

# How to Go to Confession...

May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all  
the saints,  
whatever good you do and suffering you endure,  
heal your sins,  
help you grow in holiness,  
and reward you with eternal life.  
Go in peace.

—*Rite of Penance*, no. 93

**1 PREPARATION:** Before going to confession, take some time to prepare. Begin with prayer, and reflect on your life since your last confession. How have you—in your thoughts, words, and actions—neglected to live Christ’s commands to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37, 39)? As a help with this “examination of conscience,” you might review the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes (Ex 20:2-17; Dt 5:6-21; Mt 5:3-10; or Lk 6:20-26).

**2 GREETING:** The priest will welcome you; he may say a short blessing or read a Scripture passage.

**3 THE SIGN OF THE CROSS:** Together, you and the priest will make the Sign of the Cross. You may then begin your confession with these or similar words: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been [*give days, months, or years*] since my last confession.”

**4 CONFESSION:** Confess all your sins to the priest. If you are unsure what to say, ask the priest for help. When you are finished, conclude with these or similar words: “I am sorry for these and all my sins.”

**5 PENANCE:** The priest will propose an act of penance. The penance might be prayer, a work of mercy, or an act of charity. He might also counsel you on how to better live a Christian life.

**6 ACT OF CONTRITION:** After the priest has conferred your penance, pray an Act of Contrition, expressing sorrow for your sins and resolving to sin no more. A suggested Act of Contrition is:

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

(*Rite of Penance*, no. 45)

**7 ABSOLUTION:** The priest will extend his hands over your head and pronounce the words of absolution. You respond, “Amen.”

**8 PRAISE:** The priest will usually praise the mercy of God and will invite you to do the same. For example, the priest may say, “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good.” And your response would be, “His mercy endures for ever” (*Rite of Penance*, no. 47).

**9 DISMISSAL:** The priest will conclude the sacrament, often saying, “Go in peace.”

If it has been a while since your last confession, remember, “Do not fear” (Is 41:10). The priest will help guide you. And feel free to take this how-to guide with you! (For more information, visit [www.usccb.org/confession](http://www.usccb.org/confession).)

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## Examination of Conscience

- Did I** deny or doubt God’s existence?
- Did I** refuse to believe God’s revelation?
- Did I** believe in (or use) horoscopes, fortune telling, good luck charms, tarot cards, Ouija boards or reincarnation?
- Did I** deny that I was a Catholic?
- Did I** abandon the Catholic Faith for any period of time?
- Did I** despair of or presume on God’s mercy?
- Did I** neglect prayer for a long time?
- Did I** fail to pray daily?
- Did I** blaspheme God or take God’s Name in vain, curse or break an oath or vow?
- Did I** miss Mass on a Sunday or on a Holy Day of Obligation through my own fault?
- Am I** always reverent in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament?
- Was I** voluntarily inattentive at Mass?
- Did I** arrive at Mass late through my own fault?
- Did I** leave Mass early?
- Did I** do unnecessary servile work on Sunday?
- Did I** disobey or disrespect my parents or legitimate superiors?
- Did I** neglect my duties to my husband, wife, children or parents?
- Did I** fail to actively take an interest in the religious education and formation of my children?
- Have I** failed to educate myself concerning the teachings of the Church?
- Did I** give a full day’s work in return for a full day’s pay?
- Did I** give a fair wage to my employee(s)?
- Did I** give scandal by what I said or did, especially to the young?

- Did I** contribute to anyone’s abandoning of the Catholic Faith?
- Was I** impatient, angry, envious, unkind, proud, jealous, revengeful, hateful toward others or lazy?
- Did I** give bad example, abuse drugs, drink alcohol to excess, fight or quarrel?
- Did I** physically injure or kill anyone?
- Have I** had an abortion, or advised or supported an abortion?
- Did I** participate in or approve of the grave evil known as “mercy killing,” euthanasia or doctor assisted suicide?
- Did I** attempt suicide or physically harm myself?
- Did I** willfully entertain impure thoughts and desires?
- Did I** dress immodestly or provocatively?
- Did I** use impure or suggestive words?
- Did I** tell impure stories or listen to them?
- Did I** deliberately look at impure television, internet, plays, pictures or movies?
- Did I** deliberately read or send impure material?
- Did I** perform impure acts by myself (masturbation) or with another (adultery, fornication or sodomy)?
- Did I** marry or advise another to marry outside of the Church?
- Did I** abuse my marriage rights?
- Was I** unfaithful to my marriage vows?
- Have I** kept company with someone else’s spouse?
- Did I** practice artificial birth control or was I or my spouse permanently sterilized (tubal ligation or vasectomy)?
- Did I** steal, cheat, help or encourage others to steal, cheat, or keep stolen goods?

- Have I** made restitution for stolen goods?
- Did I** deliberately fail to fulfill my contracts or to pay my bills? Did I give or accept bribes?
- Did I** rashly gamble or speculate or deprive my family of the necessities of life?
- Did I** tell lies? Deliberately in order to deceive or injure others? (slander or calumny)
- Did I** commit perjury?
- Did I** vote in accordance with a properly informed conscience, in a way consistent with the teachings of the Church, in regard to the sanctity of marriage and of human life issues?
- Was I** uncharitable in thought, word or deed?
- Did I** gossip or reveal the faults or sins of others? (detraction)
- Did I** fail to keep secrets that I should have kept?
- Did I** eat meat knowingly on the Fridays during Lent or on Ash Wednesday? (Ages 14+)
- Did I** fast as required on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday? (Ages 18-59)
- Did I** fail to receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season?
- Did I** fail to confess my sins at least once a year?
- Did I** receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin?
- Did I** receive Holy Communion without fasting for one hour or more from food and drink? (water and medicine are permitted)
- Did I** make a bad Confession by deliberately not telling all the mortal sins I had committed?
- Did I** fail to contribute to the support of the Church?
- Have I** forgiven those who have hurt or harmed me or my loved ones?

## How to go to Confession

1. The priest will greet you.
2. The penitent says: “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.” You then say how long it has been since your last Confession.
3. The penitent tells the priest his sins simply and forthrightly (if mortal sin, give kind and approximate number).
4. The priest will give you some advice and will assign you a penance.
5. The penitent will next pray the Act of Contrition (see prayer below).
6. The priest then gives the penitent absolution.
7. The priest will then say: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.”
8. The penitent responds: “His mercy endures forever.” The priest will then dismiss you.
9. The penitent carries out the assigned penance.

## Act of Contrition

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of hell. But most of all, because they offend Thee, my God, Who 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.

## Prayer After Confession

Almighty and Merciful God, Whose mercy is boundless and everlasting and of Whose goodness the riches are infinite, I thank You because You have so graciously pardoned all my sins and restored Your Heavenly favor. I am awed by Your divine compassion and the incomprehensible love of Your Son, which has led Him to institute so gentle and powerful a remedy for sins. In union with all the gratitude that has ever ascended to You from truly penitent hearts, I proclaim Your merciful praises on behalf of all in Heaven, on earth and in purgatory, for ever and ever. Amen.