

Guide to a Good Confession

INTRODUCTION

A priest sits in the confessional of a church on the Via Sardegna in Rome. A mixed group of people form a line outside the confessional. There is always a line. The penitents enter the confessional, each in their turn, telling all their sins to the priest. Regardless of the sins confessed, the priest responds to each one in the same way, saying in a soft, lilting Irish accent: "God love you for that sincere and humble Confession. We place all of our faults and failings at the feet of the merciful Jesus. For your penance pray three Hail Marys. Now make your Act of Contrition, 'O my God...'"

There are those who might think that it is worth a trip to Rome just to be able to make their Confession to such a priest. No matter what they confessed, they would hear: "God love you for that sincere and humble Confession..." No wonder there is always a line outside his confessional! The only people who would be afraid or nervous standing in that line are those who are there for the first time.

Some might fault this priest for giving a stock response to each sinner's list of sins. However, his response does teach some important lessons about Confession, for example: God's love for man is not affected by his sins; God looks for the sorrowful heart and not so much at what sins were committed; God's mercy is greater than any and all of a person's sins; because of God's mercy, sin is not punished as much as justice would require; and, the priest is there to help and heal the sinner.

With these truths in mind, why would anyone stay away from Confession? Some of the more common reasons people give are: The priest will just yell at me if I tell him my sins or how long it's been since my last Confession; I don't need to confess my sins to a priest; I can't think of any sins to confess; I don't remember how to make a Confession; and, I'll make a Confession some other time. The real reasons, though, are hidden behind these, such as fear, embarrassment, confusion, and indifference. More than likely, such people do not understand God's love for them, and how ugly sin is an account of that love. Perhaps they do not know that all sin is punished. Maybe they do not know the feeling of peace that comes with confessing their sins to a priest and receiving forgiveness. Because if they understood, they might even try to take cuts in the line to the confessional!

The Little Catechism on Confession is an attempt to respond to the most common objections and obstacles to the sacrament of Confession. It is offered to help people grow in their appreciation of the sacrament of Confession, and in their practice of it. Included in this booklet is an explanation of the sacrament of Confession, related passages from the Bible, prayers to express sorrow for sin, suggestions for penance to make up for sin, an examination of conscience, and an outline of how to actually make a Confession.

DOES GOD LOVE ME?

St. Catherine of Siena knew that she was a sinner, as are all human beings, offending God with their pride and selfishness. She correctly believed that God knows everything past, present and future. Putting these two truths together, she asked God why He would even create human beings, knowing that they would offend Him in sin? The answer she received was that God acted as if He did not see the sinfulness of mankind: "Even though You saw that we would offend

You, Your charity would not let You set Your eyes on that sight. No, You took Your eyes off the sin that was to be and fixed Your gaze only on Your creature's beauty. For if You had concentrated on the sin, You would have forgotten the love You had for creating mankind. Not that sin was hid from You, but You concentrated on the love because You are nothing but a fire of love, crazy over what You have made." (Prayer XIII)

There is something about human beings in and of themselves that is attractive to God, so much so that it distracts His attention from the horror of the sins that they commit against Him. The beauty of human beings overshadows the ugliest and most numerous of their sins. That beauty inspires love in God for human beings, indeed, for the very idea of them. And nothing can alter the fact of God's love for them, nothing can make it grow less, not even sin. God cannot NOT love mankind.

What else could explain why God, knowing that mankind would sin against Him, would create them in His own Image and likeness, except that He fell in love with the very idea of them? What else but love could explain God becoming a man with flesh and blood just so that His flesh could be nailed to a Cross and His blood be poured out to make up for the punishment due to the sins of mankind? Love alone can explain the Holy Spirit coming to sinful man to give the gift of Sanctifying Grace through the sacraments. Only love explains why God keeps mankind in existence by constantly thinking of them, or why He provides for all their needs, or why He shows them mercy again and again, or why He is patient with an eye to their salvation.

God's love defies all human logic and reason. At least that is how St. Catherine of Siena describes God's love: "O unutterable love, even though You saw all the evils that all Your creatures would commit against Your infinite goodness, You acted as if You did not see and set Your eye only on the beauty of Your creature, with whom You had fallen in love like one drunk and crazy with love." (Prayer XIII)

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND SIN?

The beauty of a human being overshadows the ugliest and most numerous of sins, and that beauty inspired God's love for man. Nevertheless, do not underestimate the horror of sin. In fact, it is ugly most especially an account of God's love for man. What a poor return for so rich a love! Some people ask, if God is all-powerful and all-loving (and He is), why would He allow people to offend Him with sin or to hurt other people? Why doesn't God just stop them before they sin? The answer has to do with freedom and love.

Moved by love, God created man to love: to love God first and most, to love his neighbor, and to love himself. In order to love something or someone, a person needs an intellect and the free will to choose. The intellect is man's ability to know what is worthy of love. The intellect tells the free will what to love and the will then reaches out to possess the thing. God could have programmed human beings like robots to love what He loves and as He loves, but that would not be love. Love can only be love if it is freely given.

Free will means that it is always possible for a person to choose among at least two things, like good and evil, or the truth and a lie. God does not want people to choose evil, He did not create them for that, but that is one of the consequences of freedom. The free will choice to desire, say, or do something that God considers evil or false is the misuse of freedom. That is called sin: disobedience to God.

The Original Sin

The first people to sin were Adam and Eve, the parents of all human beings. Their sin is called the "original sin" because it was the first. Adam and Eve were created as friends with God, sharing His life. God allowed Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from every tree in the garden of Paradise, except the fruit that came from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2:17) Their freedom was not absolute. The forbidden fruit represents the limits that God places on man's freedom. Obedience to God's will is the greatest expression of man's love for God.

In order to test their love, God permitted Adam and Eve to be tempted. He allowed the devil to try to talk them into eating the fruit from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The devil told Adam and Eve that nothing would happen to them if they ate the fruit, that the reason God did not want them to eat it was that they would become like Him. Adam and Eve believed the devil's lie that they could be like God without having to be obedient to Him. They were no longer content with friendship with God on His terms, and so they freely chose to sin. One might ask: Why would Adam and Eve do that? It is a mystery why they would trade friendship with God for independence from God, but then it is also a mystery why their descendants, present day sinners, continue to do the same.

Sin is Punished

One consequence of free will is that people are responsible for their choices. The more freedom people have in making choices, the more they are responsible for their choices. People must take personal responsibility for their choices, either receiving praise or blame, reward or punishment. Even though Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil, they were free to say "no" to his seduction. They freely chose to disobey God, and so in justice they would have to accept the blame and the punishment.

Adam and Eve's new found independence from God was a poor trade for what they lost as punishment for their sin. They lost everything: the body rebelled from the soul; the relationship between man and woman became strained; work became difficult; suffering became a companion to life on earth; and, as God warned, life ends in death. The worst punishment of all was that Adam and Eve lost the gift of Sanctifying Grace. God's punishment of sin is just, but it is also merciful. Moved by love, God never punishes sinners as much as their sins deserve.

The Loss of Sanctifying Grace

At first glance it would appear that losing the gift of Sanctifying Grace was no big deal compared to everything else Adam and Eve lost as punishment for their sin. However, Sanctifying Grace is everything! God designed human life so that man cannot be what he is meant to be without Sanctifying Grace. God created human beings to share in His divine life, to be His children, and to live with Him forever in Paradise - Sanctifying Grace alone makes this possible.

Man can only have Sanctifying Grace when he lives his life in the obedience of faith according to God's laws. When man sins it is as if he says to God: "I don't need You; I will not submit to You; I can make it my own!" Nothing could be further from the truth. If as punishment for sin man can only eat his bread by the sweat of his brow, how much more frustrating is it for man to strive for the goal of eternal life without Sanctifying Grace, and never be able to achieve it? This is the source of man's greatest suffering!

The Hope of Salvation

Even though Adam and Eve's relationship with God was strained, He did not stop loving and caring for them. The Bible tells how God Himself made clothes for them and protected them from doing further harm to themselves (Genesis 3:21-24). God also gave them hope that the debt of punishment owed for their sins would one day be pardoned. God gave them hope for salvation. From the beginning of human history, God promised to send a Savior who would have final victory over sin and death: "I will put enmity between you (the devil) and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15) Mankind needs a Savior, and Jesus is the One who crushes the head of the serpent, pardoning the debt of punishment owed for sin, and making Sanctifying Grace and Heaven available to man once again.

Sin is an offense against the infinitely good God who is deserving of love, and so, in justice, sin deserves infinite punishment. Human beings, because they are finite, could never make up for the punishment their sins deserve. Only God, who alone is infinite, could suffer the punishment for sin, but God as God cannot suffer. So, moved by love, God became man so that in His human nature He could suffer the punishment for sin and reconcile man to Himself. That is what Jesus taught Nicodemus when He said: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) It would be like a victim of a violent crime saying to the condemned criminal: "I will take your place in the electric chair to pay for the crime that you committed against me." That is what Jesus did for each person.

St. Paul describes Jesus as the "second Adam" who made up for what the "first Adam" did: "God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us...as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." (Romans 5: 12, 18) Mankind is reconciled to God by believing that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world, and by being baptized. The waters of Baptism wash away original sin and give the person the gift of Sanctifying Grace.

It was not only Adam and Eve who needed a Savior, but all human beings. Just as the original blessings Adam and Eve received from God were intended not only for themselves, but for human nature itself, so their fallen human nature is transmitted to all their descendants (except to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, was preserved free from all stain of original sin from the first instant of her conception). Like a child that is born with a congenital disease, every human being born since the fall of Adam and Eve is afflicted with ignorance, suffering, death, and with an inclination to sin called "concupiscence." They are also born without the gift of Sanctifying Grace, with the gates of Heaven closed to them. It is not that a newborn child is guilty of personal sin. Rather, the child is born into a state of sin with a fallen human nature.

Personal Sin

Baptism takes away original sin and gives Sanctifying Grace, but otherwise fallen human nature remains the same. The baptized person is no longer a "slave to sin" but is inclined to the selfishness of sin because of concupiscence. Therefore, Christians must "work out (their) own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) by cooperating with God's Grace to avoid sin and practice virtue.

The sins that the baptized person commits are called personal or actual sins: unlike original sin, the human person actually commits the sin. All sins are a misuse of freedom, but there are different kinds of sin, depending on what is actually done, how much deliberation or thought goes into it, and how free the person is to choose. They also differ, then, by the punishment they deserve. The two main kinds of actual sins are called mortal sin and venial sin.

Venial Sin

A sin is called venial, from the Latin meaning pardonable, when either what was done is not serious, or if it was serious, there wasn't full knowledge or complete consent of the will. A person does not lose the gift of Sanctifying Grace by committing a venial sin. However, he does receive a temporal punishment which is made up for during life on earth by doing penance, works of charity and by saying prayers, or else after a person's death by the sufferings of Purgatory. One who is guilty of venial sin also finds it more and more difficult to practice virtue and to resist the temptation to commit mortal sins, which do deprive a person of Heaven.

Mortal Sin

A sin is called mortal, meaning deadly (see 1 John 5:16-17), when what was done is serious, and when it was done with both full knowledge and complete consent of the will. The Catholic Church alone has the authority to determine what kinds of desires, words and actions are serious in and of themselves. The Catechism teaches that the Ten Commandments name what is seriously wrong. (CCC 1858) Why a person does something (his motive), and circumstances like who is offended, or where, or when, or how, can make a sin more or less serious, but it can never make something which is sinful acceptable. One may not do evil, not even a venial sin, in order to bring about something that seems good: the end does not justify the means.

It is possible for a person to desire, to say or to do something that is sinful in and of itself, but not know that it is sinful. God does not hold a person responsible for something he did not know was wrong. However, God does hold all people responsible to learn what is good to do, and then to do it. It is also possible for a person's ability to act with complete consent of the will to be lessened or even destroyed by things like force, fear, or habit. But that same person is responsible to, for example, break the habit that affects his freedom.

A person is guilty of mortal sin when he desired, said or did something that was seriously wrong, knowing that it was a sin, freely choosing to do it anyway. This sin is called mortal because it is punished with the "death" of the life of Sanctifying Grace in the soul of the sinner. Without Sanctifying Grace a person cannot gain any merit for the good things he might do, nor may he receive Holy Communion without first going to Confession. (see 1 Corinthians 11:28) Worst of all, if he dies without repenting of his mortal sin and asking God for forgiveness, he will be judged worthy of eternal damnation in Hell. Be careful here, for while it is possible to say whether or not a desire, word or action is mortally sinful, only God can judge whether or to what extent a person is guilty of mortal sin.

That is because only God can judge a person's mind and heart to know whether or not he acted with full knowledge and complete consent of the will.

Other Kinds of Sin

Besides these two very familiar kinds of actual sins, there are a few others. Jesus refers to the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. (Mark 3:29) This is understood as a refusal to repent of one's sins, or a rejection of the forgiveness of sins and salvation offered by the Holy Spirit. God respects our freedom, and so will not dwell in a soul where He is not invited or where He is not made welcome.

The Bible also mentions sins that cry out to heaven for vengeance: Brother killing Brother (Genesis 4:10); sodomy (Genesis 19:13); Oppression of a foreigner, a widow, or an orphan (Exodus 22:20-22); and, injustice to laborers (James 5:4).

Some sins are called capital sins because they lead people to commit other sins. There are seven capital sins: pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth. For example, the capital sin of envy led King Saul to hate David, and to be sad at his success in war and his fame with the people. Saul hated David and tried to kill him. (1 Kings 18: 6-9)

Lastly, a vice is a sinful habit that is developed over time by repeating a sin. The first time a sin is committed it is difficult because of the natural fear and shame that people have. However, each time the sin is repeated it weakens resistance until it can be done with ease and without much attention. Vice is gradually overcome by practicing virtue, which is the habit of doing good.

WHY DID JESUS START THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION?

It is said that if someone believes that God is distant, it is not God who moved. God never stops loving His creation, especially human beings made in His image and likeness. Moved by love, He always provides men and women with all good things. And when they sin and turn away from God, He does not abandon them. Like the Good Shepherd, God goes in search of sinners to call them to conversion. (see Luke 15:4-7) As man can do nothing to save Himself, God always makes the Grace of conversion available to all people. But Grace is not magic; it bears no fruit without a person's free and deliberate cooperation to repent, confess his sins, and try to change his life.

The first conversion of a sinner to God occurs when he comes to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world, and is baptized. Every time a sinner commits a sin after Baptism, he must repent, be sorry for his sins, confess them to a priest (if they are mortal sins), and try to change his life again, and again, and again, as many times as necessary. St. Catherine of Siena refers to the sacrament of Confession as "an on-going Baptism" where sinners are washed clean again in the Blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. (Dialogue, chapter 75) Christians are always in need of repentance and conversion as long as they live.

Because God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11), Jesus established the sacrament of Confession so that sinners in every time and place could repent, confess their sins, and try to change their lives.

Only God can forgive sins. The Lord Jesus, because He is God, could therefore say to the man who was paralyzed: "My son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5) Jesus also has the authority, as God, to grant others the power to forgive sins. On Easter night, Jesus appeared to the Apostles, "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 20:22-23) And because sin

offends not only God, but also the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, Jesus gave Peter and the Apostles the authority to reconcile sinners to the Church when He said: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 16:19; 18:18)

Only God forgives sins, but He does it "through the ministry of the Church." The Lord Jesus gave the Apostles and their successors, the Bishops of the Catholic Church, and the priests who work with the Bishops, the power to forgive sins in His name. When a priest absolves a person of his sins, he is not merely announcing the Good News of God's forgiveness, or that God has forgiven his sins. The sinner receives pardon from God through the ministry of the Church, that is, through the absolution given by the priest in Confession. As the Church is also offended by sin, that same prayer of absolution reconciles the sinner with the Church.

There are some people who shy away from going to Confession because they have had the experience of a priest being angry and yelling at them. It is difficult to excuse such behavior in a priest: maybe he was having a bad day, or was bothered by something totally unrelated. Nevertheless, a priest in Confession must try to remember that he has received "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5: 18), and is to be like the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep, or the Good Samaritan who binds up wounds, or the Father who awaits the prodigal son and welcomes him on his return. The penitent, on the other hand, should try to forgive the human failings of the priest. He should also remember that, regardless of what kind of confessor the priest is, it is Jesus Christ that the penitent meets in the sacrament of Confession, and that the forgiveness of sins is not dependent on the goodness of the priest.

HOW DO I MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION?

The one making a Confession is called the penitent. With trust in God's love and mercy, the penitent prepares to seek forgiveness and reconciliation by doing the following: examining his conscience to know what sins to confess; expressing sorrow for his sins; resolving never to sin again; making a Confession of his sins to a priest; and, doing the penance assigned to him by the priest in Confession.

Examination of Conscience

One excuse people give for not going to Confession is that they cannot think of any sins to confess. The way people become aware of the sins they have committed is to examine their consciences. The conscience is a person's best judgement about whether or not a particular choice that he is going to make, or has already made, is good or bad.

A Catholic has a duty to teach his conscience what is good and bad according to what the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church say is good and bad. When his conscience is certain about a particular choice, he has a duty to follow his conscience. It is as if God is speaking to him through his conscience. That is why it is always a sin when a person goes against what his conscience tells him is a good choice, and why it is always a sin to go ahead and choose something when the conscience is not certain if it is good or bad.

When preparing for Confession, a person first prays to the Holy Spirit to help him know his sins. He then thinks about the period of time since he made his last Confession. He tries to remember all the times when he deliberately did something his conscience told him was bad, or did not do

something it told was good. The best way to examine one's conscience is to check it against the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church, and to ask, "would Jesus desire, say, or do that?" He then makes a mental list of all the mortal sins he has committed, and may also add any venial sins he remembers.

Practice makes perfect. The more frequently a person examines his conscience, the easier it is to do. It is essential to spiritual growth to examine one's conscience at the end of each day and ask God for forgiveness.

Sorrow for Sin

A person becomes a penitent when he remembers his sins, recognizes that he is guilty, and is sorry for his sins. Guilt must not be confused with shame, which is a bad feeling most people have when their sins or crimes become known to others. They feel shame because their pride is wounded, and not so much because of what they did. Guilt, on the other hand, is a feeling of sorrow for having committed a sin or crime. Guilt is not a "Catholic thing," nor is it bad thing. A feeling of guilt shows that a person's conscience is normal and healthy. It is most important for a person to be sorry for his sins because there is no forgiveness without sorrow. When asked about the eternal destiny of a man who had committed suicide by jumping off a bridge, St. John Vianney said: "Between the bridge and the river he repented and was forgiven."

To be sorry for committing sins means to hate them and to resolve never to sin again. All these things are expressed in the prayer called the Act of Contrition (another Word for sorrow). The prayer also expresses why the penitent is sorry: "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 art all-good and deserving of all my love."

The Resolve to Never Sin Again

There is no true sorrow without the resolution to never sin again. That is why the "Act of Contrition" ends with words, "I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy Grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life." This means that in the future the penitent must resolve to avoid any person, place or thing that might lead him into sin, and to say "no" to the devil's temptation. St. Catherine of Siena once said that "it is human to sin, but to persevere in sin is a thing of the devil." (Letter 173)

Some people argue that there is not much point in making a Confession and resolving never to sin again because, as weak as human beings are, they will sin again. The same argument could be used against bathing or washing clothes, yet people wash themselves and their clothes regularly. Why? Because they want to present themselves as best they can, and because they have self-respect. These are the same reasons why a person goes to Confession regularly, resolving to never sin again each time. The main reason is because of the warning the Lord Jesus gives: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) All a person can do is call on God for help and to keep trying to do good and avoid sin. That is all that God asks, an God who knows the thoughts of man, knows when there is an honest effort. (see Romans 2:15-16) Remember, when a person dies and appears before God to give an accounting of his life, God will not judge him according to his successes, but his efforts

Confession to a Priest

The penitent's next step, and perhaps the most difficult, is to tell his sins, especially his mortal sins to a priest in Confession. Some penitents stay away from the confessional, claiming that they don't need to tell their sins to a priest, that they can confess their sins directly to God. If the truth be known, they are probably a little embarrassed to admit their faults and failings to another person. They forget that Jesus Himself started the sacrament of Confession as the way for people guilty of mortal sin to receive forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jesus showed His wisdom in providing for the forgiveness of sins through a priest because sometimes people are not sure what to confess, or how to confess, or if they are sorry enough, or if they are really forgiven. The priest understands the penitent's concerns because he too is human, and therefore a sinner. The priest's role is to help the penitent make a good Confession, and to judge whether or not the penitent is truly guilty of sin and sorry. However, the priest also heals the one making his Confession, accepting his sorrow, pardoning his sin in the name of Christ, and reconciling him to God and the Church. Jesus also showed His wisdom by making the telling of sins to a priest an integral part of Confession. There is something healing about telling your faults to another person (see James 5:16).

The ordinary way of making a Confession is for the individual penitent to tell a priest all of his mortal sins in kind and number, that is, describing how he disobeyed God's commandments, as well as how many times, as far as he can remember. The kind and number of sins can change how serious the sin is in God's eyes. For example, if the penitent confesses using recreational drugs and giving them to others, he should explain which drugs, to whom they were given, how often they were used, and in what situations (for example, while driving a car). It is a mortal sin to deliberately omit confessing a mortal sin because that would be like lying to the Holy Spirit. Including venial sins in one's Confession is recommended, but not required.

Besides the ordinary way of making a Confession, the Church also allows for a group of people to have a "penance Service" that might include readings from Scripture, a homily, a communal examination of conscience, and a general expression of sorrow for sins (like the "I confess to almighty God..." used at Mass). But a penance Service cannot absolve people from mortal sins, therefore those in the group who are guilty of mortal sin still have to make an individual confession to a priest.

The Church even allows people to receive a general absolution - one priest absolving more than one person at the same time. However, this is only allowed under very strict and rare circumstances: when, because of danger of death, there is not enough time for the available priests to hear each penitent's Confession; or when there are not enough priests to hear individual Confessions properly without depriving penitents, through no fault of their own, of sacramental Grace or Holy Communion for a long time. In the second set of circumstances just listed, a priest may not give general absolution lawfully without the permission of the Bishop. In order for those who receive general absolution to benefit validly from it they must be properly disposed, make an Act of Contrition, and be resolved to make an individual Confession of their mortal sins to a priest as soon as it is possible.

How is it that penitents can so easily tell all their worst sins to a priest in Confession, and sometimes even face-to-face? Are they not afraid that he will tell others, or somehow use the information against them? Penitents feel secure in the knowledge that what they tell the priest in Confession is guarded by an absolute secrecy called "the seal of Confession." There are no

exceptions to this rule, and if the priest betrays the penitent by telling the secret or acting upon what he learned from Confession, not only is he guilty of mortal sin, but is automatically excommunicated from the Church. This is the most severe penalty because it is the greatest secret.

The Need to do Penance

Before the penitent receives forgiveness for his sins, the priest gives him a penance to do, such as saying prayers, or serving his neighbor in some way, or giving something up. If the penitent is not able to do the penance suggested by the priest, he can ask for another. The purpose of the penance is to keep the person from committing sin in the future (like a deterrent from crime), and to remind him of the seriousness of sin and how it offends God, neighbor and himself.

Another reason why the priest gives the penitent penance is to help him "make satisfaction" for his sins. Justice demands that sin is punished. Jesus His mercy makes up for, or makes satisfaction for eternal punishment due to sin by His suffering and death. It is by virtue of Christ's redemption that people today receive forgiveness and reconciliation for their sins. However, the Bible tells us that people still have to make up for the damage done for their sins even after they are forgiven. For example, Zaccheus told Jesus that whatever taxes he collected over what people owed, he would restore it four-fold. (Luke 19:1-10) Justice requires that the sinner himself do something (Colossians 1:24), and so he receives what is called "temporal" punishment for his sins, meaning it is not an eternal punishment and can be made up for in time.

The penitent's sins are forgiven even if he doesn't do his penance. However, if he doesn't do penance during this life, he will have to make up for the temporal punishment due his forgiven sins in Purgatory before he can enter Heaven. Because no one can know if the penance given in Confession is enough to make up for the damage done by sin, it is good to practice penance voluntarily or, if not during life an earth, it will have to be done in Purgatory.

St. Paul compares doing penance with the discipline and self-denial of an athlete in training, but a Christian does penance for the sake of the imperishable treasure of Heaven. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27) In addition to the days of fasting and abstinence in Lent, the Church asks her members to do penance every Friday in memory of the Passion and Death of the Lord Jesus, either by abstaining from meat or by doing some other penance, like performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Frequent Confession

The next step is to, as the saying goes, "just do it!" The Catholic Church requires that her members who have attained the "age of reason" (around age seven) make a Confession of their mortal sins at least once year. Someone who knows he has committed a mortal sin should go to Confession as soon as possible. Cut of from God's Grace one cannot receive Holy Communion, nor merit for the good things he does, and it is more difficult to resist future temptations without God's strength. Besides all that, why would anyone wait when "you know neither the day nor the hour" of death and judgement. (Matthew 25:13)

The obligation to make a good Confession once a year is like saying, "if you are a Catholic, you must at least do this much." However, more is better, especially since "this is the will of God, your sanctification." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) If a Person has not committed any mortal sins over the course of a year, he is not obliged to make a Confession, but it is still highly recommended.

In fact, it is a good spiritual practice to regularly make a Confession once a month, or even more frequently! Just look at some of the benefits of making a regular Confession: the certainty of having been forgiven; reconciliation with God and the Church; the gift of Sanctifying Grace is restored or strengthened; help to avoid sin in the future by the sacramental graces received; courage to lead a virtuous life; advice on how to amend one's life is offered by the priest; the opportunity to take inventory of one's life; the opportunity to grow in self-knowledge; and, the opportunity to unburden oneself of a guilty conscience and shame. "Just do it!"

CONCLUSION

Human beings have free will in order to choose to love what God loves and as God loves. True, they sometimes use that freedom to love selfishly, that is, to sin. However, they also use that freedom correctly, to love what God loves, as God loves. Maybe it is man's free choice to love that distracts God from the ugliness of sin. Maybe man's free choice to love is what God fixes His gaze upon. Maybe one free choice to love, even the smallest act of love, is so beautiful that it distracts God's attention from the greatest number or the ugliest of sins. God does notice man's sins, and He doesn't like them one bit, but they don't change the fact of His love the sinner. In fact, St. Paul says that this is proof of God's love: "But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

Maybe, just maybe, the free choice to love that distracted God from the ugliness of man's sins was the sinners' repentance and conversion. When a person examines his conscience, it is love of what God loves and as He loves that makes him aware that he is guilty of sin. Love makes a person a penitent and puts perfect sorrow for sin in his heart - "but most of all because (my sins) offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love." The resolution never to sin again, and every little effort to do good and avoid evil, is a free will choice to love. St. John the Apostle says that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18), giving the penitent confidence to confess his sins to a priest in Confession in order to receive forgiveness and reconciliation. And what would a person not do to make up for hurting someone he loves, especially if the beloved is God?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

What follows is an examination of conscience based on the Ten Commandments and the Precepts the Church. When preparing to make a Confession, person should first pray to the Holy Spirit for help to know his sins. Then, reviewing the period of time since his last Confession, he should ask himself questions like those that follow in order to learn his sins. When finished examining his conscience, he should make a mental list of all the mortal sins he committed, noting how and how many times he committed them, as far as he can remember. He can also add any venial sins he remembers. With sorrow in his heart, and with the resolve to never sin again, he then tells his sins to a priest in Confession to receive pardon from God and reconciliation with the Church.

The Ten Commandments

First Commandment

"I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before Me."

- + Have I disobeyed the commandments of God or of His Catholic Church?
- + Have I refused to accept as true what God has revealed or what the Catholic Church proposes for belief?
- + Have I denied the existence of God?
- + Have I rejected the Christian faith, associating myself formally with another religion?
- + Have I formally associated myself with a non-Catholic denomination or sect?
- + Am I a member of a group which is forbidden to Catholics?
- + Have I given in to despair concerning the forgiveness of my sins or my salvation?
- + Have I presumed on God's mercy, expecting forgiveness without conversion and practicing virtue?
- + Do I love someone or something more than God?
- + Does someone or something other than God influence my choices?
- + Have I engaged in superstitious practices?
- + Have I consulted horoscopes, palm readers, fortune tellers, clairvoyants or mediums?
- + Have I involved myself in occult practices, such as seances, using a ouija board, or the worship of Satan?

Second Commandment

"You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain. "

- + Have I used the name of God in cursing or blasphemy?
- + Have I failed to keep the vows or promises that I have made to God?
- + Have I spoken about the Church, the saints, or sacred things with irreverence, hatred or defiance?
- + Have I watched television or movies, or listened to music that treated God, the Church, the saints, or sacred things irreverently?
- + Have I used vulgar, suggestive or obscene speech?
- + Have I used speech to belittle others?
- + Have I been disrespectful in my behavior in church?
- + Have I misused places or things set apart for the worship of God?

Third Commandment

"Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day."

- + Have I set time aside each day for personal prayer to God?
- + Have I worshipped God at Mass on Sunday and the other Holy Days of Obligation?
- + Have I committed a sacrilege against the Blessed Sacrament?
- + Have I received a sacrament while in the state of mortal sin?
- + Did I habitually come late to and/or leave early from Mass without a good reason?
- + Did I do unnecessary shopping and business on Sunday and the other Holy Days of Obligation?
- + Did I do unnecessary labor on Sunday and the other Holy Days of Obligation?

Fourth Commandment

"Honor your father and mother."

- + If still under the care of my parents, did I obey all that they reasonably asked of me?
- + Have I neglected the needs of my parents in their old age or in their time of need?
- + If still in school, did I obey the reasonable demands of my teachers?
- + As a parent, have I neglected to give my children proper food, clothing, shelter, education, discipline and care?
- + Have I provided for the religious education and formation of my children for as long as they are under my care?
- + Have I taken care to see that my children still under my care regularly frequent the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion?
- + Have I chosen a school for my children which corresponds to my religious convictions and which helps me in my role as the primary educator of my children?
- + If it is not possible to enroll my child in a Catholic school, have I seen to it that they attend religious instruction all through their school years, even after Confirmation?
- + Have I provided my children with a positive, prudent and personalized education in the Catholic teaching on human sexuality?
- + Have I given my children a good example of how to live the Catholic Faith?
- + Have I prayed with and for my children?
- + Do I live in humble obedience to those who legitimately exercise authority over me?
- + Have I broken the law?
- + Have I supported or voted for a politician whose positions are opposed to the teachings of Christ and His Catholic Church?

Fifth Commandment

"You shall not kill."

- + Have I unjustly and intentionally killed a human being?
- + Have I procured, performed, cooperated or advised another in the intentional killing of an unborn child through abortion?
- + Have I seriously considered or attempted suicide?
- + Have I supported, promoted or encouraged the practice of assisted suicide or mercy killing?
- + Have I deliberately desired to kill an innocent human being?
- + Have I unjustly inflicted bodily harm on another person?
- + Have I unjustly threatened another person with bodily harm?
- + Have I afflicted another person with verbal or emotional abuse?
- + Have I hated another to the point of wishing him evil?
- + Am I prejudiced or have I unjustly discriminated against others because of their race, color, nationality, gender or religion?
- + Do I belong to a hate group?
- + Did I purposely provoke another by teasing or nagging?
- + Did I, by my actions, recklessly endanger my life or health, or that of another person?
- + Did I operate any form of transportation recklessly or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?
- + Have I abused alcohol or other drugs?
- + Have I sold or given drugs to others to use for non-therapeutic purposes?
- + Have I been immoderate in my use of tobacco?
- + Have I over-eaten?

- + Have I been immoderate in my use of diets or diet pills?
- + Have I encouraged others to sin by giving scandal?

Sixth Commandment

"Thou shall not commit adultery."

Ninth Commandment

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife."

- + Do I make an effort to practice the virtue of chastity?
- + Have I given in to lust, the desire for sexual pleasure unrelated to spousal love in marriage?
- + Have I used artificial means of birth control?
- + Have I participated in immoral techniques for in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination?
- + Have I undergone an operation to render myself sterile for contraceptive purposes?
- + Have I willfully entertained impure thoughts?
- + Have I purchased or made use of pornography in any form?
- + Have I watched movies and television that involve sex and nudity?
- + Have I listened to music or jokes that are harmful to purity?
- + Have I committed adultery, having sexual relations with someone who is married, or with someone other than my spouse?
- + Have I committed incest, having sexual relations with a relative or in-law?
- + Have I committed fornication, having sexual relation with someone of the opposite sex when neither of us is married?
- + Have I committed sodomy, having sexual relations with someone of the same sex?
- + Have I raped someone?
- + Have I committed masturbation, using my sexual organs for my own sexual pleasure?
- + Have I engaged in sexual foreplay (petting) reserved for marriage?
- + Have I preyed upon children or youth for my sexual pleasure?
- + Have I engaged in unnatural sexual activities?
- + Have I engaged in prostitution, or paid for the services of a prostitute?
- + Have I set out to seduce someone, or allowed myself to be seduced?
- + Have I made uninvited and unwelcome sexual advances toward another?
- + Have I purposely dressed immodestly?

Seventh Commandment

"You shall not steal."

Tenth Commandment

"You shall not covet your neighbor's goods."

- + Do I try to live in a spirit of gospel poverty and simplicity?
- + Have I failed to practice the works of mercy?
- + Am I envious of others on account of their possessions?
- + Did I take something that doesn't belong to me against the reasonable will of the owner?
- + Did I deface, destroy or lose another's property without making restitution?
- + Did I cheat on a test, on my taxes, in business, or in games of chance?
- + Have I squandered money in compulsive gambling?
- + Did I make a false claim to an insurance company?
- + Do I pay employees a living wage, or fail to give a full day's work for a full day's pay?
- + Have I failed to honor my part of a contract?

- + Did I fail to make good on a debt?
- + Did I take advantage of another's hardship or ignorance by charging more for a product than it is worth?
- + Have I misused natural resources?
- + Have I treated animals cruelly, causing them to suffer or die needlessly?

Eighth Commandment

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

- + Did I knowingly and willfully deceive another by speaking a falsehood?
 - + Did I perjure myself under oath?
 - + Am I guilty of passing on gossip?
 - + Am I guilty of detraction, destroying a person's reputation by telling others about his faults for no good reason?
 - + Am I guilty of slander or calumny, telling lies about another person in order to destroy his reputation?
 - + Am I guilty of libel, writing lies about another person in order to destroy his reputation?
 - + Am I guilty of rash judgement, assuming the worst of another person based on circumstantial evidence?
 - + Have I failed to make reparation for a lie I told, or for harm done to a person's reputation?
 - + Did I fail to speak out in defense of the Catholic Faith, the Church, or of another person?
 - + Did I betray another's confidence through speech?
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The Precepts of The Church

First Precept of the Church

"You shall attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation."

(see under the Third Commandment)

Second Precept of the Church

"You shall confess your sins at least once a year."

- + Have I made a good Confession of my mortal sins least once a year?
- + Did I purposely omit telling my mortal sins in my last Confession?
- + Did I perform the penance I was given?
- + Have I made reparation for any harm I have done to others?

Third Precept of the Church

"You shall humbly receive your Creator in Holy Communion at least during the Easter season."

- + Have I fulfilled my Easter duty to receive Holy Communion at least once between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday?
- + Have I received Holy Communion while in the state of mortal sin?
- + Have I fasted an hour before receiving Holy Communion?
- + Have I received Holy Communion more than twice in one day?

Fourth Precept of the Church

"You shall keep holy the Holy days of Obligation."

(see under the Third Commandment)

Fifth Precept of the Church

"You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence."

- + Do I do penance every Friday, if not abstaining from meat, then some other form of penance?
- + If I am 14 years of age or older, did I abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent?
- + If I am between the ages of 18 and 59, did I fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday?
- + Do I try to spend time in prayer, doing spiritual and corporal works of mercy, and practicing self-denial?

Sixth Precept of the Church

"You shall contribute to the support of the Church."

- + Do I contribute a just amount of my time, talents and money to support my parish and the work of the Church?

Seventh Precept of the Church

"You shall observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage."

- + Am I living in a valid and licit marriage according to the laws of the Catholic Church?
- + Have I abandoned my spouse and family by separation or divorce?
- + Have I been keeping company with someone whom I cannot marry in the Catholic Church?
- + Have I given scandal by living with a member of the opposite sex without the benefit of a marriage blessed by the Catholic Church?
- + Have I entered into marriage with more than one person at the same time?

HOW TO MAKE AN INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION

The following is a step-by-step explanation of the ordinary way the Church has set down for an individual penitent to make his Confession. The penitent has the option of making his Confession while kneeling behind a screen so that the priest cannot know his identity, unless the penitent chooses to identify himself. Or, he may sit across from the priest, making his Confession face-to-face. If the penitent chooses to make his Confession face to-face, but the confessional in the church is not set up for it, he can arrange with the priest to make his Confession at another time and place. If the penitent is confessing his sins for the first time, or if it has been a long time since his last Confession, he should inform the priest and ask him for help in making a good Confession.

1. The priest welcomes the penitent, and then they make the Sign of the Cross, saying: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"
2. Using his own words or a prepared text from the Ritual, the priest exhorts the penitent to trust in God's mercy, to which the penitent responds: "Amen."

3. The priest or the penitent may read a text from Sacred Scripture.

4. The penitent then confesses his sins in the following manner:

The penitent may begin with these or similar words: "I confess to Almighty God, and to you, Father, that I have sinned." He then tells the priest his age, gender, state in life, how long it has been since his last Confession, and any other details that would help the priest.

The penitent may then say these or similar words: "I accuse myself of the following sins..." The penitent then tells all of his mortal sins in kind and number. He may also add his venial sins, but need not tell kind and number.

After telling all his sins, the penitent may say these or similar words: "For these and all my past sins I am truly sorry, and I beg pardon from God and penance and absolution from you, Father."

5. The priest may ask questions to help clear up any doubt about the nature of the sins confessed, or to determine if the penitent is truly sorry. The priest may also offer some advice as to how the penitent might amend his life.

6. The priest proposes an act of penance to the penitent, asking if he will accept it in order to make satisfaction for sin and to amend his life. If the penitent is not able to perform the proposed penance, he may ask for another.

7. The penitent then expresses his sorrow in an Act of Contrition, using either his own words, or one of the prayers in the Ritual, or the traditional formula.

8. The priest then extends his hands, or at least his right hand, and says the prayer of absolution, to which the penitent responds: "Amen."

9. After the absolution, the priest says: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good." The penitent responds: "His mercy endures forever."

10. The priest dismisses the penitent, using these or similar words: "The Lord has freed you from your sins. Go in peace." The penitent may respond: "Thanks be to God. Thank you, Father."

11. The penitent should perform his penance as soon as possible after making his Confession.

PASSAGES FROM SACRED SCRIPTURE

Matthew 9:12-13 "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ' I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 26:75 And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Mark 1:15 "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

Luke 7:44-48 Then turning toward the woman He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Luke 15:7 "I tell you, there will be more joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Luke 15:11-24 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants." And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.

Luke 18:10-14 Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank Thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector...But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 19:5-10 And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward for our deed; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingly power." And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

John 8:3-11 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, they Said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?"..."Let he who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her ."...But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman Standing before Him, Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

John 20:21-23 "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."

Romans 5:8 But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

PRAYERS

Acts 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 art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner. (partial indulgence)

Remember, Lord, Your compassion and mercy, which You showed long ago. Do not recall the sins and failings of my youth. In Your mercy remember me, Lord, because of Your goodness. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Wash me from my guilt and cleanse me of my sin. I acknowledge my offense; my sin is before me always. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Lord Jesus, You Chose to be called the friend of sinners. By Your saving death and resurrection free me from my sins. May Your peace take root in my heart and bring forth a harvest of love, holiness, and truth. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Lord Jesus Christ, You are the Lamb of God; You take away the sins of the world. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit restore me to friendship with Your Father, cleanse me from every stain of sin in the Blood You shed for me, and raise me to new life for the glory of Your name. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Lord Jesus, You opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick, forgave the sinful woman, and after Peter's denial confirmed him in Your love. Listen to my prayer: forgive all my sins, renew Your love in my heart, help me to live in perfect unity with my fellow Christians that I may proclaim Your saving power to all the world. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Father of mercy, like the prodigal son I return to You and say: "I have sinned against You and am no longer worthy to be called Your son." Christ Jesus, Savior of the world, I pray with the repentant thief to whom You promised paradise: "Lord, remember me in Your kingdom." Holy Spirit, fountain of love, I call on You with trust: "Purify my heart, and help me to walk as a child of the light." Amen. (partial indulgence)

Other Prayers

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here; ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, I through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen. (partial indulgence, applicable only to the souls in Purgatory)

Psalm 130 Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication: if You, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand? But with You is forgiveness, that You may be revered. I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in His Word. My soul waits for the Lord, more than sentinels wait for the dawn. More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord; for with the Lord is kindness and with Him is plenteous redemption; and He will redeem Israel from all their iniquities. (partial indulgence)

Lord, God Almighty, You have brought us safely to the beginning of this day. Defend us today by Your mighty power, that we may not fall into any sin, but that all our words may so proceed and all our thoughts and actions be so directed, as to be always just in Your sight. Through Christ our Lord. Amen. (partial indulgence)

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Your face I humbly kneel, and with burning soul pray and beseech You to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity, true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment, while I contemplate with great love and tender pity Your five wounds, pondering over them within me, calling to mind the words which David, Your prophet, said of You, my good Jesus: "They have pierced my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones". Amen.

(A plenary indulgence is granted on each Friday of Lent and Passiontide to the faithful, who after Communion piously recite the above prayer before an image of Christ crucified; on other days of the year the indulgence is partial)

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

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy; hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope! To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve! To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears! Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us; and after this, our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus! O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen. (partial indulgence)

We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen. (partial indulgence)

I love You, Jesus, my love, with all my heart. I am sorry for ever having offended You. Never permit me to offend You again. Grant that I may love You always, then do with me as You will. (St. Alphonsus Liguori)

St. Michael, the Archangel, defend us in battle; be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray; and do thou, O prince of the heavenly host,

by the Power of God, thrust into Hell Satan and the other evil Spirits who prowl about the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

A partial indulgence is granted to the faithful, who renew their baptismal promises according to any formula in use; but a plenary indulgence is granted, if this is done in the celebration of the Paschal Vigil or on the anniversary of one's baptism. What follows is one way to renew one's baptismal promises:

I, N.N., who through the tender mercy of the Eternal Father was privileged to be baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus" and thus to share in the dignity of His divine Sonship, wish now in the presence of this same loving Father and of His only-begotten Son to renew in all sincerity the promises I solemnly made at the time of my holy Baptism.

I, therefore, now do once again renounce Satan; I renounce all his works; I renounce all his allurements

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was born into this world and Who suffered and died for my sins and rose again. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.0

Having been buried with Christ unto death and raised up with Him unto a new life, I promise to live no longer for myself or for that world which is the enemy of God but for Him who died for me and rose again, serving God, my heavenly Father, faithfully and unto death in the holy Catholic Church.

Taught by our Savior's command and formed by the Word of God, I now dare to say:
Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Visit to a Cemetery

An indulgence, applicable only to the Souls in Purgatory, is granted to the faithful, who devoutly visit a cemetery and pray, even if only mentally, for the departed. The indulgence is plenary each day from the 1st to the 8th of November; on other days of the year it is partial.

Adoration of the Cross

A plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful, who in the solemn liturgical action of Good Friday, devoutly assist at the adoration of the Cross and kiss it.

Exercise of the Way of the Cross

A plenary indulgence is granted to the faithful, who make the pious exercise of the Way of the Cross under the following conditions: made before stations of the Way of the Cross legitimately erected, with fourteen Crosses, with a pious meditation on the Passion and Death of the Lord, moving from one station to the next (or at least the one conducting the exercise to move from station to station).