

## CHAPTER 2

# CONFESSION

**"And many who had believed  
came confessing and telling their deeds."  
(Acts 19:18)**

- A) Importance of Confession and Its Blessings**
- B) The Three Elements of Confession**
- C) General Guidelines**
- D) Prayers Before and After Confession**

## **A) IMPORTANCE OF CONFESSION AND ITS BLESSINGS**

Now that we have discussed the life of penance, its value and blessings, we can proceed with the first practical step, which is confession.

The Sacrament of Confession has many blessings and is of great importance in building the spiritual life. Our blessed Church has been performing it faithfully since the Apostolic Age. (Acts 19:18) It is also mentioned in the writings of the early fathers like Deyonasios (St. Paul's Disciple), Erianaos, Athanasius, Basil and St. John Chrysostom. Famous theologians such as Tertilian and Oregon spoke of the importance of confession.

In this chapter, we are going to discuss the spiritual rather than the dogmatic aspect of confession, its blessings and usefulness to the faithful.

If the church was performing the Sacrament of Confession in its early stages when faith was at its peak and life was simple and free of all complications, how much more can the need be in this day and age where life is so complex!

When we speak of the significance of the Sacrament of Confession, we are not being theoretical. **All those who practice confession faithfully and correctly experience its practical benefits - spiritually and physically.**

## **Advantages of Confession**

### **1. From the Psychological Point of View:**

Human nature has a need for expressing its shortcomings and it finds rest in confessing its fault. The conscience pushes us to confess our sins. We gain relaxation and comfort only when we do so. Confession helps us in ridding ourselves of psychological worries.

Through confession, the soul becomes clear - it sheds all its burdens. Our world is full of problems and confession helps us in dealing with them. These problems may have deep psychological effects on individuals, such as hatred for the society, developing hysteria or even committing suicide.

### **2. From the Spiritual Point of View:**

**a. When we confess, we receive through Jesus Christ, the gift of forgiveness of sins.** We cannot get this gift through any other way.

**b. Through confession, we are made worthy of receiving Communion** and of dwelling in Jesus Christ, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6:56) Without confession, we are not worthy of this gift, as St. Paul said. (1 Corinthians 11:29)

**c. In confessing, we examine and purify our soul, thus,** we improve our spiritual life. Careful self examination as well as the spiritual remedies offered by the priest, guide the confessor step by step in his spiritual life.

**d. When you reveal all your thoughts to the priest, this helps us in getting rid of them.** There is nothing the devil likes better than for us not to reveal our thoughts to the priest, because this is an indication that we need. Solomon said, "For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has not one to help him up."

(Ecclesiastes 4:10) St. John Casian said, “He who admits his thoughts cannot be deceived.” He also said, “Sin will stay as long as it is hidden in the heart.” Once sin is admitted, it is erased even before the priest gives an answer. When a serpent hiding in a hole is found, it escapes immediately. So do evil thoughts, when revealed, escape instantly.

**St. Macarius the Great** once asked the devil how well he was doing with the monks in the desert. The devil answered, “Very badly. Every evil thought I tell them, they admit to their priests, except one monk, who is my friend because he never confesses his thoughts to the priest.” St. Macarius went straight to advise the monk to confess all his thoughts to the priest. The monk obeyed. Later, St. Macarius met the devil and asked him, “How well are you doing?” The devil answered, “Very badly, even that friend of mine is no longer my friend.”

**e. Through confession, we find solutions to our problems.** An Egyptian monk once had a problem; he prayed and fasted for a solution. At the end, he decided to ask an elder. On his way, an angel met him, gave him an answer to his problem, and told him, “God gave you an answer to your problem because of your humble heart when you decided to ask that elder.” When Jesus healed the ten lepers. He told them, “Go, show yourselves to the priest. And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.” (Luke 17:11-14) Therefore, God wants to teach us that He is pleased when we submit to other humans who are appointed as God’s representatives. So, let us hurry and confess all our thoughts to our priest. In other words, let us complain about our enemy, the devil, to our father. Let us be like the little child, who, when bothered by someone, would say, “I will complain to my father.”

**f. Another great spiritual benefit is the discipleship.** Christian life is based on discipleship. The last commandment of our Lord Jesus was: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20) Jesus taught us this principle for us to follow when He chose His twelve disciples.

Discipleship has many blessings because spiritual virtues cannot be attained through reading books or by listening to a speaker, but by being a disciple to a spiritual father who can guide and train. St. John Casian said, “When we look at physical sciences and the subjects that require skill we find that it cannot be attained without the training by their masters.” Likewise, spiritual aspects of soul salvation and its growth to perfection need a spiritual father to guide, teach and train.

### **3. From the Social Point of View:**

Confession relieves the individual psychologically and saves him from spiritual mistakes that might make him non-adaptable to society. He will adjust better, be more cheerful toward life, doing his best at work and his production in society will multiply.

### **4. From the Physical Point of View:**

Confession also has many blessings for our body, for we know from the Bible that sin is the cause of some illnesses, as in the case of the sick man of Bethesda. (John 5:14) Our church teaches that the sick person, to whom the priest will perform the sacrament of unction, has to

confess his sins in order to be cured. In addition, modern science confirms the deleterious effects of psychological problems on the general health. As a result, a new branch of medicine called “Psychosomatic Medicine” has been established and taught in medical schools.

**Hence, confession cures the body** as well as **the spirit**, frees those who are tied with bad habits, and cures those who have psychological problems and those who cannot adjust well to the society. In short, it frees from the consequences of sin.

Some governmental agencies now appoint social workers in schools and other institutions to try to restore the deviations in the behavior of youth. In addition, the number of psychiatrists has increased tremendously to help those who are psychologically sick. Our church has known and performed what modern science now realizes. Our church has known and performed the Sacrament of Confession 18 centuries before psychoanalysis was discovered. The knowledge of the church about the Sacrament of Confession was merely based on obeying the commandments of God who created man and knows his inner soul and how to cure it.

Confession is not only a psychological treatment, it is an important church sacrament and psychological treatment is one of its advantages. Forgiveness of sins accompanies this sacrament. This gift cannot be offered by any psychological clinic in the world, even if its doctors are experts and believers.

### **Duty of the Church:**

Since confession is of such great importance, tremendous responsibilities face the church today concerning the problems of its children, especially teenagers and youth.

Tradition in our church does not allow any priest to implement the Sacrament of Confession, only those who have certain characteristics that qualifications to lead and guide others. When the bishop feels that a certain priest has reached that state where he can listen to confessions and can counsel people, he gives him permission. Certainly, age is one of the factors that affect his personality, as he will be more experienced and spiritually knowledgeable.

Abba Isaiah (the 4<sup>th</sup> century) in his teachings to the beginners said, “If an elder asks you about your thoughts, reveal them to him very frankly, when you are assured that he is faithful and does not reveal your words. Do not look only at his age but depend on his spiritual knowledge and experience, lest he multiplies your sickness instead of curing you.”

St. John Casian also said, “Anba Moses commanded us not to hide our thoughts but to reveal them to spiritual elders who have knowledge and discrimination and not only to those who are old. Many have gone to old priests who had no spiritual knowledge and fell in despair instead of being cured.”

Special studies should be offered in the seminaries to equip spiritual fathers with needed knowledge and experience. There should be centers for confessions in big cities where the priest is completely devoted to confessions and relieved from other responsibilities. Confession during the liturgy loses many of its advantages.

## **B) THREE ELEMENTS OF CONFESSION**

### **First: Between Me and Myself.**

#### **The Importance of Repentance:**

Confession is the first practical step in repentance; being sincerely sorry for your sins should precede confession. The Sacrament of Confession, in our church, is called the Sacrament of Repentance. **Hence, confession is not just words you say to the priest, even if these words are truth, but rather it is repentance.** Some people who want to have communion go to the priest and ask him for forgiveness and when the priest asks them for their sins, they say, “Thank God, we have done nothing wrong,” or “We took communion last week or three days ago,” as if one does not sin in three days.

**St. Kebryanos** (the 3<sup>rd</sup> century) **admonished those who came for communion without true repentance**, saying, “How do you receive communion without a true repentance and confession and the priest has not laid his hands on you?” We are not talking here about those who receive communion frequently and do not confess every day, but we are talking about those who do not care about confession and say, “Thank God, everything is alright.”

Those who hide their sins do not know themselves and are lying to God. St. John said in his epistle, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8-10) Those people do not benefit from the prayer of Absolution and furthermore, they add another sin which is taking communion without repentance **We have to be sure that the Absolution Prayer without confession and true repentance will not grant us forgiveness of sins.** When God sees our true repentance, He grants us forgiveness. King Solomon, after finishing building the Temple said, “Then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know.” (2 Chronicles 6:30)

**Therefore, repentance is an important step in the Sacrament of Confession.** The confessor should feel that he has sinned against God Who loved him, he comes with a humble heart to ask forgiveness, promising not to sin anymore, asking God for power and help. David said, “I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.” (Psalms 38:18) Jeremiah said, “A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel; For they have perverted their way, And they have forgotten the LORD their God.” (Jeremiah 3:21)

**Sit with Yourself.** A perfect confession, which is accompanied by true repentance, needs preparation before going to confess. This preparation is called, “examining yourself.” Sit

in a quiet place and examine yourself. Compare how many blessings God has given you with how many times you have denied Him. Compare your life with the life of the saints.

Remember St. Peter's words: "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18) And say in your heart, "Yes, where shall I, a sinner, appear?" All this will give you a broken spirit and will renew your need for the grace of God. Examining yourself will also help you remember your sins so you will never forget them. David, after he sinned, said, "My sin is ever before me." (Psalms 51:3)

Sometimes we do not realize our sins; either we have forgotten them or because we do not examine ourselves and confess frequently, or because of carelessness in our spiritual life causing us to sin without feeling that we are sinning. In this case, we have to pray to God to reveal our sins for us. Ask the Holy Spirit to shine the light of His grace upon you and pray with St. Augustine saying, "Lord, grant that I know who You are and who I am." Our compassionate Lord who is anxious for the salvation of everyone, Who is eager for the tears of the lost sheep, will then grant you to remember your sins.

At the end of this chapter, we have a list of questions, which may help you to confess. If you are that type of person who forgets easily, it is better for you to write down your sins on a piece of paper. If you are afraid somebody might read it, write down symbols not the details. After confession, tear that piece of paper because the Lord has torn away your sins.

**Sit with God:** When you feel the burden of your sins, pray to God with tears and sorrow. Confess to Him in detail. He knows all your sins before you even do them, but in confession, you admit your mistakes. David said, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin." (Psalms 32:3-5)

**In your prayer, speak to God in detail. Talk to Him in a singular form; not plural** for this will make you sense your mistakes more, instead of feeling that others also do the same mistakes. For example, when you pray in a personal relationship, do not say, "Lord forgive us our sins for you know that we are sinners and we are often weak and fall in sin." Instead say, "Lord, forgive me my sins, for You know I am a sinner and I am often weak and fall in sin."

## **Second: In Front of the Priest:**

**Shyness:** One of the main factors that hinder people from confession is being shy of admitting their sins in front of the priest. We have to overcome that obstacle, for confession is very beneficial in our spiritual life. As long as you were not shy in sinning in front of God, why are you shy now to admit your sin in front of God's chosen one? **Although shyness is a difficult feeling, it is beneficial for you,** as it makes you feel how bad and shameful sin is. This feeling is important, for as long as you have enjoyed doing sin, it is better that you suffer in confessing your sins. Our fathers have said, "The Sacrament of Confession prevents us from sinning again." Jesus Ben Sirakh said, "Do not be ashamed in admitting your sins."

**From Who are you shy? Why are you shy?** You have to know that priests have heard these and similar sins several times before from other people. The confessor should realize that the priest is used to hearing the bad rather than the good. **Shyness may cause some people to ask: “Why do we have to confess to a priest? Why not confess to God directly?”** One reason for such a question is pride. A person may appear as a saint in front of others and is so concerned with portraying a righteous character. Also, what we have mentioned earlier about the importance of the Sacrament of Confession can answer that question. This is a trick from the devil that wants to deny us the blessings we receive from confession. So, do not listen to him and put away all shyness and pride, and let our main concern be how to obtain the great blessings of confession, which we cannot receive otherwise. .

## How to Confess?

**1. When you sit with the priest, forget your relationship to him and remember that he is God’s representative,** God’s steward to whom you are turning in the account of your sins. Remember that you are approaching to perform a sacred sacrament, which will renew your life. Do not mention your sins as if you are telling a story, but with awe and sorrow.

**2. Confess all kinds of sins:** Sins of deed, thought, or feeling, etc. **Remember that every sin you do not confess will remain worrying you even if you become a saint.** In brief, empty your heart from every sin. Jeremiah said, “Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord” (Lamentations 2:19)

A good illustration which can explain how we should empty our hearts of our sins is when you empty an oil jar or a honey jar. There always remain some particles at the bottom of the jar. When you empty a vinegar jar, the smell remains at the end. However, if you empty a jar full of water, nothing remains, not even the smell. The same way when you empty your heart during confession, no sin should remain.

**3. Say the details of sin:** This helps to show how shameful your sin is. Mention the place and time where you sinned, and if any, the person with whom you have sinned. If you confess in general without mentioning the details, this will not help you much. For example, you may say: “My father, I have not prayed as I am supposed to and I do not love people as God wants me to and I have not come for communion with proper respect.” This type of confession will not tell the priest what kind of person you are because all persons, even the saints, can say such words, for any person who is growing in his spiritual life says such words.

Again, there is a difference between saying, “Father, I have looked with lust toward a girl,” and “I have looked with lust toward a girl while I was in church.” There is a difference in saying “I became angry when a person told me a word I misinterpreted” and “I hate that person, and I cannot stand him.” The second confession reveals another sin, which is hatred, besides getting mad.

Therefore, telling the details of sin is very useful because the priest will better know your bad habits and behavior and will offer you the right advice and remedy.

**4. Emphasize also the duration of the sin:** Confess how often you do that kind of sin. Ask yourself, “Did I do that sin once only or it has become a habit, which I cannot control?”

**5. Confess your feelings while sinning:** Were you enjoying the sin or rejecting it?

**6. Do not give yourself excuses during confession:** Do not say, “The devil tricked me,” to show that the devil is guilty and you are innocent. Do not forget that any sin you do, you do by your own free will. Do not say, “That person annoyed me, therefore I became furious.” If he had made you mad, why were you not patient and where is your compassion that endures everything?

**7. Be honest in your confession:** Do not put your sin in a different light than what it actually is. For example, if a person, when asked what his religion is, denied that he is a Christian, he cannot consider that sin as a lying sin. There is a great difference between lying and denying your faith.

**8. Put emphasis also on the negligence in the positive aspects of your life and not nourishing your virtues.** St. James said, “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17) As a Christian, you should grow spiritually until you reach perfection and “the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13) If you are not growing, this means there is sin, which is hampering your growth. Therefore, you have to ask yourself if you are growing in Christian virtues like love, self-denial, chastity and worshipping. Find out how much you have neglected these virtues and confess your negligence.

**9. Do not think confession includes only your spiritual life. It also includes other aspects of life.** Jesus wants us to be perfect in everything. “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48) He also wants us to be faithful unto death. (Revelation 2:10) A student who is lazy in his studies should confess his laziness and an employee who is not giving his employer his money’s worth should confess his laziness.

**10. Confess your sins even if you know how to overcome them.** Never try not to confess some sins because you have heard much advice from your priest and you know the solution. Sometimes the devil tries to convince us that as long as we know the answer, there is no need to confess. **However, we still need to confess, even if we know the answer,** until we get rid of it. The river waters of Syria and Iraq seemed much better for Naaman the Syrian, but they were not as good to heal him as the Jordan waters which Elijah has told him. **God gives special power to the words of the priest that they may benefit the confessor.** Confession is not only for counseling, but also for receiving forgiveness.

**11. You have to be honest with your priest** and tell him everything frankly, even if it concerns him. For example, if he is fast in doing that sacrament and you do not like that, you should mention that to him, in a polite way.



**12. Listen well to the advice of your spiritual father and accept it.** If any of this advice troubles you, discuss it with him, as the patient should tell his doctor if the treatment made him well or did not help.

### **Third: The Absolution from Sin:**

**Prayers of Absolution: After you have made a complete confession before the priest, kneel in awe and respect saying, “Absolve me my father from the sins that I already confessed and the hidden ones too.”** Probably there are sins that you forgot to mention. Then the priest puts the cross on your head and prays the absolution.

It is useful that we record these prayers in this chapter in order to meditate on the beautiful meaning of these prayers. Then when you bow your head under your spiritual father, you feel the power of these words. **Prayers of Absolution are divided into three parts:**

#### **The First Absolution**

Yes, Lord, **You have given authority** unto us to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy. Crush his heads beneath our feet speedily. Scatter before us his **every design of wickedness that is against us.** For You are King of us all, O Christ Our Lord.

To You we send up the glory, the honor and the adoration together with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You, now, and at all times, and to the age of ages. **Amen.**

#### **The Second Absolution**

You, O Lord, who bowed the heavens, You descended and became man for the salvation of the race of men. You are He Who sits upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, and beholds them who are lowly.

You also now, our Master, are He unto Whom we lift up the eyes of our hearts; the Lord Who forgives our iniquities and saves our souls from corruption. We worship Your unutterable compassion, and we ask You to **give us Your peace,** for You have given all things unto us.

Acquire us unto Yourself, God our Saviour, for we know none other but You; Your holy name we do utter. Turn us, God, unto fear of You and desire of You. Be pleased that we abide in the enjoyment of Your good things; and those who have bowed their heads **beneath Your hand,** exalt them in their ways of life. and adorn them with virtues. And may we all be worthy of Your kingdom in the heavens, through the goodwill of God, Your good Father, with Whom

You are blessed, with the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. **Amen.**

### **The Third Absolution (The Absolution of the Son)**

Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Logos of God the Father, Who has broken every bond of our sins through His saving, life-giving sufferings; Who breathed into the face of His holy disciples and saintly apostles, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained.”

You also now, our Master, through Your holy apostles, have given grace to those who for a time labored in the priesthood in Your holy church, to forgive sin upon the earth, and to bind and to loose every bond of iniquity.

Also, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Philanthropic One, for Your servants, (here he signs the people once and twice) my fathers, and my brethren, (here he signs himself) and my weakness; those who **bow their heads before Your holy glory**. Dispense unto us Your mercy, and loose every **bond of our sins**, and, if we have committed any sin against You, **knowingly or unknowingly, or through anguish of heart, or in deed, or in word, or from faintheartedness**, do, O Master, Who knows the weakness of men, as a good and Philanthropic One, O God, grant us the forgiveness of our sins; (he signs himself).

Bless us, (he signs the clergy) purify us; make us absolved, (he signs the congregation) and all Your people absolved. (Here he remembers those whom he wishes to remember.) Fill us with Your fear, and straighten us unto Your holy, good will, for You are our God, and the glory, honor, the dominion, and the adoration are due to You, together with Your good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Life-Giver, Who is of one essence with You, now, and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. **Amen.**

#### **Comments:**

The repentant feel that he is bowing his head not under the hand of a man, but under the hand of God. The priest says in the second absolution, **“Your servant who is bowing his head under Your hand.”**

The priest declares that he performs this sacrament only because of the Divine authority given to him when he says, “You have granted the clergy the power to forgive sins on earth.”

In the three absolutions, the priest does not ask for the repentant only, but also for himself. The priest asks that God grant the repentant many spiritual blessings, which are:

1. To remove the roots of evil from our souls, “Crush the heads of the enemies beneath our feet.” Head means its beginning.

2. To grant us His peace which we have lost by sin. Sin destroys the peace of man as fire to the straw.

3. To fill us with God’s fear. We notice here that when the priest asks for peace he says, “**Grant us Your peace,**” and when he asks for God’s fear he says, “**Fill us with Your fear.**” St. Antony said, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.” When light enters a dark house, it casts away its darkness. Likewise, when God’s fear enters the heart of man, it casts away his ignorance and teaches him all virtues and wisdom.

4. To bring back to us the desire to live with God. “**Bring us back to the path of fear and love for You.**” The taste of spiritual matter changes by sin as the taste of good food changes in the mouth of the sick person. Hence, the priest asks God to bring back this desire for God to become attracted to Him and not to sin. “Lead me away! We will run after You.” (Song of Solomon 1:4)

#### **The results of these absolutions are:**

1. **Forgiveness of sins:** committed intentionally or unintentionally.
2. **Forgiveness of sins:** all kinds of sins, whether in deed or word.
3. **Forgiveness of sins:** which we committed under all circumstances “through the agitation of our hearts or through littleness of heart.”
4. Blessing, purity and loosening of all the bonds of sin and its authority.

**After the absolution, be sure that God has forgiven your sins as Nathan the prophet told David after he confessed, “The Lord has put away your sin.” (2 Samuel 12:13)**

Proceed in love and submission and kiss the cross in the hand of the priest.

## **C) GENERAL GUIDELINES**

### **1. After Confession:**

**Following confession, it is better to go home alone thinking of what the Lord has done for you, and benefiting from this spiritual experience.** A common mistake many people do is to go to confession in a group and spend the time before confession joking and in a silly mood. That is not thinking of their sins and feeling sorry. Then after confession they walk home discussing the same things and not staying quietly with themselves.

**The confessor has to obey all the priest has told him with accuracy and faithfulness because this advice is like medicine that the doctor prescribes to a patient.** There is no use for a sick person to go to a doctor and not taking the medicine that the doctor has prescribed.

**Do not lose hope if you sin again after confession, but go and confess again, for it is written, “A righteous man falls seven times And rise again.”** (Proverbs 24:16) God, Who knows how weak our nature is, gave us the opportunity to go and confess again every time we sin. **The door of repentance will remain open to the end of our lives, and blessed is the man who enters from it.**

## **2. One Spiritual Father:**

**Our church teaches that every person should have only one priest to go to for confession. Every confessor should continue confessing to that priest unless there are circumstances that prevent him, such as travel or the like.** In this case, the confessor has to take permission from his priest so he can confess to another priest. Therefore, you have to be very careful in choosing your priest. **You have to care only about your spiritual benefit. Never try to get away from your priest for an unholy reason or because you failed in overcoming sin.**

## **3. Changing the Spiritual Father:**

Sometimes, the repentant do not benefit from the spiritual advice, which his spiritual father gives him. Here the person asks, **“Can I change my spiritual father, or is this not allowed according to the church rules?”**

The spiritual father is like a physician. A sick person may not benefit from the treatment of one physician and he may go to a different physician. Moreover, the physician may ask the sick person to see another physician. Likewise, since the goal of confession is to benefit the repentant spiritually, he may change his spiritual father. As well, some priests refer their children with special problems to other priests so that by special grace they may help them with their problems.

In this case, the repentant have to take the permission of his spiritual father as a matter of courtesy.

This permission may create another problem because the repentant is shy to ask to change his spiritual father, after he had realized all his weakness. How can he face his father with that request?

If the repentant is the shy type, he may change his spiritual father without personal contact, but he may send him a letter telling him all the circumstances that lead him to that decision and ask for his permission and for his prayers.

**In the case of changing the spiritual father, do you confess again all the previous sins that you have already said before your previous father?**

The repentant have received complete absolution from all the sins that he had already confessed; therefore, there is no need for him to confess again. There is one exception: when the

previous sins have connection with his present sins, or if he wants to give his new spiritual father a true picture about his life in order to receive from him the correct treatment.

#### **4. The Sin You Forgot to Mention:**

**What happens if you forget to mention a sin to your priest or if you have committed a sin after confession and before communion?**

Either you confess it before communion to any priest available at the church even if he is not your priest, or you may receive communion then later go to your priest and confess it. Anyway, this matter has to be arranged between you and your priest. We would like to remind you that this issue depends on the seriousness of the sin. If you are in doubt, it is better to wait until you have a chance to confess to your priest.

#### **5. The Spiritual Guide:**

One may choose a spiritual guide beside his father of confession. A spiritual guide does not have to be a priest; he can be a layman who deals with general spiritual topics like prayer, humility, and condemnation, without getting into the details of your sins. A spiritual guide is like a teacher. He cannot grant you forgiveness of sins like the priest. You ask him about a specific issue or how to overcome a sin without confessing that you have committed that sin.

#### **6. Forgiveness of Sins:**

**Are all your sins forgiven after you confess, even if they are very serious?** Of course, the answer is yes, as God's promises are clearly stated "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) St. John Chrysostom said, "Have you sinned? Enter the church, confess and your sins will be erased. Repent any time you sin. If you sin again, repent again and never lose hope, for the church is a hospital and not a court; He does not condemn us for our sins."

**7.** We emphasize that complete confession cannot be performed during the Holy Eucharist, but it has to be during special scheduled hours in order that the confessor will have ample time.

**8.** The intervals between confessions may be determined between the priest and the confessor, according to the spiritual needs and the circumstances of the confessor. Of course, this interval should never be too long.

#### **9. Immigrants and Confession:**

How can immigrants confess if they are in cities where there are no Coptic Orthodox Churches and no Orthodox priests?

No doubt, confession should be verbal in front of the priest who is God's steward, because often confession needs to be discussed and clarified so the priest can give the right solution and cure. However, in some cases, where immigrants are in places where there are no

Orthodox Churches and no Orthodox priests, they still have to examine themselves and write their confessions in letters to their priests. This is very beneficial for them and when they meet any priest, they ask him to pray for them the absolution to receive forgiveness of sins.

## **A guide for examining one's self before confession**

A complete true confession is when you reveal yourself completely in front of your priest and when you feel that you have not hidden anything that you know about yourself from your priest. Hence, you have to examine yourself very thoroughly and accurately before confession. **These are some questions, which may help you to know and examine yourself before confession. They are classified into topics: some concerning worship, relationships with people, and others concerning the kinds of sins.**

### **A. Concerning Worship:**

#### **Prayer:**

1. Do you neglect your prayers or are you regular in your prayers? Do you neglect them sometimes or completely? Why? Have you thought of a solution for it? What was the result?

2. When do you pray? When you wake up in the morning? Before sleeping? Before and after eating? Before leaving home? Before you start any work? In any trouble you face? Do you pray while you are on the road? While you are with people?

3. Do you have long private prayers where you have a private conversation with God? Are you regular in these prayers? Are these prayers growing or diminishing?

4. Do you pray with the psalms? Do you pray all the prayers of the Agbeya or some of them? Which ones do you pray? If you do not pray with the psalms, why?

5. Do you memorize the psalms and litanies from the Agbeya? Is this memorization growing or diminishing?

6. Do you pray with a fervent heart? Do you pray with tears at times? Do you feel the presence of God while praying? Are your prayers lukewarm or sometimes hot and sometimes lukewarm? Why?

7. Does your mind wander during praying? During which kind of prayers does your mind wander? In which kind of topics does your mind wander? Does this continue for any length of time? What have you done to remedy this problem?

8. What is the posture of your body during prayer? Do you stand and lift up your hands to God? Do you kneel? Do you bow? Do you have any other posture? Do you stand respectfully in front of God? Do you bend your feet or lean your body against a wall? Do you move your hands or do your eyes look at other things?

9. Are there any special topics that occupy your mind during praying? Do you pray for your sins and your spiritual life? Do you pray for others? Do you pray for those who bother you? Do you have material requests?

10. Do you give God your best time while you are fully active? Do you pray while you are physically and mentally exhausted?

### **Fasting:**

1. Do you fast all the fasting days of the church or just some of them? Which fasting days do you practice regularly? Do you fast Wednesdays and Fridays of every week? Are there any obstacles, which hinder your fasting? What are they?

2. Do you abstain from food during fasting? For how long?

3. Do you desire special kinds of food? Do you fulfill that desire? Do you ask that special kinds of food be prepared for you?

4. Do you spend much on food, in general and on its luxuries, specifically?

5. Do you eat between meals?

### **Giving Alms:**

1. Are you faithful in giving your tithes to God?

2. Do you only give your tithes or do you give generosity?

3. What is your feeling when you give? Is it a feeling of pride or a feeling of love toward Jesus' brothers?

4. Do you get annoyed sometimes by those who ask you for alms? Or do you give cheerfully?

### **Communion and Confession:**

1. Are you regular in receiving communion? When was the last time you received communion?

2. Are you regular in confession? When was the last time you confessed?

3. If you are negligent, what is the reason?

4. Do you feel that there is something you want to hide from your priest?

5. Do you prepare and examine yourself thoroughly before confession?

6. Are there repeated sins in your confessions? What have you done to overcome them?

### **Reading:**

1. Do you read the Bible regularly? Do you read in sequence?

2. Do you meditate in your readings? Do you write these meditations or just think about them?

3. Do you study the Bible? Do you read any commentaries?
4. Do you read other religious books? What kind do you read (spiritual, lives of saints, dogma, etc.)? Do you read regularly?
5. Do you read inappropriate books or magazines? Do you sometimes read topics that make you stumble?
6. What is the average time you devote to spiritual readings every day or every week?
7. Do you try to apply what you read to your life or do you train yourself with spiritual exercises?

### **Matanias:**

Do you do matanias, that is, **bowing before God while asking for forgiveness**? How many do you do? Are they accompanied by short prayers?

### **Going to Church:**

1. Do you go to church and attend the Divine Liturgy regularly? If there are obstacles in your way, what are they?
2. Do you attend the Divine Liturgy while fasting?
3. Do you come early to the Divine Liturgy? Do you attend all of the prayers?
4. Do you attend other meetings besides the Divine Liturgy, like the vesper service, sermons, youth meetings, Sunday school, etc.? Do you attend them regularly?
5. Do you serve in the church? Are you faithful in your service? Are there any problems that bother you?

### **Spiritual Exercises:**

1. Do you have spiritual exercises? What are they? Are you successful in applying them? If not, what are the reasons for your failure?
2. Are there any virtues, which you would like to attain?

## **B. Your Relationship with People:**

1. Do you have good relations with people, old, young, family members, colleagues, or others? If not, why?
2. Have you been angry with someone? For what reason?
3. Was your anger suppressed or apparent? Did you raise your voice? Did you say any words that hurt others? Did you insult them or fight with them?
4. Did your anger go away fast or did it remain for a long time? For how long? Did you have bad thoughts because of your anger? Did your anger leave any bad feelings toward any person? Did this anger change to hatred for a period? Did this anger remain in your heart as enmity with someone?
5. If you were angry with someone, have you reconciled with him? Did you initiate this reconciliation or did others interfere? How long did this enmity last? Is everything alright now?



6. Is there anyone who offends or makes you angry? What is your reaction toward him outwardly? Inwardly?

7. To what extent do you have virtues such as perseverance, longsuffering, forgiving, and loving your enemies?

8. Do you sometimes hurt others even by joking, through ignorance, or by being forgetful? What have you done to overcome this matter? Have you apologized to those whom you hurt?

9. Do you hurt others with the excuse of defending the truth? How did you hurt them?

10. What are the obstacles toward the virtue of meekness in your behavior?

11. Do you abuse the rights of anyone? Do you perform all your duties toward everyone faithfully, whether in the family, at work, in church or in your social relations?

12. Do you keep bad company? With whom? What sins do you commit because of this bad company? Do you have friends who drive you away from the church and from God's love?

13. Are your financial relations with people good? Were you unjust with anyone? Did you cheat anyone?

14. Do you perform your financial obligations toward God; the virtue of giving alms? What is your reaction toward tithes the first fruits and participating in the needs of the church?

15. Are you humble in treating other people or do you treat anyone with pride?

16. Do you behave violently toward others or treat them unkindly? On the other hand, are you calm, merciful and moderate? Are you passive? What kinds of sin do you commit due to your passive nature?

17. Do you love to have people praise you? Do you seek that? How? What is your feeling if someone rebukes you, ignores you, rejects you, or does not treat you appropriately?

18. Do you try sometimes to pretend before people to be the opposite of what you are?

19. Is your behavior an obstacle to others?

20. Do you serve others and tire yourself for others' comfort?

## **C. Some Kinds of Sin:**

### **Sins of the Tongue:**

1. What are the sins that you commit with your tongue? Do you lie, judge others, "blaspheme, swear, insult, humiliate someone, bad humor, silly discussions, or any inappropriate talk, etc."?

2. With whom have you sinned? And to whom? How many times (if possible) and for what reason? Did this matter become a habit?

3. Have you thought of overcoming those sins? How? What was the result?

4. Are you very talkative? Do you talk about subjects that you do not understand? Do you feel that you waste your time in useless talking instead of talking about something more useful?

5. Do you sing worldly songs? Do you sometimes use words that are inappropriate for God's children to use?

6. Is your voice loud or harsh? Do you think before you talk? Do you interrupt during discussions? Do you make mistakes while discussing something?

7. Do you interfere in other people's business? Do you give your opinion even if you are not asked? Do you like to be always critical of others, rebuke and advise others, even those who are older than you, those who are strangers or even who do not accept your advice?

8. Have you trained yourself to be silent? What are the results?

### **Sins of Thought:**

1. What kinds of sins do you fall into by your thoughts? Is it adultery, lust, thoughts of wrath, hatred, revenge, judging others, thinking evil, pride, envy, blasphemy, doubt or daydreaming?

2. Does this thought stay with you for a long period? For how long?

3. Does such thought come to you from outside and you do not like it but try to cast it away or do you welcome the thought, enjoy it, and try to build on it other thoughts?

4. Does the thought change into lust and tempt you to actually sin? Every time you sin by thought, do you also sin by deed?

5. Is your mind occupied with cares of this world, its many problems and worries?

### **Sins by Senses:**

What are the sins that you fall into by your senses; by sight, hearing or touch? Do you fall in adultery by your senses? Do you desire what others have? Do you spy on others? Do you listen to dirty jokes and words?

### **Sins of the Heart:**

1. Are there any desires and feelings of your heart that do not please God? Is there in your heart any envy, jealousy, hatred, desire to be rich, desire for high positions, love of authority, pride, love of the world vain glory, love of the flesh, or love of revenge?

2. Is there in your heart any wrath, complaint, provoking, despair, or sadness?

3. Do these feelings and desires appear in your daily life, in your thoughts and your dreams?

### **Sins of Deed:**

1. What are the actual sins you have committed? What commandments have you broken: adultery, stealing, killing, fighting, and drinking, rebellion, negligence, bad habits, etc.?

2. How many times have you repeated sin? With whom have you sinned and to whom?

3. What are the bad consequences of your sin? Have you treated them or are they still existing?

4. Are there constant causes that lead you to sin? What are they? Are there occasional causes or have they become a habit? What have you done to avoid these causes?

5. Have you tried to repent and forsake these sins? Have you succeeded or failed in repenting?

### **Note:**

These questions are meant to help the beginners in their spiritual lives to examine themselves accurately so their confession may reveal what is inside them.

**However, those who are advanced in their spiritual lives should examine themselves from the positive aspects, which are the virtues they neglect to possess.**

We are all required to be perfect and holy and we all have to grow in the grace and virtue as St. Peter said, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18)

**Therefore, those who are spiritually growing should examine themselves from both aspects: the negative and positive in such a way that these may be an incentive for their continued growth in the holy life with God.**

#### **D) A PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION**

O Holy Father, Who longs to the sinners’ return, Who promised to accept those who repent, look at a soul that was long lost in the valleys of disobedience. I have long tasted the bitterness of misery, being away from the source of salvation. Now I come back to You to be purified, accept me and do not reject me, for when You look at me with mercy and compassion, I will be cleansed and saved. But if You turn away from me, I will perish. Grant me, O Lord, Your blessing to strengthen my will to come closer to You in faith and hope, to confess my sins, and detest returning to them. Let Your Holy Spirit remind me not to stray. Enlighten my heart O God, so that I can see the graveness of my sins and negligence and have the will to obey your commandments and live for the glory of Your Holy name. **Amen.**

#### **A PRAYER AFTER CONFESSION**

O Father, I am grateful for Your goodness and love for mankind. You did not wish that I perish but awakened me from my sleep and guided me to your way. You saved me from the valley of death to the protection of Your strong fortress. Fill me with hope and faith. I come to You like the sick wishing to be healed, like the hungry seeking to be filled, like the poor to the source of riches, the sinner to the redeemer and like the dying to the origin of life. You are my salvation, my health, my life and my strength. With You, I find consolation, happiness and comfort. Help me, protect me and surround me with Your goodness. Teach me to put my will in Your hands and live according to Your will. Remove my weakness so that I may be firm and honest to You to the end. **Amen.**