thy merciful forgiveness of my sins.

I glorify Thy goodness in bestowing blessings beyond any merits of mine; Thy patience in not holding my offenses against me; Thy humility in offering me consolation; Thy patience in protecting me; Thy eternity that preserves me; Thy faithfulness to Thy promises in rewarding me.

What can I possibly say, my God, in honor and acknowledgment of Thy generosity that defies description? For Thou dost call back to Thee the person that flies from Thee; receive the returning prodigal; give aid to the wavering and joy to the person in despair; incite the negli-

gent to action; equip the fighter for battle; and crown the victor. Thou dost not spurn the repentant sinner, nor remember his wrongdoing.

Thou dost free us from dangers, and soften our heart for repentance. Thou dost deter us from sin by the terror of punishments, and draw us to Thee by Thy promises.

Thou dost correct us with the lash; guard us with the ministry of Thine angels; see to it that our material needs are provided; and hold in reserve for us the goods of eternity.

Thou dost exhort us by the dignity of our creation; invite us to the mercy of redemption; promise us eternal rewards. And for all these gifts I am incapable of saying anything in Thy praise.

I thank Thy divine majesty for the abundance of Thine infinite goodness. Mayest Thou always increase Thy graces in me, preserve what Thou hast thus increased, and reward what Thou hast preserved. Amen.²⁸



ST. GERTRUDE'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

O almighty and merciful God, whose mercy is boundless and everlasting, and the riches of Thy goodness infinite, I give thanks with all my mind and heart for the most amazing and exceeding goodness Thou hast shown me in graciously pardoning all my sins, and restoring me to Thy grace and favor.

Blessed be Thy divine compassion, O my God, and blessed be the incomprehensible love of Thy beloved Son, which constrained Him to institute so gentle and so powerful a remedy for our sins.

In union with all the thanksgivings that have ever ascended to Thee from truly penitent hearts, I sing aloud Thy joyous praises on behalf of all in heaven, on earth, and in Purgatory, for ever and ever. Amen.²⁹



YOUR PENANCE

At this point fulfil the penance your confessor has designated, if it consists in an act of devotion to be performed in church. Unite your penance with the infinite satisfaction that Jesus Christ offered for your

sins. Whatever value your penance has, comes from its union with Christ's atonement for all sin.



A SUGGESTION

After confession your soul is free from all sin. It is at its worthiest, humanly speaking, for acceptable prayer. It is now impelled by the love of God.

Probably your confessor has assigned an intention according to which your penance has been performed. A short penance may not satisfy your present desire to prove your love of God. If your charity seeks more, the following intentions are suggested as added ways of expressing your love of God. Pick out one or the other of them and say an *Our Father* in the spirit of charity.

Say a prayer of your own choice for some person, unknown to you, who is at this moment dying, and who will go before his Judge within the hour. He may have led a bad life: possibly he has not received the sacraments for some time. He is now in the greatest spiritual danger, maybe with the same sins on his soul that you had before you went to confession. Beg God to send a priest to his bedside to prepare him for a blessed death.



Or pray for the person who has some special claim on your charity, who will be exposed to serious temptations this day or night. Let your petition be that God will not be offended by this person's conduct, that he will correspond with the graces that are given to him to overcome the temptation.



Say a prayer in atonement for the persons of your family, or of the parish, or the diocese, who are not frequenting the sacraments nor faithfully practicing their religion, who are leading lives that are an open scandal.



Many admirers of our holy religion admit that confession is the stumbling block that keeps them out of the Church. In gratitude for God's goodness to you in this sacrament, offer a prayer for the conversion of the person whose sacramental absolution would be the greatest glorification of the divine mercy.



Beg God to humble the enemies of the Church, particularly those who dishonor this holy sacrament.



Somewhere a favored soul is now in the process of becoming a great saint. Holiness in his creatures is

God's work, but it calls for heroic cooperation with grace. Now that you have broken your attachment to sin, your prayer for such a soul, regardless of how far you consider yourself removed from heroic holiness, is an act of love in Christ that is most acceptable.



“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart: and He will save the humble of spirit. Many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them will the Lord deliver them.” (Psalm 33, 19, 20) Someone who has a claim on your charity, or possibly in justice, has a heavy cross to bear. God loves those whom He tests with crosses. He will love you all the more, too, if you pray that this person bear his cross in the manner that is most pleasing to Him.



ST. BEDE'S PRAYER TO BREAK ATTACHMENT TO SIN

After a sincere confession one does not worry about the past. Complete confidence in God's goodness and mercy honor Him as few other dispositions of which the human soul is capable.

But remembrance of past failures, awareness of present weakness, and knowledge of dependence on divine protection, do *not* dishonor God.

St. Bede, who led a life of singular detachment, has left us this beautiful prayer of great urgency that our Blessed Lord will guard us and shield us, and lead us to Him.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Deliverer of souls, Redeemer of the world, eternal God, immortal King! Although I am a sinner, I make bold to implore Thy boundless clemency. Out of Thy great mercy, and through the words of the Psalms [and other prayers] which I have addressed to Thee, free my soul from sin.

Turn away my heart from all wicked, perverse, and dangerous thoughts. Deliver my body from the slavery of sin. Keep all evil desires far from me. Free me from every hold that the devil and his ministers, visible and invisible, might have over me, and from all Thy faithless enemies who seek to plunge my soul into sin.

Protect me from these and from all other evils, O Savior of the world, who with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, livest, and reignest, and dost govern as Lord of all, God, for ever and ever. Amen.³⁰



ST. ANSELM'S PRAYER FOR ABANDONING VICES AND ACQUIRING VIRTUES

My Lord, God, grant my heart a longing for Thee, make it seek Thee because of that longing, find Thee in its search, love Thee upon finding Thee, in its love for Thee atone for my evils, and never repeat the sins from which Thou hast redeemed me.

My Lord, God, give penance to my heart, contrition to my spirit, tears of compunction to my eyes, and the generosity of almsgiving to my hands.

My King, destroy in me the desires of the flesh, and kindle in me the fire of Thy love.

My Redeemer, banish from my life the spirit of pride, lovingly grant me the spirit of Thy humility.

My Savior, cure me of anger's madness, bestow on me the shield of patience.

My Creator, uproot all rancor from my soul, and give me the tenderness of a mild disposition.

Grant me, most kind Father, unshakable faith, a fitting hope, unfailing charity.

My Ruler, destroy in me vanity, inconstancy of mind, restlessness of spirit, unworthiness of

speech, proudness of bearing, gluttony, abusive language, sins of detraction, the avidity of harmful curiosity, desire of vainglory, hypocrisy, the poison of flattery and fawning, contempt of the poverty-stricken and helpless, oppression of the weak, the torment of avarice, the rusting away of envy, the death of blasphemy.

Remove from me, my Maker, inconsiderateness and rashness, evil stubbornness, restless idleness, indolence, dullness of mind, blindness of heart, obstinacy of opinion, failure to control my temper, disobedience, refusal to accept advice, lack of control of speech, taking advantage of the poor, violence in dealing with the helpless, malicious accusation of the innocent, neglect of the persons committed to my charge, severity in dealing with the members of my household, lack of reverence and disloyalty toward my friends, harshness to those about me.

My God and my mercy, I beg Thee through Thy beloved Son, bestow on me the desire to perform works of kindness and mercy, to have compassion for the afflicted, to help the needy, aid the unfortunate, counsel those in error, console the sorrowful, lighten the burden of the oppressed, give a chance to the poor, hearten

the mournful, release debtors, make allowances for those who have sinned against me, love those who hate me, render good for evil, despise no one but rather honor all men, imitate people who are good while remaining intent on avoiding the influences of the evil, embrace virtues and reject vices, practice patience in misfortune and moderation when things are going well, control my speech and set a door round about my lips (Psalm 140, 3), despise worldliness and long for what is heavenly. . . .

They that go far from Thee shall perish. (Psalm 72, 27) But none that wait on Thee shall be confounded. (Psalm 24, 3) They that fear the Lord have hoped in the Lord: He is their helper and protector. (Psalm 113, 11)

Through fear we arrive at love. Thou art to be feared as our Lord, but loved as our Father. Holy fear of Thee is enduring, because it possesses that which makes saints persevere. Nothing is wanting to those who fear Thee, because Thine eyes are upon them and Thine ears are inclined to their prayers. (Psalm 33, 16)

My mercy, my refuge, my protector, my deliverer, make my fear lead to love of Thee. Make it intensify my desire of Thee. So make

me of the number of those who fear Thee, that I may become partaker of those who keep Thy commandments. (Psalm 118, 63)

Thus by the servitude of my fear may I attain to the grace of love, through which I shall finally arrive at Thy glory.³¹



ST. THOMAS' PRAYER FOR A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD

Every day while kneeling before the Crucifix, St. Thomas of Aquin, the Angelic Doctor, recited this prayer for the grace and wisdom to lead his life in a manner that would never fail to please God. As the petition of one who so gloriously strove to direct all means to his final goal, the prayer is ideal after a worthy confession.

Bestow on me, most merciful God, the fervent zeal of desiring the things that please Thee, and diligence in searching for them faithfully in my life. Grant me the wisdom necessary for finding them, and grace to accomplish them for the praise and glory of Thy Name.

Direct my life, that I may possess the knowledge for doing what Thou dost demand of me:

help me to do what I am supposed to do, in the way that I am supposed to do it, and as is most beneficial for my soul.

Do not permit either prosperity or adversity to make me negligent in duty, or separate myself from Thee. Keep me from being puffed up with pride by the one, and driven to despair by the other. Teach me to give humble thanks when all goes well, and to be armed with patience when difficulties arise. In this way I will learn to rejoice only in what draws me to Thee, my blessed Jesus, and to have sorrow only for what separates me from Thee.

When I am put to the test, give me the courage to seek to please no one but Thee, and never fear to displease anyone but Thee.

May what is short-lived and passing cease to hold attraction for me, Lord: but make me love all that is Thine for Thy sake, and Thyself more than all else.

Deprive whatever is indulged in without relation to Thee of its power to give me joy: do not let me desire anything that is foreign to Thee. May labor undertaken for Thy love always gratify me: may leisure that is not enjoyed by reference to Thee be irksome.

Give me the grace to lift up my heart to Thee often. When I become forgetful, grant that I may have sorrow for my sins with a firm purpose of amendment.

Make me, Lord God, obedient without contradiction; poor without turning in envy to those who are materially blessed; pure with no stain of corruption; patient without murmuring; humble without hypocrisy; cheerful without giving way to levity; sorrowful without dejection. Grant me the grace to be serious-minded without taking myself too seriously; busily engaged without the dissipation of my spiritual energies; blessed with fear of Thee without loss of hope; given to a love of truth without deceit; devoted to the performance of good works without presumption; possessed of the charity to correct my neighbor without pride, and to instruct him by word and example without pretending to be other than I truly am.

Bestow on me, most loving Lord, a heart so devoted to prayer and watchfulness that worldly curiosity cannot distract it from Thee; a noble heart that no unworthy attachment can draw downward; a heart so righteous that no evil can turn it aside from what is virtuous; a

heart of such constancy that hardship cannot overcome it; a heart so free from the allurements of sin that the most violent temptation has no power to conquer it.

Give me, O my Lord God, understanding for knowing Thee; earnestness for seeking Thee; wisdom for finding Thee; the grace of a way of life pleasing to Thee; the perseverance of hoping in Thee to the end; and the unshakable confidence of finally enjoying Thee for ever.

May I accept present afflictions as Thy punishments in penance; and use Thy blessings as the operations of Thy grace; but more than all else, have part in Thy heavenly joy as Thy glorious reward, Thou, Who livest and reignest, God, for ever. Amen.³²



ST. BERNARD AND PRAYER FOR THE INTERCESSION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

A worthy confession makes you aware of the help you need to lead a virtuous life.

Catholic piety prompts the forgiven sinner to turn to the Blessed Mother in an earnest plea for her prayer. Down through the centuries millions of lips

beg, "Pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death." The pity is that the prayer is often forgotten when it is most needed, in the time of temptation.

St. Bernard, one of the most devoted of all clients of the Queen of Heaven, wrote a beautiful sermon on Mary's name, which in its original language can mean Star of the Sea. He compares our present life, with its numerous crosses and temptations, to a rough ocean voyage. He sees the Blessed Virgin Mary as the star or beacon to whom we can always look in hope and complete trust. The following prayerful thought in his sermon is particularly beautiful: it never fails to increase confidence in Mary's intercession.

Unless you wish to be submerged by the tempest, do not turn your eyes away from this beacon. When the storms of temptation break over you, or you are driven upon the rocks of tribulation, look up to the Star, call out to Mary!

When the waves of pride, or ambition, or hatred buffet you, again look up to the Star, call out to Mary!

If billows of anger, or avarice, or the allurements of the flesh beat against the frail vessel of your soul, look up to Mary.

If the enormity of your sins troubles you, if foulness of conscience confuses you, if dread

of the awful judgment terrifies you, if you are beginning to sink into the depths of despondency, into the very abyss of despair, O think of Mary!

In dangers, in your difficulties, in doubts, think of Mary, call out to Mary!

To make certain that you will never lack the assistance of her prayer, turn not aside from her example.

If she is your guide, you will never go astray. If you invoke her aid in prayer, you will never have cause to despair. If you keep her in mind, you will always be safe from error. If she supports you, you will never fall. If she walks before you, you will never grow weary. If she helps you, you will certainly reach home [heaven] safe at last. And in this way you will understand how very appropriately it was said: And the Virgin's name was Mary.³³



Most children learn the *Memorare* by heart in their earliest years. It remains a favorite prayer for the devout throughout life. It is particularly appropriate when you are gathering courage after a good confession to avoid sin in the future.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful; O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

(Indulgence, three years. A plenary indulgence once a month on the usual conditions for the daily recitation of this prayer.)³⁴

DEPENDENCE ON YOUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

The confession you have just made has cleaned the slate.

You would not honor God by worrying about the past, after you had done what you could to correspond to the graces of the sacrament. In fact, you would be lacking in the virtue of hope.

But the future is something different. You are concerned about that. You know from experience that there will be temptations and occasions of sin which are not wanting in power and attractiveness.

When they present themselves, you must depend on the helps that God has given you. Among these is your guardian angel, ever ready to aid and shield

you, always intent on preventing offense to the divine goodness, prompted by obedience to God and love for you that result from the beatific vision.

St. Bernard uses these terms to exhort you to confidence in your guardian:

How greatly should this assurance of the appointment of angels as our guardians command reverence, foster devotion, instill confidence!—reverence for their presence, devotion because of their benevolence, and confidence in their protection.

Walk with caution in all your ways, mindful of the angels who have been ordered to accompany you. Show reverence for your angels wherever you may be. Certainly you will not dare to do before them what you would not attempt if I were present!

Despite our weakness, what have we to fear under the protection of such guardians, however long and dangerous the way before us? The angels who shield us in all our ways cannot be overcome nor seduced, nor can they mislead us. They are faithful; they are prudent; they are powerful. What are we to fear? All we have to do is follow them, remain in close dependence

on them, and we shall dwell in the protection of God.³⁵



If he seems to be a bit less optimistic and confident, St. Anselm is more direct and humbly dependent.

Guard over me constantly and protect me, I beg of thee, angelic spirit, to whose watchful care God has committed me. Keep me always in thy sight. Shield me from every attack of the Devil. Never let thy loving watchfulness fail for an hour, or even for a moment, whether I am awake or asleep, night or day. Accompany me wherever I go. Keep all of Satan's temptations at a distance from me.

I realize that my merits do not justify my asking for so great a favor, but obtain for me that no shadow of vice darken my life: make this thy prayer before our most merciful Judge and Lord, who appointed thee my guardian and assigned me to thy care.

When thou seest me about to enter into forbidden ways, use all thy power to return me to our Redeemer by the paths of justice. Whatever the difficulties I encounter, may I always enjoy the grace of Almighty God which thou wilt

obtain by making my need known and pleading my cause.

If possible I pray thee to make known to me the time of my death. In the hour that my soul is going forth from this body, do not permit the evil spirits to terrify me, nor mock me, nor cast me into the pit of despair. Do not leave me until thou hast led me to the vision of my Maker where, with thee as my advocate, as thou hast been my protector in earthly life, I shall rejoice with all the saints for ever, through the mercy of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.³⁶



THE NEW HOPE, FRESH CONFIDENCE

I have confessed my sins as worthily as I could.

Now I face the old battle once more, but no longer in the same way. New temptations will arise: I know that. New problems will present themselves. Occasions of sin will thrust themselves on me, or result from my lack of caution.

But now there is a tremendous difference.

In these few minutes I have broken with sin. The record that stood against me has been wiped out. I have sincerely declared that I detest what is offensive to God.

I have received new grace, and further assurance of the help of God when difficulties arise. I must be on my guard against failure.

Most consoling of all, in a way, I have received the pledge of eternal life, renewed hope of unending union with God to be enjoyed and cherished in the present.

Many passages of the Church's official prayer instill the confidence I now need. They hold out to me the security and courage I have lacked in the past; they offer strong incentives to conduct myself in a manner pleasing to my future Judge. All of them, carefully worded by the Church, remind me that victory over my sinful inclinations must be God's work, and that I must humbly attribute my conversion to Him. That means that I must constantly correspond with the graces given to me. It will pay me to keep some of these phrases before my mind—even to commit a few of them to memory and use them as ejaculatory prayers.



O God, strength of all that put their trust in Thee, mercifully hear our prayers, and because without Thee human weakness can do nothing, grant us the help of Thy grace, so that in fulfilling Thy commandments we may please

Thee both in will and in action. (*Collect, First Sunday after Pentecost*)



... protect us from all attacks of the enemy so that putting our trust in Thy defense, we may not fear. (*Postcommunion, Feast of St. Irenaeus, bishop, martyr, June 28*)



Look with mercy, Lord, upon our offerings, through the prayers of the Mother of God, whom Thou didst take up out of this world to plead boldly before Thy face for the forgiveness of our sins. (*Secret Prayer, Vigil of the Assumption, August 14*)



Stir up in us the spirit with which St. Benedict was animated, so that we may strive to love what he loved, and practice what he taught. (*Collect, Octave of the Solemnity of St. Benedict, July 18*)



... grant us by the prayers of St. Scholastica to live so innocently that we may deserve to ar-

rive at eternal joys. (*Collect, Feast of St. Scholastica, virgin, February 10*)



...grant us in all our days to find safety in the protection of the Guardian Angels, and in eternity to share their happiness. (*Collect, Feast of Guardian Angels, October 2*)



...by the merits and prayers of the angelic youth Aloysius, in whom wonderful innocence and a singular spirit of penance were united, grant us who are no longer innocent as he was, the grace to imitate his penance. (*Collect, Feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, confessor, June 21*)



...that rejecting those things which displease Thee, we may be filled with the delight of Thy commandments. (*Prayer over the people, Thursday, Passion Week*)



Break, Lord, the bonds of our sins, and mercifully avert what we deserve for them.

(Prayer over the people, Monday, First Week of Lent)



... sanctify our mind and heart, thereby making us worthy of partaking in the divine nature. *(Postcommunion, Feast of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop, confessor, March 18)*



... mercifully grant to Thy faithful pardon and peace, so that they may be cleansed of all offenses, and serve Thee with an undisturbed mind. *(Collect, Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost)*



Humbly we implore of Thy majesty, Lord, that these holy mysteries [of the Eucharist] may free us from past sins and keep us from violating Thy commandments in future. *(Secret Prayer, Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost)*



O God, whose providence that orders all things does not fail, put away from us all that

is harmful and bestow on us all that is to our good. (*Collect, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost*)



O God, who hast created man in a wonderful manner, and in a still more wonderful way redeemed him, grant us the grace to resist the allurements of sin with so strong a mind that we may deserve to arrive at eternal joy. (*Collect after First Prophecy, Holy Saturday*)



... grant us a persevering obedience to Thy will. (*Prayer over the People, Wednesday of Passion Week*)



... mercifully compel our rebellious wills to be subject to Thee. (*Secret Prayer, Saturday, Fourth Week of Lent*)



... in order that Thou mayest grant what Thy petitioners desire, make them ask what is pleasing to Thee. (*Prayer over the People, Wednesday, Fourth Week of Lent*)



O God, who seest that, left to ourselves, we are wholly lacking in strength, guard us inwardly and outwardly, so that we will be protected from everything that can harm the body and cleansed from all evil thoughts. (*Collect, Second Sunday of Lent*)



... by the might of Thy grace, so strengthen us in faith and charity that we may deserve to be among Thy servants who shall be found faithful unto the end. (*Collect, Feast of St. Fidelis of Sigmaringen, martyr, April 24*)



PRAYERS FOR VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION

It is comforting to speak of renewed confidence. But it is necessary to be realistic, too.

Persons who have received sacramental absolution with ideal dispositions are often fearful of the future. They have their weaknesses: they acknowledge them humbly.

The Church has numerous prayers to strengthen them in the hour of temptation. Only a few of these prayers can be indicated here. It is praiseworthy to

recite them after confession: it is eminently wise to keep them in the heart and on the lips when temptation strikes.

There is nothing haphazard about gaining victory over temptation: it is a matter of grace. Virtuous living is the love of God in action. It is love of God that casts out fear. It is the reliance on divine help that has been stored up as the fruit of countless petitions. It is love's intense desire not to offend God, and confidence in His goodness that He will not permit sin.

FOR HUMILITY

O God, who dost resist the proud and bestow Thy grace on the humble, grant us the virtue of true humility, of which Thine only-begotten Son showed the faithful an example in Himself; that we may never provoke Thee to anger by our pride, but rather receive through humility the gifts of Thy grace. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.³⁷

FOR PATIENCE

O God, who by the patience of Thine only-begotten Son hast crushed the pride of our ancient enemy, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may devoutly keep in mind all that He endured

out of love for us, and, following His example, bear our troubles with calmness. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.³⁸

AGAINST EVIL THOUGHTS

O almighty and merciful Lord, look upon our prayers with favor and deliver our hearts from the temptation of evil thoughts: that we may deserve to become worthy dwelling-places of the Holy Spirit. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who livest and reignest with Thee, in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen.³⁹

FOR PURITY, CHASTITY, CONTINENCE

Let my heart, O Lord, be made immaculate, that I may not be ashamed. (*An indulgence of 300 days.*)⁴⁰

Make my heart and my body clean, holy Mary. (*An indulgence of 300 days.*)⁴¹

Lord, burn our reins and our hearts with the fire of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may serve Thee with chaste bodies and pure minds. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (*An indulgence of three years.*)⁴²

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty and everlasting God, that we may attain to purity of mind and body through the inviolate virginity of the most pure Virgin Mary. Amen. (*An indulgence of 500 days.*)⁴³

TO OVERCOME THE SPIRIT OF HATRED

Even after a worthy confession, hatred of enemies can present a special difficulty. Unavoidable future association with persons who have provoked anger or even hatred, is a temptation that may sorely try even the most cooperative. Despite his best efforts the penitent anticipates these contacts with dread, and may feel that some attachment to his past offense remains even now.

That is the nature of enmity. If a penitent has told a serious lie, or deliberately absented himself from Sunday Mass, or used the Holy Name irreverently, he usually detests his sin at the time of his confession, at least, as an offense against the good God, even while he fears that if temptation arises, he may fall again.

It is harder to break away from hatred.

Sincere prayer for one's enemies is the best assurance. It is a disposition that is most pleasing to Him who begged His heavenly Father from the Cross:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke, 23: 34)

St. Anselm’s plea to Christ for one’s enemies can hardly be prayed earnestly without the comforting knowledge of one’s having completely broken with any attitude that is offensive to God. It gives a deep meaning to the fifth petition of the *Our Father*.

A PRAYER TO CHRIST FOR ONE’S ENEMIES

Lord, Jesus Christ, all powerful and infinitely kind, I desire Thee to be benign and merciful toward my friends. But what my heart longs to happen to my enemies is also clearly known to Thee. Thou, O God, searchest the hearts and reins, (Psalm 7, 10) and dost penetrate the innermost secrets of my mind.

Thou dost recognize all that Thou hast sown in the soul of Thy servant, which is to bear its fruit and be harvested for Thee. On the other hand, there is nothing that the enemy [the devil] and I have sown there, and which should be burned in the fire, that can be hidden from Thee. (See Matthew, 13: 28 f)

Do not despise, most merciful God, what *Thou* hast sown, but care for it, make it grow, perfect it, preserve it!

Just as I can undertake nothing that is good without Thy help, so also I can bring no good work to completion nor preserve it without Thee.

Do not judge me, merciful God, because of that which Thou dost find displeasing in me, but remove all that Thou hast not placed there, and save my soul which Thou didst create. Without Thee I cannot amend my life, because when we are good, it is Thou who makest us so, and not we ourselves. (Psalm 99, 3) My soul could not bear it if Thou wert to judge it in its wickedness.

Thou, O Lord, who alone art powerful, who alone art merciful, bestow on my enemies, with an appropriate reward for me, whatever *Thou* dost make me desire for them. Should I ever wish them anything opposed to the law of charity, do not permit it to happen to them, nor punish me, regardless of whether I have acted from ignorance, or from weakness, or from malice.

Enlighten the blindness of my enemies, Thou who art true light. Correct their errors, O supreme truth. Quicken their souls, Thou who art life itself. Through Thy beloved disciple Thou

hast told us that he who loveth not abideth in death. (1 John, 3: 14) I beg Thee, Lord, to bestow on my enemies as great a love of Thee and their neighbor as Thou hast commanded them to have, lest in Thy sight they be stained with sin against their fellow man.

O loving Lord, forbid that I be an occasion of sin for my brethren, that I should be for them the stone of stumbling and a rock of scandal. (1 Peter, 2: 8) It is enough, and far more than enough, O Lord, that I am a source of scandal for myself. I have enough to account for in my own sin!

I, Thy servant, beseech Thee for my fellow servants, that they do not offend the goodness of so great and kind a Lord on my account, but that they be reconciled to Thee, and that out of love for Thee, they get along peacefully with me according to Thy will.

In the secret depths of my heart this is the vengeance that I desire to take on my fellow servants, and enemies, and fellow sinners.

This is the punishment that my soul begs for my enemies—that we love Thee and love one another, as Thou dost will, and as is most favorable for us. Even more, that as we make repara-

tion individually for our own sins to the good Lord, so, impelled by the spirit of charity, that we may atone for one another to our common Master. May we obey our common Lord together, as with one heart.

Sinner that I am, I beg this vengeance to be meted out to all who wish me ill, or who have wronged me by their deeds. Prepare this vengeance for Thy sinner, most merciful Lord.

Act, therefore, good Creator, who art my merciful Judge, act with Thine infinite compassion, forgive me all my debts, as in Thy presence I now forgive all my debtors. (Matthew, 6: 12)

In its weakened condition my spirit cannot as yet bring this prayer of forgiveness of my enemies to the perfection that can stand Thy examination. But it desires to do so: it desires to do violence to itself, and through Thy help, to do what it can. This much I offer Thee. Where I am capable only of imperfection, Thou who art all-powerful, can perfectly forgive my sins, and have mercy on my soul.

Hear me, great and good Lord, hear me! My famished soul desires to nourish itself on Thy loving affection, but it cannot satiate itself of

Thee. My lips find no name with which to address Thee which satisfies my heart. There is no word that means to me what the love Thou hast instilled in me makes me understand of Thee. I have prayed, Lord, as well as I can, but I want to say more than I am able to express.

Hear me, hear me, as Thou canst, Thou who alone canst do whatever Thou dost will. I have prayed in my weakness and sinfulness, but hear me, hear me, Thou who art all-powerful and all-merciful.

Do not bestow on my friends and enemies only what I have prayed for, but grant to each according to his need as Thou knowest it, and insofar as it is not opposed to Thy will. Distribute the remedies of Thy mercy to all living and deceased.

Always hear me, Savior of the world, not as my heart may desire, nor as my lips may present my requests, but as Thou knowest my needs, and as Thou wouldst have me wish and pray, Thou, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, livest and reignest, God, world without end. Amen.⁴⁴

FOOTNOTES

¹ St. Ambrose, *de poenit.*, lib. II, c. 10, n. 96. P.L. 16: 541.

² *The Raccolta; prayers and devotions enriched with indulgences; authorized by the Holy See.* New York, Benziger, 1946. N. 265, p. 196.

³ Alcuin of York. *Beati Alcuini Opera. De Psalmorum usu liber. XI, Oratio Monachorum.* P.L. 101: 502.

⁴ *D. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici et Scholarum Catholicarum Patroni monita et preces.* Vienna, Woerl, 1882. p. 69.

⁵ Footnote given in text.

⁶ Footnote given in text.

⁷ The examination of conscience is taken principally from the following sources: St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* 2. 2. q. 1 ff.; Pruemmer, Dominicus, O.P., *Manuale theologiae moralis* (3 vols.) Barcelona, Editorial Herder, 1946. I: 195 ff.; Flynn, T. E., *The supernatural virtues.* London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1938, 87 p.; Sause, Bernard, O.S.B., *Virtue in the Catholic Home.* Atchison (Kansas), Abbey Student Press, 1942. 101 p.

⁸ This prayer has been composed principally from Marmion's chapter on "Compunction of heart" [in: Marmion, Columba, *Christ, the ideal of the monk.* London, Sands, 1926. p. 148 f.]

⁹ *Rule of St. Benedict*, conclusion of the Prologue.

¹⁰ St. Cyprian, *Liber de bono patientiae*, n. 20. P.L. 4: 659.

¹¹ Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter "On the Christian Education of Youth," December 31, 1929 [in: *Five Great Encyclicals*. New York, Paulist Press, 1939. p. 57.]

¹² Pope Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter "On the Condition of Labor," May 15, 1891. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹³ Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter "On Reconstructing the Social Order (*Quadragesimo Anno*)", May 15, 1931. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁴ *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1081, par. 2.

¹⁵ Pope Pius XII, "Address given October 29, 1951 to Italian Midwives," [in: *Moral Questions affecting Married Life*. N.C.W.C. pamphlet, 1952. p. 14, par. 35.]

¹⁶ The following works were found particularly helpful in drawing up the shorter examination of conscience: Sabetti, Aloysius, S.J.—Barrett, Timothy, S.J., *Compendium theologiae moralis*. 34th edition. New York, Pustet, 1939. pp. 197 f.; Heenan, John Carmel. *Priest and Penitent; a discussion of confession*. London, Sheed and Ward, 1937. p. 86 f.; Scharsch, Philip, O.M.I.—Marks, F. A., *Confession as a means of spiritual progress*. St. Louis, Herder, 1930. p. 93 f.

¹⁷ *The Confessions of St. Augustine*; translated by F. J. Sheed. New York, Sheed and Ward, 1943. p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 183.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 191.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 192, 193.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 256.

²² *Preces et Pia Opera*. Rome, Vatican Polyglott Press, 1938. N. 693. p. 556.

²³ *Preces Gertrudianae; prayers of St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde of the Order of St. Benedict*; [translated

by Thomas A. Pope.] New York, Sadlier, no date. p. 211. Somewhat modified.

²⁴ St. Ambrose, *de poenit.*, lib. I, c. 2, n. 8. P.L. 16: 488.

²⁵ St. Bernard, *Sermo 40, de septem gradibus confessionis*. P.L. 183: 647.

²⁶ Roman Ritual, Title 3, Chapter 2, "*Absolutionis forma communis*" [in: *Rituale Romanum*. New York, Benziger, 1944. p. 79.]

²⁷ Deutsch, Rt. Rev. Alcuin, O.S.B., *Manual for Oblates*. Collegeville, St. John's Abbey Press, 1937. p. 260. The formula is commonly found in all scholarly and devotional works on third orders.

²⁸ *D. Thomae Aquinatis . . . monita et preces*. Vienna, Woerl, 1882. p. 68.

²⁹ *Preces Gertrudianae . . .* New York, Sadlier, no date. p. 213.

³⁰ St. Bede, *Ascetica: libellus precum B. Bedae Venerabilis, oratio prima*. P.L. 94: 529.

³¹ St. Anselm, *Oratio 10 ad Deum pro vitiis resecandis et virtutibus obtinendis*. P.L. 158: 877-885. This prayer is so long that only the introductory and concluding paragraphs could be included here.

³² *D. Thomae Aquinatis . . . monita et preces*. p. 63.

³³ St. Bernard, *Sermo 4 super Missus est*, P.L. 183: 70 f.

³⁴ *The Raccolta*. New York, Benziger, 1946. N. 309, p. 235.

³⁵ St. Bernard, *Sermo 12 in Psalmum Qui habitat*. Used in the monastic office, Octave of Feast of Guardian Angels, October 9.

³⁶ St. Anselm, *Oratio 62, Ad Angelum Custodem*. P.L. 158: 967.

³⁷ Roman Missal, Various Collects, Number 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Number 28.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Number 25.

⁴⁰ *The Raccolta*. N. 662, p. 544.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, N. 633, p. 545.

⁴² *Ibid.*, N. 664, p. 545.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, N. 665, p. 545.

⁴⁴ St. Anselm, *Oratio 24, Ad Christum pro inimicis*.

P.L. 158: 908.

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