

# The Sacrament Of Confession



Items from [St Nicholas Orthodox Church](http://www.orthodox.net/confess/index.html)  
McKinney Texas

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# PREPARING FOR CONFESSION

## Prayer before confession

### Of St. Symeon the New Theologian

O God and Lord of all! Who hath the power over every breath and soul, the only One able to heal me, hearken unto the prayer of me, the wretched one, and, having put him to death, destroy the serpent nestling within me by the descent of the All-Holy and Life-Creating Spirit. And vouchsafe me, poor and naked of all virtue, to fall with tears at the feet of my spiritual father, and call his holy soul to mercy, to have mercy on me. And grant, O Lord, unto my heart humility and good thoughts, becoming a sinner, who hath consented to repent unto Thee, and do not abandon unto the end the one soul, which hath united itself unto Thee and hath confessed Thee, and instead of all the world hath chosen Thee and hath preferred Thee. For Thou knowest, O Lord, that I want to save myself, and that my evil habit is an obstacle. But all things are possible unto Thee, O Master, which are impossible for man. Amen.

Translated from the Russian by [Priest Viatcheslav Davidenko](#)

# **A 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.

# Preparation for Confession

Here are some aids in preparing for her confession and I found in my files the following which I have given to parishioners at times to help them prepare. This comes from no single source but is drawn from a number of places.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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

1. To abstain from servile work on Sundays and Holy Days.
  2. To attend Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days.
  3. To fast and to abstain on the days appointed by the Church.
  4. To confess our sins and to receive the Holy Mysteries at least
  5. once a year.
  6. Not to solemnize marriage at forbidden times.
  7. To pray to God every day, especially at morning and evening.
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## SEVEN DEADLY SINS

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

## **ACCESSORIES TO SIN**

By counseling, by commanding, by consenting, by provoking another to sin; by praise of flattery, by concealment, by silence, or by defending that which is wrong.

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## **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF TO PREPARE FOR CONFESSION**

- Have you prayed to God upon rising and before eating and sleeping?
- During prayer were you distracted by other thoughts?
- Did you make the sign of the Cross carelessly?
- Have you attended Church services regularly?
- When in Church, have you been inattentive, laughed or talked unnecessarily?
- Have you used the name of the Lord in swearing or in a joking way?
- Have you sworn or murmured against God?
- Have you been ashamed to make the sign of the Cross in front of others?
- Have you attended parties, movies, etc. during the hours of Church services?
- Have you failed to keep the fast or other rules of the Church?
- Have you believed in astrology, superstitions, fortune-tellers or the like?
- Have you strayed from the teachings of the Church by unbelief or indifference to the Faith?
- Have you failed to ask for God's help in every effort?
- Have you concealed sins at confession?
- Do you show your parents proper respect? Have you been rude to them, talked back or otherwise offended them?
- If your parents are reposed, have you prayed for them.
- Have you been disrespectful to members of the clergy, your elders, teachers or superiors?
- Have you been angry or irritated?
- Have you abused anyone? Used foul language? Struck someone?
- Offended someone in an argument?
- Have you raised your voice in anger?
- Have you joked or made fun of the handicapped, unfortunate, or elderly?
- Are you truly at peace with everyone?
- Have you asked forgiveness of those you may have offended?
- Have you failed to give aid to someone in need, especially when asked?
- Have you donated to the needs of the Church?
- Have you been cruel to animals?

- Have you taken something without asking?
- Have you failed to return a book or other thing that you have borrowed?
- Have you been stubborn, insistent on pressing your point of view?
- Have you plotted or taken revenge on one who's offended you?
- Have you told falsehoods, distorted the truth, cheated, judged others or gossiped?
- Have you joked of the faults of others, or exposed the faults of another to make yourself the better?
- Have you been vain? Sought glory or praise for yourself?
- Does your inner peace disappear when others are unfair to you or judge you?
- Are you proud? Do you brag of your abilities, position or possessions? Do you consider yourself worthy or sinless in the sight of God?
- Have you been overly concerned with your appearance? Are you properly attired in God's house?
- The 7th commandment includes all sins of a sexual nature, either by thought, word, or deed, any of these must be confessed.
- Have you been envious of another's possessions, appearance or standing?
- Have you fulfilled all obligations faithfully? Have you been lazy?
- Have you been impatient? Fallen into despair or apathy? Had thoughts of suicide?
- Are you attached to smoking, alcohol, or other drugs? Food or drink?
- Do you give up your heart to money or other earthly possessions?

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This information is edited from a post to the ORTHODOX mailing list on April 1, 1996 by [Fr. David Moser](#), of [St Seraphim of Sarov Orthodox Church, Boise Idaho](#)

# Preparation for Confession

## From the Vision of Blessed Theodora

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.

### First Torment: Idle speech

- Have you spoken without thinking? or spoken too much? or spoken anything that is impure? or shameless? or without need or order? or unreasonable? or unclean?
- Have you thought or said angry words or foul words?
- Have you participated with or sung worldly shameless songs in word or thought?
- Have you laughed unnecessarily or excessively? or laughed about things that you shouldn't have laughed about or found funny?
- Have you acted too silly?

### Second Torment: Lying

- Have you kept the vows of your baptism?
- Have you failed to keep oaths or promises to God?
- Have pronounced the name of God without reverence?
- Have you falsely confessed your sins? or was insincere about, belittled, justified, or kept silent about your sins during confession?
- Have you lied?
- Have you been sly or secretly mischievous? or have you been deceptive or hypocritical?
- Have you honestly obeyed traffic laws?
- Have been argumentative or stubborn?

### Third Torment: Spoke evil of others

- Have you spread rumors or gossiped in thought or in word?
- Have you slandered anyone wanting to or intending to injure the reputation of another?
- Have you given bad ideas or words to people?
- Have you laughed at other's deficiencies or misfortunes?
- Have you maligned treated anyone with malice or shown hatred toward or abused or wronged or injured anyone?
- Have you condemned anyone? or declared others unfit?
- Have you made fun of people in thought, word, or action? or mocked in a harmful way?
- Have you reproached anyone or reflected on anyone abusively?
- Have you taunted, teased, or tempted anyone?
- Have you insulted anyone?

#### **Fourth Torment: Gluttony**

- Have you eaten before I put on the sign of the cross?
- Have you eaten when you were not hungry?
- Have you eaten too much at one time or became too full during the fasts?
- Have you eaten without having thankfulness to God?
- Have you eaten like a slob or out of control stuffing food in your mouth?
- Have you consumed too many alcoholic beverages to the point of being drunk?
- Have you respected the feasts and fasts as much as I should?
- Have you broken the fasts?
- Have you not looked forward to the fasts taking in mind the true meaning and purpose of them?
- Have you eaten too many sweet foods for the enjoyment of them or had a love of sweets?
- Have you had gluttonous fantasies?

#### **Fifth Torment: Sloth**

- Have you taken efforts to remember and extensively learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers by reading spiritual things?
- Have you kept your physical and spiritual passions in check all the time? Or had a general carelessness about doing things having to do with the salvation of your soul?
- Have you devoted yourself to the comforts of life?
- Have you lacked endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows by not struggling against your passions as much as you should?
- Have you been idle? or not worked as hard as you could have? or fallen asleep at work? or not wanted to get out of bed?
- Have you complained about having to work or attend long services or say long prayers?
- Have you cared to praise and thank God as much as I could or should have throughout the day?
- Have you failed to keep in continual prayer trying always to keep your mind on serving God?
- Have you dwelled upon your previous sins?
- Have you fallen into despondency? Or given up hope or not having faith in God that He can and will change you?
- Have you forgotten to pray at certain times during the day?
- Have you rushed through or not said your morning and evening prayers wholeheartedly?
- Have you attended the services completely?
- Have you been fully prepared to go to Church to worship? or have you gone to Church only half-heartedly, lazily, and carelessly?
- Have you conversed during the services about things not having to do with the service?
- Have you paid complete attention during the services?

- Have you let your mind wander or daydream or think other ungodly thoughts during prayer or services?
- Have you left the Church before the dismissal and blessing?
- Have you forced yourself to do good at all times?
- Have you had a weak will?

### **Sixth Torment: Stealing**

- Have you stolen anything or thought seriously about stealing something?

### **Seventh Torment: Avarice and love of money**

- Have you loved riches?
- Have you been content with what God gave you?
- Have you wished in your mind that you had more money than you do already?
- Have you acquired unnecessary things? or had an immoderate attachment to material things?
- Have you been too concerned or caught up with material things?
- Have you been too concerned with things having to do with the flesh?
- Have you bought things in exchange for proper tithing?
- Have you been greedy or selfish?
- Have you worried about money or financial circumstances instead of putting your trust in God?
- Have you had fantasies about material wealth or having riches?

### **Eighth Torment: Usury**

- Have you gained riches by exploiting people?
- Have you accepted bribes?
- Have you acquired something that belonged to another?

### **Ninth Torment: Injustice**

- Have you judged anyone?
- Have you acquitted the guilty and condemned the innocent all for the sake of gain?
- Have you been unjust in anyway?
- Have you accused an innocent person of committing an act that they did not do?

### **Tenth Torment: Envy**

- Have you envied anyone? or been jealous?

### **Eleventh Torment: Pride**

- Have you been prideful?
- Have you thought myself better than anybody else?

- Have you considered yourself worthy while considering others unworthy?
- Have you had a high opinion of yourself in any way?
- Have you talked down to anyone?
- Have you compared or measured yourself up to anyone?
- Have you looked out for other people's faults rather than your own?
- Have you tried to conceal the shortcomings of others while trying to conceal your virtues?
- Have you been critical of other people or criticized anyone?
- Have you been arrogant, vain, or conceited?
- Have you relied completely on yourself rather than God?
- Have you bragged or boasted of things that you have accomplished? Have you loved praise and honors? Have you put on airs?
- Have you been prideful of the good deeds that you have done?
- Have you failed to give proper honor or obey your parents or superiors appointed by God? Have you been disobedient?
- Have you thought yourself self-important?
- Have you been self-willed instead of trying always to do the will of God?
- Have you been self-righteous? Have you self-justified your sins?
- Have you disregarded the counseling of your conscience?
- Have you failed to confess any of your sins through negligence or false pride?
- Have you been impatient or anxious about anything in which you shouldn't be that way about?
- Have you been prejudice towards anyone for any reason?
- Have you had prideful fantasies of power, fame, or glory?

### **Twelfth Torment: Anger and Ruthlessness**

- Have you felt anger?
- Have you said anything unfeeling towards anyone? Have you harmed or hurt anyone's feelings in any way?
- Have you carried on arguments with anyone about anything in your head?

### **Thirteenth Torment: Bearing grudges**

- Have you nurtured evil thoughts against anyone?
- Have you returned evil for evil?
- Have you remembered wrongs anyone did to you in the past?
- Have you bore any grudges instead of understanding, loving, and forgiving?
- Have you kept in mind when anyone made offences towards you?
- Have you imagined ways you could have revenge on anyone?

### **Fourteenth Torment: Murder**

- Have you wounded anyone in some way?
- Have you had any violent or destructive thoughts?
- Have you had any harmful thoughts aimed towards anyone?

- Have you wished evil upon anyone?
- Have you been angry with people without a just cause?

### **Fifteenth Torment: Magic, sorcery, poisoning, and incantations**

- Have you thought about your past interest in magic and things relating to magic?
- Have you imaged Holy things having some sort of magical properties?

### **Sixteenth Torment: Fornication**

- Have you had any sensual or lustful thoughts? carnal thoughts?
- Have you daydreamed about amorous and lustful things and found them sweet?
- Have you made impure glances?
- Have you touched yourself in a lustful or passionate way that was pleasing or arousing?
- Have you had blasphemously lustful thoughts about saints and holy people?
- Have you been unchaste in thought, word, or deed?
- Have you waken up from lustful bad dreams and found them pleasing to think about?
- Have you had fantasies of lust or fornication?

### **Seventeenth Torment: Adultery**

- Have you had any adulterous thoughts with married people?

### **Eighteenth Torment: Sodomitic sins**

- Have you sinned against your nature?

### **Nineteenth Torment: Heresies**

- Have you participated in Holy Communion having as much humility or the fear of God as you should?
- Have you loved and feared the Lord always?
- Have you turned away from the Orthodox confession of faith by apostatizing and agreeing with false doctrines or beliefs?
- Have you lacked faith?
- Have you doubted or had misconceptions about the faith?
- Have denied holy things or had a negative attitude towards them?
- Have you been grateful for all of God's great and unceasing gifts, His mercy, His long-suffering, and His providence?
- Have you fulfilled the Holy Commandments of God, the canons, and the rules of the Church?
- Have you blasphemed or swore in thought or word?
- Have you thought curse words when you pray?
- Have you turned words of prayer into profane words or filthy concepts?

- Have you feared man instead of God?
- Have you been too attached to parents, relatives, and friends?
- Have you answered the telephone during prayer?

**Twentieth Torment: Lack of compassion and cruelty of the heart**

- Have you lacked mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and love for anyone?
- Have you felt hatred toward anyone? or any other manifestation of hatred?
- Have you been unfriendly to anyone? or been cruel?
- Have you ridiculed anyone?
- Have you rejoiced at the misfortunes of other's?
- Have you had abusive or violent thoughts?
- Have you been polite and friendly while driving on the roads and highways?

I have sinned in deed, word, and thought, voluntarily and involuntarily, knowingly and unknowingly, in knowledge and in ignorance, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, by day and by night, 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.

# A LIST OF THE PASSIONS

by Saint Peter of Damaskos

The passions are:

harshness,  
trickery,  
malice,  
perversity,  
mindlessness,  
licentiousness,  
enticement,  
dullness,  
lack of understanding,  
idleness,  
sluggishness,  
stupidity,  
flattery,  
silliness,  
idiocy,  
madness,  
derangement,  
coarseness,  
rashness,  
cowardice,  
lethargy,  
dearth of good actions,  
moral errors,  
greed,  
over-frugality,  
ignorance,  
folly,  
spurious knowledge,  
forgetfulness,  
lack of discrimination,  
obduracy,  
injustice,  
evil intention,  
a conscienceless soul,  
slothfulness,  
idle chatter,  
breaking of faith,  
wrongdoing,  
sinfulness,

lawlessness,  
criminality,  
passion,  
seduction,  
assent to evil,  
mindless coupling,  
demonic provocation,  
dallying,  
bodily comfort beyond  
what is required,  
vice,  
stumbling,  
sickness of soul,  
enervation,  
weakness of intellect,  
negligence,  
laziness,  
a reprehensible  
despondency,  
disdain of God,  
aberration,  
transgression,  
unbelief,  
lack of faith,  
wrong belief,  
poverty of faith,  
heresy,  
fellowship in heresy,  
polytheism,  
idolatry,  
ignorance of God,  
impiety,  
magic,  
astrology,  
divination,  
sorcery,  
denial of God,  
the love of idols,  
dissipation,

profligacy,  
loquacity,  
indolence,  
self-love,  
inattentiveness,  
lack of progress,  
deceit,  
delusion,  
audacity,  
witchcraft,  
defilement,  
the eating of unclean  
food,  
soft living,  
dissoluteness,  
voracity,  
unchastity,  
avarice,  
anger,  
dejection,  
listlessness,  
self-esteem,  
pride,  
presumption,  
self-elation,  
boastfulness,  
infatuation,  
foulness,  
satiety,  
doltishness,  
torpor,  
sensuality,  
over-eating,  
gluttony,  
insatiability,  
secret eating,  
hoggishness,  
solitary eating,  
indifference,

fickleness,  
self-will,  
thoughtlessness,  
self-satisfaction,  
love of popularity,  
ignorance of beauty,  
uncouthness,  
gaucherie,  
lightmindedness,  
boorishness,  
rudeness,  
contentiousness,  
quarrelsomeness,  
abusiveness,  
shouting,  
brawling,  
fighting,  
rage,  
mindless desire,  
gall,  
exasperation,  
giving offence,  
enmity,  
meddlesomeness,  
chicanery,  
asperity,  
slander,  
censure,  
calumny,  
condemnation,  
accusation,  
hatred,  
railing,  
insolence,  
dishonor,  
ferocity,  
frenzy,  
severity,  
aggressiveness,  
forswearing oneself,  
oath taking,  
lack of compassion,  
hatred of one's brothers,  
partiality,  
patricide,  
matricide,

breaking fasts,  
laxity,  
acceptance of bribes,  
theft,  
rapine,  
jealousy,  
strife,  
envy,  
indecenty,  
jesting,  
vilification,  
mockery,  
derision,  
exploitation,  
oppression,  
disdain of one's  
neighbor,  
flogging,  
making sport of others,  
hanging,  
throttling,  
heartlessness,  
implacability,  
covenant-breaking,  
bewitchment,  
harshness,  
shamelessness,  
impudence,  
obfuscation of thoughts,  
obtuseness,  
mental blindness,  
attraction to what is  
fleeting,  
impassionedness,  
frivolity,  
disobedience,  
dull wittedness,  
drowsiness of soul,  
excessive sleep,  
fantasy,  
heavy drinking,  
drunkenness,  
uselessness,  
slackness,  
mindless enjoyment,  
self-indulgence,

venerly,  
using foul language,  
effeminacy,  
unbridled desire,  
burning lust,  
masturbation,  
pimping,  
adultery,  
sodomy,  
bestiality,  
defilement,  
wantonness,  
a stained soul,  
incest,  
uncleanliness,  
pollution,  
sordidness,  
feigned affection,  
laughter,  
jokes,  
immodest dancing,  
clapping,  
improper songs,  
revelry,  
flute playing,  
license of tongue,  
excessive love of order,  
insubordination,  
disorderliness,  
reprehensible collusion,  
conspiracy,  
warfare,  
killing,  
brigandry,  
sacrilege,  
illicit gains,  
usury,  
wiliness,  
grave-robbing,  
hardness of heart,  
obloquy,  
complaining,  
blasphemy,  
fault-finding,  
ingratitude,  
malevolence,

contemptuousness,  
pettiness,  
confusion,  
lying,  
verbosity,  
empty words,  
mindless joy,  
daydreaming,  
mindless friendship,  
bad habits,  
nonsensicality,  
silly talk,  
garrulity,  
niggardliness,  
depravity,  
intolerance,

irritability,  
affluence,  
rancour,  
misuse,  
ill-temper,  
clinging to life,  
ostentation,  
affectation,  
pusillanimity,  
satanic love,  
curiosity,  
contumely,  
lack of the fear of God,  
unteachability,  
senselessness,  
haughtiness,

self-vaunting,  
self-inflation,  
scorn for one's neighbor,  
mercilessness,  
insensitivity,  
hopelessness,  
spiritual paralysis,  
hatred of God,  
despair,  
suicide,  
a falling away from God  
in all things,  
utter destruction --  
altogether 298 passions.

These, then, are the passions which I have found named in the Holy Scriptures. I have set them down in a single list, as I did at the beginning of my discourse with the various books I have used. I have not tried, nor would I have been able, to arrange them all in order; this would have been beyond my powers, for the reason given by St. John Klimakos: 'If you seek understanding in wicked men, you will not find it.' For all that the demons produce is disorderly. In common with the godless and the unjust, the demons have but one purpose: to destroy the souls of those who accept their evil counsel. Yet sometimes they actually help men to attain holiness. In such instances they are conquered by the patience and faith of those who put their trust in the Lord, and who through their good actions and resistance to evil thoughts counteract the demons and bring down curses upon them.

A LIST OF THE PASSIONS, Saint Peter of Damaskos

The Philokalia; The Complete Text compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, Volume Three

Translated from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherard, Kallistos Ware faber and faber, 1984

# EXAMPLES OF CONFESSIONS

## A Lament for Sin

### St. Basil the Great

Weep over your sin: it is a spiritual ailment; it is death to your immortal soul; it deserves ceaseless, unending weeping and crying; let all tears flow for it, and sighing come forth without ceasing from the depths of your heart.

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, covert and overt, great and little, committed by word and deed, in thought and intention, day and night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self love and my boastfulness; I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarreling and cursing;

I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my wrath, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance and rancor;

I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclinations; covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and sloth;

I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, joked, ridiculed, mocked, enjoyed empty gaiety, singing, dancing and every pleasure to excess;

I weep over my self indulgence, cupidity, love of money and miserliness, unmercifulness and cruelty;

I weep over my laziness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration in prayer and in Church, for not observing fasts and not doing charitable works.

I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and unfeelingness in what concerns the Holy Orthodox Faith, and over all my foul, cunning and reviling thoughts;

I weep over my exaggerated sorrow and grief, depression and despair, and over sins committed willingly.

I weep, but what tears can I find for a worthy and fitting way to weep for all the actions of my ill fated life; for my immeasurable and profound worthlessness? How can I reveal and expose in all its nakedness each one of my sins, great and small, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, overt and covert, every hour and minute of sin?

When and where shall I begin my penitential lament that will bear fitting fruit? Perhaps soon I may have to face the last hour of my life; my soul will be painfully sundered from my sinful and vile body; I shall have to stand before terrible demons and radiant angels, who will reveal and torment me with my sins; and I, in fear and trembling, will be unprepared and unable to give them an answer; the sight and sound of wailing demons, their violent and bold desire to drag me into the bottomless pit of Hell will fill my soul with confusion and terror. And then the angels of God will lead my poor soul to stand before God 's fearful seat of judgment. How will I answer the Immortal King, or how will I dare, sinner that I am, to look upon My Judge? Woe is me! have no good answer to make, for I have spent all my life in indolence and sin, all my hours and minutes in vain thoughts, desires and yearnings!

And how many times have I taken the Name of God in vain!

How often, lightly and freely, at times even boldly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, mocked them!

How often have I been proud and vainglorious and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done!

How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant and mean!

How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked or gloated over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred or envy!

How often have I laughed stupidly, mocked and derided, spoke without weighing my words, ignorantly and senselessly, and uttered a numberless quantity of cutting, poisonous, insolent, frivolous, vulgar, coarse, brazen words!

How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind, my imagination and my heart with voluptuous sensations, and unnaturally satisfied the lusts of the flesh in fantasy! How often has my tongue uttered shameful, vulgar and blasphemous things about the desires of the flesh!

How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on delicacies, on tasty, varied and diverse foods and wines; because of intemperance and lack of self-control how often have I been filled past the point of satiety, lacked sobriety and been drunken, intemperate in food and drink, and broken the Holy Fasts!

How often, through selfishness, pride or false modesty, have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary and grasped at attention!

How often have I entered the House of God without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absent-minded, and left it in the same spirit and disposition! And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little, lazily, and indolently, inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting the appointed prayers!

And in general, how slothful I have been, weakened by indolence and inaction; how many hours of each day have I spent in sleep, how often have I enjoyed voluptuous thoughts in bed and defiled my flesh! How many hours have I spent in empty and futile pastimes and pleasures, in frivolous talk and speech, jokes and laughter, games and fun, and how much time have I wasted conclusively in chatter, and gossip, in criticizing others and reproaching them; how many hours have I spent in time-wasting and emptiness! What shall I answer to the Lord God for every hour and every minute of lost time? In truth, I have wasted my entire life in laziness.

How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy or through stupid habit, insensitivity, ignorance, insolence, shamelessness, and hardness sinned deliberately, willingly, in my right mind, in full awareness, in all goodwill, in both thought and intention, and in deed, and in this fashion trampled the blood of God's covenant and crucified anew within myself the Son of God and cursed Him!

O how terrible the punishment that I have drawn upon myself!

How is it that my eyes are not streaming with constant tears?.. If only my tears flowed from the cradle to the grave, at every hour and every minute of my tortured life! Who will now cool my head with water and fill the well of my tears and help me weep over my soul that I have cast into perdition?

My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Be it unto me according to Thy will, O Lord! If Thou wouldst grant me light, be Thou blessed; if Thou wouldst grant me darkness, be Thou equally blessed. If Thou wouldst destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy righteous judgment; and if Thou wouldst not destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy boundless mercy!

## **A Brief Confession before One's Spiritual Father**

### **From the Full Confession of St. Demetrius of Rostov**

I confess to the Lord my God and before thee, venerable father, all my countless sins, committed by me unto this very day and hour, in deed, word and thought. I sin daily and hourly by mine ingratitude toward God for His great and countless blessings and benevolent providence over me, a sinner.

I have sinned through: idle talking, judging others, stubbornness, pride, hard-heartedness, envy, anger, slander, inattention, negligence concerning my salvation, carelessness, indifference, impertinence, irritability, despondency, rendering evil for evil, bitterness, disobedience, complaining, self-justification, contradicting others, self-will, being reproachful, gossiping, lying, light-mindedness, tempting others, self-love, ambition, gourmandizing, eating and drinking to excess, vanity, laziness, entertaining unclean thoughts, acquisitiveness, impure glances, absence from divine services because of laziness and carelessness, absent-mindedness at prayer both in church and at home; I have sinned in deed, word thought; in sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and the rest of my mental and physical senses; of all my sins I repent and beg forgiveness.

(Here one should mention specifically any other sins which may be burdening the soul.)

I also repent and ask forgiveness for all those sins that I have not confessed because of their multitude and my forgetfulness.

Forgive and absolve me, venerable father, and bless me to commune of the holy and life-creating Mysteries of Christ unto the remission of sins and life everlasting.

# **BRIEF CONFESSION BEFORE A SPIRITUAL FATHER**

**Compiled by the late Archbishop Tikhon of San Francisco.**

**Based on a longer version by St Dimitry of Rostov.**

I confess to the Lord my God before thee, reverend father, all my sins which I have committed up to the present day and hour, in deed, word and thought. Every day and every hour I sin through ingratitude to God for His great and numberless blessings to me and His most gracious providence and care for me, a sinner. I have sinned through:

- idle talk
- saying unseemly things
- condemnation of others
- laughter
- scorn
- self-love
- insubordination
- love of glory
- pride
- love of honor
- envy
- gluttony
- anger
- love of sensual pleasure
- slander
- over-eating
- inattention
- drunkenness
- listlessness
- attachment to things
- negligence
- love of money
- carelessness
- vainglory
- resentment and remembering wrongs
- laziness
- disobedience
- acceptance of lustful and grumbling impure thoughts
- self-will
- missing church services
- reproaching others
- dozing and sleeping in church
- evil speech
- neglect of prayer
- lying
- concealing sins at confession

I have sinned with all my senses, both spiritual and physical, wherefore I repent to the Lord and ask forgiveness. Absolve all my sins, reverend father, and bless me to partake of the Mysteries of Christ.

## **A sincere confession of an Orthodox Christian**

Bless me, O Lord and Savior,

to confess to Thee not only with words, but also with bitter tears.

and there is much to weep for...

My faith in Thee vacillates, O Lord!

Thoughts of skepticism and disbelief push themselves in to my soul much more often than they ever have.

Why?

Of course, the spirit of the times is to blame,

and people that I meet are to blame, but even more to blame am I myself, because I do not struggle with disbelief, because I do not pray to Thee for aid.

I am still more to blame if I am a temptation for someone else, by deed or word or just by cold silence when people speak of the faith.

I have sinned in this, O Lord: forgive and have mercy, and grant me faith.

My love for other people, even my relatives, is diminishing.

Their continual requests for help and their forgetfulness of how much I have already done for them causes mutual hard feelings.

But I am more guilty than they are: guilty because although I have the means to help them, I help them only grudgingly; guilty because I help them not for pure, Christian motivations, but out of pride and a desire for gratitude and praise.

Forgive me, Oh Lord, soften my heart and teach me to look not at how people treat me, but at how I treat other people.

And if they treat in a hostile way, inspire me, Oh Lord, to pay them back with love and goodness and pray for them.

I have also sinned in that I think very, very little about my sins.

Not only at ordinary times of the year, but even when I am preparing for Communion I do not remember them, I do not try to call them to mind for confession.

General phrases come to mind: "Nothing special, I am sinful like everyone.

Oh Lord, it is as if I did not know that in Thy eyes both every "idle word" and even the sinful desire in my heart is a sin.

And how many of these words and desires pile up within me in just one day, not to mention in a whole year!

Thou alone, Lord, knowest them; grant me to see my transgressions, have mercy on me, and save me.

Further: I acknowledge as my constant sin the lack of almost any struggle with evil.

As soon as any occasion or provocation appears, I plunge headlong into the pit of sin, and then, just as soon as I have fallen, I ask myself: what have I done?

A fruitless question, because it does not help me to become better.

And if at this point I feel sorrow, it proceeds from my self-esteem having suffered, and not from the realization that I have offended Thee, Oh Lord.

I neglect struggling not only with gross evil, but even with the most frivolous and harmful habit.

I do not know how to master myself and I do not even try.

I have sinned; forgive me!

Furthermore, the sin of irritability, which predominates in me, is not withdrawing from me in the least.

When I hear a sharp word, I do not reply with good-natured silence but behave like a heathen: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.

And hostility flares up for trifles and lasts for days and weeks.

I do not think of conciliation, but try to get revenge when an opportunity presents itself.

I have sinned without number, Oh Lord.

Have mercy, forgive me, and calm my heart!

Besides these most grievous sins, my whole life is a chain of sins: I do not value the time that You have given for gaining eternal salvation.

I very often stand irreverently, pray mechanically, judge others while they are praying, but do not look after myself.

At home I sometimes pray with great reluctance and absent-mindedness, so that often I do not hear my own prayer, and sometimes I simply omit it.

Such are my attitudes towards Thee, Oh Lord, and I can say nothing else but "forgive and have mercy!"

In my relations with people I sin with all my senses; I sin with my tongue by pronouncing false, foul, reproachful, or suggestive words; I sin with my eyes; I sin with my mind and heart by judging others and I am contentious often and for long periods of time; I sin not only against my soul, but against my body as well, by immoderately consuming food and drink.

Accept, Oh Lover of Mankind, my repentance, that I might approach Thy holy and life-giving Mysteries in peace, for the remission of sins, for the correction of this temporary life, and for the inheritance of eternal life.

Amen.

"I am not worthy to ask forgiveness, Oh Lord!"

So the great teacher of penitence, Saint Ephraim the Syrian, once exclaimed of himself.

"How can we resist the attack of sin? How can we deny entry to the passions?", Saint Basil the Great asked Saint Ephraim, who answered only by shedding tears.

What can I, the consummate and incorrigible sinner, say to thee now, O Lord?

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Ephraim and Basil, grant me, Oh Lord, repentance, and words, and tears.

Help me to spew out of myself, like deadly poison, my evil deeds, idle words, and wicked thoughts.

If I have forgotten to tell anything, Thou knowest know all and will remind me; for I do not want to conceal anything.

Thou commandest command me, "tell your iniquities before thou seekest justification.

But I say: "My sins are multiplied, Oh Lord, and they multiply incessantly.

They have no limit.

I know and I remember that even an impure thought is an abomination in Thy sight, but I not only think, but also do, things that grieve Thee.

I know that I am doing evil, but I do not refrain from it...

Thus, my repentance has not yet even begun, and the end is not in sight for my evil carelessness about sin.

There is truly no limit to my foul thoughts, bursts of self-esteem, vainglory, pride, gossip, resentment, and vengefulness.

I quarrel often, and I become angry, cruel, envious, lazy, and blindly stubborn.

Although I am of no importance, I think very highly of myself.

I do not want to honor those worthy of honor, but at the same time I demand undeserved deference for myself.

I lie ceaselessly, but I get angry at liars.

I judge those who speak evil or who are thieves, but I myself am a thief and an evil-sayer.

I defile myself by lustful thoughts and stimuli, but sternly judge others for immodestly.

I cannot bear being joked about, but I myself love to taunt others, respecting neither persons nor places, even doing it in church.

I consider as an enemy anyone who tells the truth about me.

I do not want to put myself out by doing a good turn, but I get angry if someone does not do me a good turn.

I coldly refuse a neighbor in need, but when I myself am in need, I tiresomely appeal to him.

I do not like to visit the sick, but if I am sick, I expect everyone to care for me without my asking.

Lord, send down in to the depths of my soul a ray of heavenly light, that I might see my sins.

My confession is almost always limited to only a superficial naming of some sins.

Oh my God, my conscience gave You a promise to start a better life, but I broke the promise and live as before.

Unless I have turned over a new leaf, I am ashamed to appear before a mere human with whom I have often not been true to my word.

How could I stand before Thee, my God, without shame and self-reproach, when so many times before Thy Throne, before the angels and saints, I have given promises and have not fulfilled them.

How base I am!

How criminal!

To Thee, Oh Lord, is truth, and to me are shameful faces" (Book of Daniel).

Only your boundless goodness can endure me.

Thou dost not destroy the sinner; do not destroy the penitent.

Teach me how to bring to mind and count the sins of my past life, the sins of an empty-headed youth, the sins of proud manhood, the sins of day and of night, sins against Thee, my Lord and Savior.

How can I count them in the few minutes in which I stand in this Holy Place? I remember, Lord, that thou didst heed the few words of the publican and the thief.

I know that thou mercifully greetest even a readiness to repent,

and I pray to Thee with all my soul, "My Lord, accept as my repentance the daily confession of sins that the sacred book contains.

I have many more sins than it lists, and I have no way to make amends for them.

I offer now only a striving for thee and a desire for the good, but I have no strength to reform.

Oh Lord and Lover and Mankind!

Thou dost not drive away the sinner who comes to Thee, beseeching Thee for forgiveness.

Before he even comes to the door of Thy mercy, thou hast already opened it for him; before he falls down before Thee, thou hast already stretched out Thy hand to him; before he confesses his sins, thou hast granted him forgiveness.

Grant it to me who repents, grant it according to Thy great mercy; forgive all the bad things that I have done, said, and thought.

and while granting forgiveness, send me also, Oh Lord, the strength, so that I might be able henceforth to live according to Thy will and not to offend Thee.

Help me, and I will be saved; help me by granting me to receive Thy holy Mysteries.

and that I may receive them worthily, declare to me by the lips of Thy priest, declare by Thy Holy Spirit, the grace of pardon and forgiveness, which can not be heard by the ear, but are heard in a deeply-moved heart and in peace of conscience.

Amen.

Translated by Seraphim F. Englehardt from a leaflet published on Mount Athos

# **AN ORTHODOX CONFESSION WHICH LEADS THE INWARD MAN TO HUMILITY**

## **From "The Way of a Pilgrim"**

Turning my eyes carefully upon myself and watching the course of my inward state, I have verified by experience that I do not love God, that I have no religious belief, and that I am filled with pride and sensuality. All this I actually find in myself as a result of detailed examination of my feelings and conduct, thus:

1. I do not love God. For if I loved God I should be continually thinking about Him with heartfelt joy. Every thought of God would give me gladness and delight. On the contrary, I much more often and much more eagerly think about earthly things, and thinking about God is labor and dryness. If I loved God, then talking with Him in prayer would be my nourishment and delight and would draw me to unbroken communion with Him. But, on the contrary, I not only find no delight in prayer, but even find it an effort. I struggle with reluctance, I am enfeebled by sloth, and am ready to occupy myself eagerly with any unimportant trifle, if only it shortens prayer and keeps me from it. My time slips away unnoticed in futile occupations, but when I am occupied with God, when I put myself into His presence every hour seems like a year. If one person loves another, he thinks of him throughout the day without ceasing, he pictures him to himself, he cares for him, and in all circumstances his beloved friend is never out of his thoughts. But I, throughout the day, scarcely set aside even a single hour in which to sink deep down into meditation upon God, to inflame my heart with love of Him, while I eagerly give up twenty-three hours as fervent offerings to the idols of my passions. I am forward in talk about frivolous matters and things which degrade the spirit; that gives me pleasure. But in the consideration of God I am dry, bored and lazy. Even if I am unwillingly drawn by others into spiritual conversation, I try to shift the subject quickly to one which pleases my desires. I am tirelessly curious about novelties, about civic affairs and political events; I eagerly seek the satisfaction of my love of knowledge in science and art, and in ways of getting things I want to possess. But the study of the Law of God, the knowledge of God and of religion, make little impression on me, and satisfy no hunger of my soul. I regard these things not only as a non-essential occupation for a Christian, but in a casual way as a sort of side-issue with which I should perhaps occupy my spare time, at odd moments. To put it shortly, if love for God is recognized by the keeping of His commandments (If ye love Me, keep My commandments, says our Lord Jesus Christ), and I not only do not keep them, but even make little attempt to do so, then in absolute truth the conclusion follows that I do not love God. That is what Basil the Great says: 'The proof that a man does not love God and His Christ lies in the fact that he does not keep His commandments'.

2. I do not love my neighbor either. For not only am I unable to make up my mind to lay down my life for his sake (according to the Gospel), but I do not even sacrifice my happiness, well-being and peace for the good of my neighbor. If I did love him as myself, as the Gospel bids, his misfortunes would distress me also, his happiness would bring

delight to me too. But, on the contrary, I listen to curious, unhappy stories about my neighbor and I am not distressed; I remain quite undisturbed or what is still worse, I find a sort of pleasure in them. Bad conduct on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with ensure. His well-being, honor and happiness do not delight me as my own, and, as if they were something quite alien to me, give me no feeling of gladness. What is more, they subtly arouse in me feelings of envy or contempt.

3. I have no religious belief. Neither in immortality nor in the Gospel. If I were firmly persuaded and believed without doubt that beyond the grave lies eternal life and recompense for the deeds of this life, I should be continually thinking of this. The very idea of immortality would terrify me and I should lead this life as a foreigner who gets ready to enter his native land. On the contrary, I do not even think about eternity, and I regard the end of this earthly life as the limit of my existence. The secret thought nestles within me: Who knows what happens at death? If I say I believe in immortality, then I am speaking about my mind only, and my heart is far removed from a firm conviction about it. That is openly witnessed to by my conduct and my constant care to satisfy the life of the senses. Were the Holy Gospel taken into my heart in faith, as the Word of God, I should be continually occupied with it, I should study it, find delight in it and with deep devotion fix my attention upon it. Wisdom, mercy, love, are hidden in it; it would lead me to happiness, I should find gladness in the study of the Law of God day and night. In it I should find nourishment like my daily bread and my heart would be drawn to the keeping of its laws. Nothing on earth would be strong enough to turn me away from it. On the contrary, if now and again I read or hear the Word of God, yet even so it is only from necessity or from a general love of knowledge, and approaching it without any very close attention, I find it dull and uninteresting. I usually come to the end of the reading without any profit, only too ready to change over to secular reading in which I take more pleasure and find new and interesting subjects.

4. I am full of pride and sensual self-love. All my actions confirm this. Seeing something good in myself, I want to bring it into view, or to pride myself upon it before other people or inwardly to admire myself for it. Although I display an outward humility, yet I ascribe it all to my own strength and regard myself as superior to others, or at least no worse than they. If I notice a fault in myself, I try to excuse it, I cover it up by saying, 'I am made like that' or 'I am not to blame'. I get angry with those who do not treat me with respect and consider them unable to appreciate the value of people. I brag about my gifts: my failures in any undertaking I regard as a personal insult. I murmur, and I find pleasure in the unhappiness of my enemies. If I strive after anything good it is for the purpose of winning praise, or spiritual self-indulgence, or earthly consolation. In a word, I continually make an idol of myself and render it uninterrupted service, seeking in all things the pleasures of the senses, and nourishment for my sensual passions and lusts.

Going over all this I see myself as proud, adulterous, unbelieving, without love to God and hating my neighbor. What state could be more sinful? The condition of the spirits of darkness is better than mine. They, although they do not love God, hate men, and live upon pride, yet at least believe and tremble. But I? Can there be a doom more terrible

than that which faces me, and what sentence of punishment will be more severe than that upon the careless and foolish life. that I recognize in myself?

From "The Way of a Pilgrim" ("Otkrovennye rasskazy strannika dukhovnomu svoemu Otcu")

# ABOUT CONFESSION

## What Is Necessary for a Saving Confession?

by Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow

What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance.

But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect - what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Isn't that so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us.

To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins, which have stolen into your heart.

To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession.

But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or

recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of?

When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance: Before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return.

Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: "As I live, saith the Lord," i. e., I assure and swear by My life, "In desiring I do not desire", i.e., I do not at all desire, "the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion."

It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? And who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him.

And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him - the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really acceptable? A broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations!

It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive.

And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great - truly great, both before God and before man. Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but it is necessary to forgive, otherwise

God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you yours.

On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned, if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain, for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you, in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say, "Forgive me." Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, "For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?" Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins - then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, "I forgive and absolve," the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!

From *Orthodox Life*, vol. 38, no. 4 (July-August, 1988), pp. 20-22.

## **A Catechism on Confession**

When preparing to go to confession, every Orthodox Christian should try to remember all the sins that he has committed, whether voluntary or involuntary, and should examine his life in detail. If there are sins that were committed before his last confession, but which he then forgot to confess, he should mention these also.

When you come to confession, you should confess your sins sincerely, remembering that you are not confessing them to the priest, but to God Himself, Who already knows, but wants you to admit your wrongs and your guilt. You should not feel embarrassed before your spiritual father, because, being a man like yourself, he knows human weaknesses and the inclination that all people have towards sin, and thus he cannot judge you harshly when you come to confession. But maybe you are embarrassed to confess your sins before your spiritual father because you are afraid of losing his good opinion? On the contrary, if you value his good opinion, you should understand that he will respect you all the more for the sincerity of your confession. Also, if you are ashamed and afraid to lay bare your sins before your spiritual father, how will you bear it when at the Dread Judgment your sins—if you have not been freed of them by true repentance—will be revealed before God Himself, His angels, and all mankind, both people you know and strangers? If you remember this, you will want to free yourself from your sins and from the punishment that they bring upon you, and will confess them in all sincerity before your spiritual father. You should hide nothing wrong that you have done, but at the same time you should not add anything extra, and not blame yourself for what you have not done by simply saying, “Everything I have done is sinful,” or some such catch-phrase. Nor should you admit every sin you are asked about whether you have done it or not, as some people mistakenly think they should. Your confession must be realistic and therefore true.

Another reason why you should not simply say, “I have sinned in everything, word, deed, and thought, and by omission,” without giving further details, is because your spiritual father needs to know exactly what you have done in order to give you good advice. Also such a short, undetailed confession means that you are avoiding what confession is intended to achieve, i. e. to bring you to admit what you have done and to admit that you were wrong in doing it. Your spiritual father already knows that you are a sinner, for no man is without sin; even the holy Apostle Paul described himself as the “chief of sinners.” Each sin must be mentioned in turn, just as you would enumerate all your symptoms to a doctor. You should not just think of a couple of main trends to “discuss,” and neglect to mention the innumerable other sins.

Do not mention the sins of others in your confession, unless this is necessary for your spiritual father to understand how and why you yourself have sinned. If you have a personal problem involving other people, which you would like to discuss with your spiritual father, or if you are in need of advice or some consolation for some unkindness that has been done to you, make an appointment to see your spiritual father at some other time. Also, do not use the fact that many people commit some sin that you have committed as an excuse for it. Still less say “but everyone does that.” For one thing, you

have come to confess your own sins, not those of others. How can you be sure that without exception every human being commits any given sin? Or even though you might know of their sin, how can you be sure they have not repented of it in their heart? Pay no heed to the sins of others. Oftentimes we imagine the motives and intentions and sinful inclinations of others, for no man knows the heart of another.

Confess your sins fully but concisely; one does not have to make a story of them! That in itself can be an evidence of pride. Particularly regarding carnal sins, do not go into detailed descriptions of sin. If your spiritual father feels that you need to confess any particular sin in fuller detail, he will ask you about it, and then you should not hesitate to describe it fully and to answer all his questions.

Before going to confession make a thorough preparation, and examine your life so that you recognize your sins. If you wish you can write out a list, or keep a list day by day. In order to check your sins, it is wise to check them against some list. One can use the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or the list of sins in the prayer of daily confession of sins read before going to sleep each day, or that in the prayer at the end of the Canon to the Guardian Angel in the Prayer Book. Such checking against a list is very beneficial, otherwise one tends to remember only the most serious sins, or the most noticeable or most extraordinarily, and to forget, perhaps deliberately, the underlying ones, the ones that have become habitual, and the things that we have forgotten even to remember as sins because they have become so much a part of our life. Sins of neglect, omission, and laziness often fall into this category, as do the ones that are seemingly respectable: pride, vanity, etc.

Do not try to make excuses for your sins, for the more that you justify yourself, the less forgiveness you will receive. It is important that you yourself should fully realize how wrong each sin you have committed is—and the more you understand the wrongfulness of any sin, the easier it will be for you to make an effort of will to avoid committing it in the future. However, you may mention if there is any special circumstance, such as some particular temptation or outside pressure, that it would be useful for your spiritual father to know, so that he can advise you how to deal with it.

It is important not to overlook any sin, but to mention all the sins that you have committed.

If you are asked whether you have committed a particular sin, it is not good enough to reply, “I can’t remember.” This is, of course, much less likely to happen if you go to confession regularly. It is good at the end of your confession to admit that there may be other sins which you have forgotten or have not realized that you have committed—such a sin might be by a careless word or action which has upset someone and perhaps caused them to sin.

Unless your spiritual father asks you about them, do not mention sins that you have not committed, nor good deeds that you have done. If you are asked whether you have committed some sin and have not, simply say “No.” Do not say, “I have committed no

serious sins,” because this means that you do not realize how sinful what you have done is, and how sinful your insensitivity is.

Also do not be insensitive to the feelings and weaknesses of others, including your spiritual father. If you have not confessed for some time, or have some particular difficulty and are likely to need a long confession, try not to come on the eve of a great feast or when there will be many other people going to confession, but come on a day when there are likely to be few, or make a special arrangement with the priest. Also, unless it is otherwise completely impossible (because, for instance, you live far from the church), do not come for confession either immediately before the Divine Liturgy (when the priest will be preparing the gifts) or during the service, when you will cause the entire congregation to wait while your confession is heard.

If after your confession you are hoping to receive a blessing to partake of the Holy Mysteries, it is best to come for the confession after the evening service on the previous night.

You must be truly sorry for the sins you have committed. Unless you really regret having done them, and intend to try to avoid them in the future, you lack true penitence, without which your sins are not forgiven.

It is also necessary to confess with faith in Jesus Christ and to trust in His mercy. Only if we believe and trust in Jesus Christ can we receive remission of our sins. Judas Iscariot, for example, repented of his sin, not before one man, but before all, and he returned the pieces of silver. But instead of believing in Jesus Christ and trusting in His mercy, he fell into despair and, receiving no remission, he died a terrible death. Thus, in addition to careful confession and true repentance, faith and hope are essential for the salvation of a sinner.

### **Penances — Their Nature and Purpose**

Penance is a form of discipline or a prohibition administered by the priest (in accordance with the canons or laws of the Church) to those repentant Christians for whom it is necessary, much as a doctor prescribes a suitable medicine or treatment. It is a form of treatment for a moral sickness. Examples of penances are: fasting over and above what is required of all Orthodox Christians, special prayers of repentance with prostrations, reading books which will help in overcoming one’s weakness, and the performance of good works.

Penances are not given to all who come to confession, but only to those who, by the nature or seriousness of their sins, require this special medicine. An example of this is St. Paul’s excommunication of a Christian of the Church of Corinth for incest; then, because of his penitence, he received him back into the Church (11 Cor. 2:6-8).

Although penance would seem to be a punishment, its purpose is not to make retribution for sins, to pay back a debt, but is rather corrective, medicinal, and instructive—to cure

the sinner from his sinful habits, to instruct him regarding both the harmful nature of what he has been doing, and ways to change his life, so that he shall not repeat his sin. Penance is intended to deepen and increase the penitent's regret for what he has done, and to strengthen the desire of his will for correction. The Apostle says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of" (II Cor. 7:10). This is upheld by the canons of the Ecumenical Councils and the teaching of the Fathers, who describe penance as a means of spiritual treatment to cure the diseases of the soul. The 102nd canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council says: "The character of a sin must be considered from all points and conversion expected. And so let mercy be meted out."

### **Moral Guidance or "The Opening of One's Thoughts"**

It is necessary to distinguish between the mystery of confession itself, and the moral guidance of a spiritual father in "the opening of thoughts" which is still used, especially in some monastic communities, but is something quite different from confession. The telling of one's thoughts and actions before a spiritual elder, from whom one seeks moral guidance, has a vast psychological significance. It is very useful for moral training, the correction of bad inclinations and habits, and the overcoming of doubts and indecisiveness. In some monasteries this is practiced daily, but it is not a course to be entered upon lightly. Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov says, "An indispensable condition of such submission is a Spirit-bearing guide, who by the will of the Spirit can mortify the fallen will of the person subject to him in the Lord, and can mortify all the passions as well." And he issues dire warnings about heeding "Elders" falsely so-called. Nonetheless, some writers (notably Prof. Andreyev) suggest that some form of "opening of the thoughts" can form part of Christian family life, so that husband and wife open their thoughts to each other each day. Of course such a practice is far removed from the spiritual discipline of Eldership of which Bishop Ignatius writes. Either way, this type of spiritual guidance, although very beneficial when rightly ordered, does not have the significance of a mystery or grace-bearing Church rite like confession, which is why confession itself, the sacrament of penitence, can take place only before a priest.

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## **The relationship between Confession and Communion**

In the various topics of confession, there have been some questions that, I think, exhibit a (common) misunderstanding of the relationship between mysteries of Holy Confession and Holy Communion. There often seems to be a predominant idea that the link between these two is somehow a legal concrete thing - that there must be a 1:1 correspondence or some specific ratio and that any deviation from that ratio constitutes an abrogation of tradition or requires some kind of formal "dispensation". But this is not the relationship that really exists. While it is true that there is often a functional relationship that appears as though a formal ration exists, this is actually a coincidental observation. These two mysteries, actually form part of a larger whole of the spiritual life and both form a closely connected but not dependant link in producing a spiritual life. There are of course other components such as fasting, prayer, self denial, obedience, righteous deeds, etc. to living a spiritual life which are also a part of this picture, but in this case I wish to confine myself only to the issue at hand - confession and communion.

These two mysteries are not part of the same process, but rather are themselves parallel and often intertwined (interdependent is a good "social worker" word) processes. Holy Communion is not dependent on Holy Confession, nor is Holy Confession dependent upon Holy Communion. Each is independent but at the same time they work together toward the same goal. Just as a physician might see you and diagnose an illness and then prescribe therapy that includes many components, (for example medication, diet, physical therapy & counseling) which all are targeted toward the goal of recovery so also the spiritual condition might be diagnosed in confession, and various spiritual remedies prescribed by the confessor. And one of those spiritual remedies may be to refrain from receiving Holy Communion for a time (just as a physician might temporarily restrict your diet for a particular purpose) or perhaps the remedy prescribed might be to receive Holy Communion (like taking medication - or to stay with the diet analogy, to eat the proper nutritional foods). The frequency that one goes to the Dr is determined by the severity and course of the illness and the various restrictions on the diet are governed again by the patients condition and improvement. So also the "ratio" of confession to communion is determined by the spiritual physician (your confessor) and corresponds to the severity of your spiritual condition, your relative spiritual health, your particular spiritual needs, etc. There are times when you cannot receive Holy Communion (such as a period of epitimia - penance - following a divorce for example) but when you should receive the mystery of Holy Confession regularly. OTOH, there may be times when the priest may permit one to receive Holy Communion weekly but only require confession on a biweekly basis. And just because you develop a particular rhythm at one time doesn't mean that it is constant - just as your frequency of seeking medical help is not constant.

Holy Confession in and of itself is not a prerequisite to Holy Communion. To take this position is to subordinate the one mystery to the other and so lessen its importance. Rather both mysteries are necessary and often they are combined for the health of the soul. The "prerequisite" for Holy Communion is not a completely pure soul, but rather one that is "healthy" and prepared. And most frequently the way to guarantee that state is through receiving the mystery of Holy Confession.

Now on a practical note, there is the question of how to "stay" sinless from confession on Saturday evening until communion on Sunday morning. If you structure your Saturday evening such that all overt sources of temptation are removed (TV, movies, games, parties, etc.) and are replaced with spiritually beneficial activities (participation in vigil; the service of preparation, including canons and akathists; spiritual reading; prayer; psalmody; spiritual conversation; etc.) then you will have gone a long ways toward avoiding sin. This is all very simple to do - except for the fact that one must deny oneself to accomplish all this. In the "wisdom" of the world, Saturday night is a night of parties and entertainment and leisure and mindless activity. It is hard to rule out all these things and concentrate only on the fact that you will be receiving in yourself He Who is an all consuming purifying fire, He Who is the Creator of All, He Who is Uncontainable; you are about to encounter God face to face. Read carefully the prayers and hymns that are appointed to be said in preparation and choose those images (they are many) which create in your soul the most beneficial effects. Use those images (verbal icons) as a framework to which you conform your mind and thoughts. If this is your Saturday night activity, then you will be able to keep yourself far from sin.

From a Post to an Orthodox mailing list, dated Fri, 8 Nov 1996 by Priest David Moser  
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## **LESSONS FROM THE FATHERS - On Confession of One's Sins**

Repentance consists in no longer doing the same thing henceforth, while he who takes up his former (bad) deeds, according to the proverb, cards wool over a fire and draws water with a sieve.

*Hierarch John Chrysostom*

Whoever has escaped from a prison will not wish to see it another time. Whoever has been delivered from captivity prays that he will never fall into captivity (that is, repentance consists in not returning to one's former sins).

*Venerable Ephraim the Syrian*

Whoever offers repentance ought not only to wash his sin with tears, but ought to cover his former transgressions with better deeds, lest the sin be imputed to him.

*Hierarch Ambrose of Milan*

If the inclination for them (sins) has also been extirpated from our hearts, this serves as proof that they are forgiven us.

*Venerable John Cassian*

Reveal not thy thoughts to everyone, but only to them that can save thy soul.

*Venerable Anthony the Great*

Reveal not thy conscience to him to whom thy heart is not well disposed.

*Venerable Pimen the Great*

Thou art ashamed and blushest when it is necessary to tell thy sins (to a priest at confession). It is better to be ashamed to sin than to confess. Consider: If confession is not offered here, then everything will be confessed there before the whole world. Where is there more torment? Where is there more shame? In doing the deed, we are bold and shameless, but when we ought to confess, then we are ashamed and slow.

*Venerable Ephraim the Syrian*

If thou wantest God to grant thee tears of contrition and dispassion, unceasingly bring to mind thy grave.

*Venerable Ephraim the Syrian*

Do not be ashamed to reveal your scabs to your spiritual director. Be prepared as well to accept from him disgrace for your sins, so that by being disgraced, you might avoid eternal shame.

Counsels of Venerable St. Hilarion (Ponomarev) of Optina

Do not go into detail in confessing carnal acts, lest you become a traitor to yourself.

St. John Climacus, "The Ladder of Divine Ascent," Step 28: On Holy and Blessed Prayer, the Mother of Virtues, and on the Attitude of Mind and Body in Prayer

During the time of one's confession not only the person who makes his confession is judged, but the confessor as well. In the past, confessors were practical. They did not judge on the basis of the seriousness of a transgression, but rather on the intent. They did not concentrate so much on the sins being confessed as on thinking of how to treat the repentant person's soul.

An Athonite Gerontikon by Archimandrite Ioannikios (Kotsonis)

If you want cure your soul, you need four things. The first is to forgive your enemies. The second is to confess thoroughly. The third is to blame yourself. The fourth is to resolve to sin no more. If we wish to be saved, we must always blame ourselves and not attribute our wrong acts to others. And God, Who is most compassionate, will forgive us.

Modern Orthodox Saints I, St. Cosmas Aitolos). Dr. Constantine Cavarnos., INSTITUTE FOR BYZANTINE AND MODERN GREEK STUDIES., Belmont, Massachusetts., pp.81-94

Let us not wait to be convicted by others, let us be our own examiners. An important medicine for evil is confession, and care to avoid stumbling.

St. Gregory Nazianzen (On His Father's Silence no. 17)

Let us then not be ashamed to confess our sins unto the Lord. Shame indeed there is when each makes known his sins, but that shame, as it were, ploughs his land, removed the ever-recurring brambles, prunes the thorns, and gives life to the fruits which he believed were dead. Follow him who, by diligently ploughing his field, sought for eternal fruit: "being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure, being defamed we entreat, we are made as the offscouring of the world." If you plough after this fashion you will sow spiritual seed. Plough that you may get rid of sin and gain fruit. He ploughed so as to destroy in himself the last tendency to persecution. What more could Christ give to lead us on to the pursuit of perfection, than to convert and then give us for a teacher one who was a persecutor?

St. Ambrose of Milan, Concerning Repentance

Our sins are forgiven us at each confession, but we must remember that there is the

"Great Forgiveness," which consists in this, that by God's mercy, we unconsciously stop committing certain specific sins, such as sinful acts, words, deeds and thoughts, but at the same time we continue to feel and be aware of our profound sinfulness. The most perfect man is the one who, precisely as he is a man, sincerely feels that he is a great sinner. An example of this was St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Metropolitan Vitaly, Paschal Encyclical, 2001 (<http://www.orthodox.net/pascha/2001-pascha-vitaly.html>)

The proof of authenticity of the spiritual condition of a father confessor is, that while he is very strict with himself, he is very lenient with others and does not use the canons of the Church like cannons against them.

Elder Paisius of the Holy Mountain (+July 12, 1994)

Two factors are involved in man's salvation: the grace of God and the will of man. Both must work together, if salvation is to be attained.

Repentance is a Mysterion through which he who repents for his sins confesses before a Spiritual Father who has been appointed by the Church and has received the authority to forgive sins, and receives from this Spiritual Father the remission of his sins and is reconciled with the Deity, against Whom he sinned.

Repentance signifies regret, change of mind. The distinguishing marks of repentance are contrition, tears, aversion towards sin, and love of the good.

"Modern Orthodox Saints, St. Nectarios of Aegina", Dr. Constantine Cavarnos, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts., 1981., pp. 154-187

When you go to your spiritual father for confession, do not bring yourself as an accuser of other people, saying, "he said this," and "so-and-so said that" . . . but speak about your own doings, so that you may obtain forgiveness.

Elder Daniel of Kantounakia

You are, I am sure, aware that for you penitence is now no longer limited to disclosing your sins to your confessor, but that you must now bear your sins in mind always, until your heart nearly breaks with their ugly load; and would break, were it not for your firm faith in the mercy of our Lord."

St. Makary of Optina

My child, do you want to crush the head of the serpent? Openly reveal your thoughts in

confession. The strength of the devil lies in cunning thoughts. Do you hold on to them? He remains hidden. Do you bring them to the light? He disappears. And then Christ rejoices the prayer progresses, and the light of grace heals and brings peace to your nous and heart.

Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast

It is necessary and beneficial for a general self-examination to take place from time to time, remembering all former sins.

Elder Amphilochios Makris - <http://agrino.org/cyberdesert/makris.htm>

153. If you wish to make a blameless confession to God do not go over your failings in detail, but firmly resist their renewed attacks.

Saint Kosmas Aitolos +1779



