

A PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

Introduction to the Sacrament

by Fr. Thomas Hopko

The sacrament of penance (confession) exists in the Church to allow for the repentance and reconversion of Christians who have fallen away from the life of faith. There are three main elements to the act of formal penance. The first is a sincere sorrow for sins and for the breaking of communion with God. The second is an open and heartfelt confession of sins. At one time this confession was done publicly before all men in the midst of the Church, but in recent times it is usually done only in the presence of the pastor of the Church who stands in behalf of all. The third element of penance is the formal prayer of absolution through which the forgiveness of God through Christ is sacramentally bestowed upon the repentant sinner.

The sacrament of penance, like all sacraments, is an element of the life of the Church which presupposes a firm belief and conviction that Christ himself is present in the Church through his Holy Spirit. A person without the experience of Christ in the Church will not understand the meaning of sacramental penance and the need for the open and public confession of sins. When the Church is experienced as the new life in Christ and as the genuine communion with God in his kingdom already present with men in sacrament and mystery, then not only will sacramental penance and the confession of sins be understood, but it will be cherished as the great mystery of God which it is: the unique possibility for reunion with God through the forgiveness of Christ who has come to save sinners who confess their sins and who sincerely desire to change their lives according to the ways which he himself has given.

In a word, the Orthodox Church strictly adheres to the teaching of the Bible that only God can forgive sins, that he does so through Christ in the Church, that his conditions are genuine repentance and the promise of change which are witnessed by confession; and that confession, by definition, is the open and public acknowledgment of sin before God and all mankind. acknowledgment of sin before God and all mankind

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The following guides are valuable for those who wish to begin anew a life-sustaining relationship with Lord through His bride, the Holy Orthodox Church.

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Preparation for Confession

by St. John of Kronstadt

I, a sinful soul, confess to our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, all of my evil acts which I have done, said or thought from baptism even unto this present day. I have not kept the vows of my baptism, but have made myself unwanted before the face of God.

I have sinned before the Lord by lack of faith and by doubts concerning the Orthodox Faith and the Holy Church; by ungratefulness for all of God's great and unceasing gifts; His long-suffering and His providence for me, a sinner; by lack of love for the Lord, as well as fear, through not fulfilling the Holy Commandments of God and the canons and rules of the Church. I have not preserved a love for God and for my neighbor nor have I made enough efforts, because of laziness and lack of care, to learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers.

I have sinned: by not praying in the morning and in the evening and in the course of the day; by not attending the services or by coming to Church only half-heartedly, lazily and carelessly; by conversing during the services, by not paying attention, letting my mind wander and by departure from the Church before the dismissal and blessing.

I have sinned by judging members of the clergy.

I have sinned by not respecting the Feasts, breaking the Fasts, and by immoderation in food and drink.

I have sinned by self-importance, disobedience, willfulness, self-righteousness, and the seeking of approval and praise.

I have sinned by unbelief, lack of faith, doubts, despair, despondency, abusive thoughts, blasphemy and swearing.

I have sinned by pride, a high opinion of my self, narcissism, vanity, conceit, envy, love of praise, love of honors, and by putting on airs.

I have sinned: by judging, malicious gossip, anger, remembering of offenses done to me, hatred and returning evil for evil; by slander, reproaches, lies, slyness, deception and hypocrisy; by prejudices, arguments, stubbornness, and an unwillingness to give way to my neighbor; by gloating, spitefulness, taunting, insults and mocking; by gossip, by speaking too much and by empty speech.

I have sinned by unnecessary and excessive laughter, by reviling and dwelling upon my previous sins, by arrogant behavior, insolence and lack of respect.

I have sinned by not keeping my physical and spiritual passions in check, by my enjoyment of impure thoughts, licentiousness and unchastity in thoughts, words, and deeds.

I have sinned by lack of endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows, a devotion to the comforts of life and by being too attached to my parents, children, relatives and friends.

I have sinned by hardening my heart, having a weak will and by not forcing myself to do good.

I have sinned by miserliness, a love of money, the acquisition of unnecessary things and

immoderate attachment to things.

I have sinned by self-justification, a disregard for the admonitions of my conscience and failing to confess my sins through negligence or false pride.

I have sinned many times by my Confession: belittling, justifying and keeping silent about sins.

I have sinned against the Most-holy and Life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord by coming to Holy Communion without humility or the fear of God.

I have sinned in deed, word and thought, knowingly and unknowingly, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, and it is impossible to enumerate all of my sins because of their multitude. But I truly repent of these and all others not mentioned by me because of my forgetfulness and I ask that they be forgiven through the abundance of the Mercy of God.

Ten Commandments

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.
2. Thou shalt not make any graven image, or bow down before any creation in heaven or on earth.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10. Thou shalt not covet that which is thy neighbors.

Seven Deadly Sins

1. Pride
2. Covetousness
3. Lust
4. Anger
5. Gluttony
6. Envy
7. Sloth

Sins of Accessory

- ◆ by counseling
- ◆ by commanding

- ◆ by consenting
- ◆ by provoking another to sin
- ◆ by praise of flattery
- ◆ by concealment
- ◆ by silence
- ◆ by defending that which is wrong

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Prayers before Confession

Say The *Trisagion Prayers* (Holy God, Holy Mighty . . .) and close with the following prayer:
“I have sinned, O Lord, forgive me. O God be merciful to me a sinner.”

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How to Give Your Confession

Silently approach the confessional stand or kneeler and reverently bow your head or kneel. After the priest greets you, describe the sinful actions (not emotions) that separate you from God. Avoid the “blame game” by implicating others for your sin. Do not withhold those sins or details that the Holy Spirit brings to your mind. Be specific but not overly detailed. Above all, be honest, repentant, and open to God’s forgiveness.