

PREPARATION FOR YOUR FIRST CONFESSION

Going to confession is an act of obedience. Jesus does not give us an option; He calls us to follow him faithfully by confessing our sins to those whose Apostolic authority conveys to us in the most personal and direct way the forgiveness of our sins and the grace to live a new life. Read over the following verses from Holy Scripture followed by the two short paragraphs from the catechism. **Make a resolution in your heart to act in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ** who loves you more than anyone you know.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. --*Matthew 16: 15-19*

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." --*John 20: 19-23*

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. --*James 5: 16*

"Jesus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before Him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the CONVERSION OF THE HEART, INTERIOR CONVERSION. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.

Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His grace." --from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; 1430-31.

I suggest you work through the following preparatory steps as a way to get ready. Whether you make an appointment with the priest or just go at a time announced for confession, be sure to tell the priest that you are preparing in anticipation of reception into full union with the Catholic Church and that you are in the last stage of RCIA preparation. This will help the priest lead you through the rite. Do not be anxious about what to do; the priest will help you.

1. Spend a few minutes in prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember your sins and to give you the grace of **contrition** (true sorrow for your sins—see pg. 3). Read through the various forms of the Act of Contrition, and meditate on the one you prefer.
2. Think through your life and consider the ways in which you have caused injury of any kind to others and to yourself. It can be helpful to divide your life into stages that allow you to look at yourself as you were at different times. For example,

- early childhood, later childhood, early adolescence, later adolescence and early adulthood, etc. There is no right or wrong way to do this; most of us have a sense of how our personal histories have unfolded, so arrange it in a way that makes sense to you.
3. For each stage, think back through your behavior patterns, your relationships, and any decisions and actions that caused harm to others and to yourself. Be specific. Also think through your words, decisions and actions by which you turned yourself and others away from God's love. Again, be specific.
 - Be careful to examine **your own sins** and not everyone else's. While there may be many "mitigating circumstances" by which you could seek to justify wrong decisions and actions, that's not what confession is all about. Examine your word, decisions and actions for what they actually were.
 - You do not need to name every instance of a particular act, but, if it was often repeated, you need to make that clear.
 - If it helps you to write things down, do it, but **be sure to keep what you write private and plan to destroy whatever you write after going to confession**. It is perfectly acceptable to take what you've written into the confessional with you.
 - If you are not sure if something you did is a sin or not, include it and ask the priest to help you clarify it. My own rule is this: when in doubt, include it.
 - As you work through the years that get closer to the present, you might begin to detect patterns in your present life that have roots in your much earlier stages of life. That's worth noticing. Self-examination can be very revealing.
 - Do not deliberately leave out something. Things that are particularly difficult often make us feel ashamed, which is all the more reason to confess thoroughly. You're there to be rid of this stuff, right? **This is all about being as honest with yourself and with the Lord Jesus Christ as you can possibly be at this moment in your life**. Jesus' intention is to meet our sins with healing grace and restorative love. The priest's role is to exercise the ministry of Jesus Christ given to the Apostles. Be afraid of hanging onto the sins; but by no means be afraid of giving them to Jesus, who waits in love to relieve you of them through the office of the priesthood of His Body, the Church.
 - If you genuinely forget something that you remember after you've gone to confession, be sure to bring it up the next time. But remember, if you "deliberately forget" that's not the same as actually not remembering.
 4. You may think your list seems pretty big—it might be. However, you will be surprised how quickly you can move through it when making your confession. **Resolve in your heart to forgive those who have sinned against you**. Ask the Lord to help you do this as a way to express this resolve.
 5. Determine the time when you will go to confession, and **make it a firm commitment between yourself and the Lord**. Make an appointment or go to the church at the appointed times for Lenten confessions.

Here are four different versions of the Act of Contrition. Any one of these will suffice when the priest asks you to say the Act of Contrition in the Confession Rite. You might want to look them over, decide which one you prefer, and have a copy of it on hand when you go to confession.

ACT OF CONTRITION

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who are 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 to amend my life. Amen.

OR

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

OR

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy.

OR

O my God, I am sorry for my sins because I have offended you. I know I should love you above all things. Help me to do penance, to do better, and to avoid anything that might lead me to sin. Amen.

If you have a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd Edition*, you will find a very detailed discussion in

**PART TWO
THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY**

**SECTION TWO
THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH**

**CHAPTER TWO
THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING**

**ARTICLE 4
THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**

Paragraphs 1422-1498

You can also go straight to these paragraphs online at
<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc/p2s2c2a4.htm#1422>

The link for the whole Catechism online is
<http://www.scborromeo.org/ccc.htm>