

THE PRIEST'S GUIDE FOR
THE RITE OF CONFESSION:

With Instructional Materials and Articles on the Sacrament.



THE RITE OF CONFESSION IN THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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CHRIST THE SAVIOUR ORTHODOX CHURCH

Of

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX AUTONOMOUS CHURCH (ROAC)

Revised: Friday, June 08, 2007

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"When the first order of angels fell from the angelic glory and became demons, the other nine orders humbled themselves and worshipped the All-Holy Trinity, and remained in their place and rejoice forever. We, too, my brethren, must reflect what an evil thing pride is - that it cast down the devil from angelic glory and he will always burn in Hell - and that humility kept the angels in Heaven, and they rejoice perpetually in the glory of the Holy Trinity. Let us then, my brethren, avoid pride, because it is the first daughter of the devil, it is a path that leads to Hell; and let us have humility, because it is angelic, and is a path that leads to Paradise".

-St. Cosmas Aitolos

HOLY REPENTANCE

PREFACE AND INSTRUCTION CONCERNING HOW IT BEHOOVES A CONFESSOR TO BEHAVE AND TO INSTRUCT WITHOUT CONTRADICTION THEM THAT COME TO HIM

It is the duty of him that is the recipient of human thoughts to be a model of all good things, and to be abstinent, humble, and virtuous, himself praying every hour unto God, that He may give him the word of understanding to correct them that make haste unto him. First of all it is his duty himself to fast Wednesday and Friday throughout the year, as the divine canons direct, since from these he has to direct himself and others what to do.

But if he himself be ignorant, a profligate, and a lover of pleasure, how can he teach virtue unto others? And who would be so unwise as to hearken unto him concerning that which he (*that is, the penitent*) has to say, seeing him a disorderly person and a drunkard, and teaching others not to be intemperate, or to follow any virtue whatever, while he himself is unable to do this? For eyes are more believing than ears, says the divine Scripture.

Therefore, take heed unto thyself, O Confessor, for if one sheep be lost through thy negligence, it shall be required at thy hands. "*For cursed,*" says the Scripture, "*is he that does the work of the Lord negligently.*" (Jer. 48:10) And the great Basil says,

Give heed, that thou fear not a man in his fall, that thou give not the Son of God into unworthy hands, that thou be not ashamed of Him because of them that are glorious on the earth, and that thou commune not even him that wears a diadem.

For the divine canons do not permit the unworthy to be communed, since they are regarded as pagans. If they will not repent, woe unto them, and to them that commune them. Give heed, he says; thou seest that I will not permit such things.

Keeping these and similar precepts, and before all things, preserving the Church dogmas immovably, thou shalt save thyself and them that hearken unto thee.

If any without proper authorization from the local Bishop dare to be the recipient of thoughts and to confess, such shall rightly receive punishment as a transgressor of the divine canons; for he not only ruins himself, but as many as are confessed by him, they are not confessed, and as many as are bound or loosed, they are not corrected, according to the Sixth Canon of the Council of Carthage, and according to the Forty-third of the same Council.

THE ORDER OF CONFESSION

Preparatory Notes

Confession must be performed at any time: the shepherd of souls must be prepared to confess any repenting Christian at any time—even when it may be inconvenient for him.

If anyone comes to Confession who is unknown, the Confessor must first inquire as to who he/she is, whether he/she is married or unmarried, how long has it been since his/her last confession, and who confessed him/her previously.

Perhaps he/she has left his/her previous Confessor? Has he/she fulfilled any penance laid by the previous Confessor? Has he/she been confessed according to the rules of the Holy Orthodox Church? Is he/she under excommunication, or any other penance by a Bishop? And if the one coming to him is bound by a Bishop, then the Confessor is not permitted to confess him/her, and he/she must be sent to the Bishop who bound him/her.

In preparation for Confession, a Gospel Book, or an Icon of the Savior, and a Cross are placed on an analogon. Then the beginning prayers (*Trisagion*, Psalm 50 and the two following prayers) are said.

Usually the reading of the

prayers for Confession will be in the church at one time for all those wishing to confess; they are read before Confession at the end of a Divine Service, e.g., at the end of Matins or Vespers, or at Divine Liturgy.

Also, the following *Exhortation* may be said (or one similar) for all penitents together, before each one comes forward for their individual confessions.

EXHORTATION TO THE PENITENT BEFORE CONFESSION

My beloved Child in the Holy Spirit, *N.*, it is good that you have come to Holy Repentance, for there, as by a spiritual font, you will wash the sins of your soul, and, as with heavenly medicine, it shall be healed of death-bearing wounds.

Only strive that your heart might be broken on account of all your sins, and that you may confess them truthfully to the Lord your God Who is with us invisibly, before me, the wretched one, who have received from him the power of absolution, hiding nothing and in nowise lying. But call to remembrance everything that you have done, and confess them. For the hiding of sins is soul-destroying deception, and lying is death-bearing; for the sake of both, all sins confessed will not be forgiven. And as the Mystery is not fulfilled because of this action of lying, new deadly sins are born.

But do not conceal even one sin, not even because of shame, for I also am a man subject to passions, able to fall into similar sins, and I have experience of the weakness of man. And when despising the shame which you shall expose to the One God, through me, you will not be accused of these sins before the Angels of God and before all men at

the dread Judgment. But if you hide *anything*, before me, from the One God, then you will be accused before the universal assembly, and you shall not be delivered from eternal punishment.

Do not hide anything because of infirmity, for I will not be angry at you, neither will I make public your sins; but I will heal you with gentleness of soul. And when you confess, expose *everything*, and I will not censure you; uncover your sins, and I will not be as a stranger *to you*.

Do not speak to me about those who participate with you in sins, for *to speak* of the weakness of our neighbors is evil. Confess only your sins, not idly, but with a pricked heart, and, with good intent, to preserve yourself henceforth from like transgressions; for without this it is not possible to have true repentance.

In this way, then, having ordered your heart, give glory to the Lord. Confessing your transgressions before me, a sinner, and receiving absolution, you will be freed from the bonds of sins, you will be cleansed, and you will be healed spiritually by the grace of God.

The Confessor leads the one that comes to confess (but not two or more) with uncovered head before an icon of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he begins:

THE RITE OF CONFESSION

Priest: Blessed is our God
always; now and ever,
and unto ages of ages.

Penitent: Amen.

Priest Glory to Thee, our God,
glory to Thee.

O Heavenly King, O
Comforter, the Spirit of
Truth, Who art in all
places and fillest all
things; Treasury of good
things and Giver of life:
Come and dwell in us
and cleanse us from
every stain, and save our
souls, O gracious Lord.

Penitent: Holy God, Holy Mighty,
Holy Immortal: Have
mercy on us. (*thrice*)

Glory to the Father, and
to the Son, and to the
holy Spirit: both now
and ever, and unto ages
of ages. Amen.

All-holy Trinity, have
mercy on us. Lord
cleanse us from our sins.
Master, pardon our
iniquities. Holy God,
visit and heal our
infirmities for thy name
sake.

Lord, have mercy. (*thrice*)

Glory to the Father, and
to the Son, and to the

holy Spirit: both now
and ever, and unto ages
of ages. Amen.

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 trespass,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us; and
lead us not into
temptation, but deliver
us from evil.

Priest: For Thine is the
kingdom, and the power,
and the glory: of the
Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit:
now and ever, and unto
ages of ages.

Penitent: Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (*Twelve
times - 4 x 3 sets*)

Priest: O come let us worship
and fall down before
God our King.

O come let us worship
and fall down before
Christ our King and our
God.

O come let us worship
and fall down before the
very Christ our King and
our God.

Psalm 50(51)

Penitent: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know mine iniquity, and my sin is before me continually. Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight; that Thou mightest be justified in Thy words and victorious when Thou art judged. For behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother bear me.

For behold, Thou hast loved truth; the hidden and secret things of Thy wisdom hast Thou revealed unto me. Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be made clean; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. Thou shalt make me to hear joy and gladness; *my* humbled bones shall rejoice. Turn Thy face away from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and with Thy governing Spirit establish me. I shall teach transgressors Thy ways, and the ungodly shall turn back unto Thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation; my tongue shall rejoice in Thy righteousness. O Lord, Thou shalt open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise. For if Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would have given it; with whole burnt-offerings Thou shalt not be pleased. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God will not despise.

Do good, O Lord, in Thy good pleasure unto Sion, and let the walls of Jerusalem be built. Then shalt Thou be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, with oblation and whole burnt-offerings. Then shall they offer young bulls upon Thine altar.

And these Troparian, TONE 6:

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for laying aside all excuse, we sinners offer to Thee, as to our Master, this supplication: Have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

O Lord, have mercy on us, for in Thee have we put our trust. Do not be angry with us, nor remember our iniquities, but look down on us even now, as Thou art compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies; for Thou art our God, and we are Thy people; we are all the work of Thy hands, and we call on Thy name.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages.
Amen.

O Blessed Theotokos, open the doors of compassion to us whose hope is in thee, that we may not perish, but be delivered from adversity through thee. For thou art the salvation of the race of Christian people.

Then, Lord, have mercy (40 times).

The Priest says:

Priest: Let us pray to the Lord.

And this Prayer:

O God, our Savior, Who, by Thy prophet Nathan didst grant remission of his sins to the repentant David, and didst accept the penitent prayer of Manasseh: Do Thou Thyself, in Thy customary love for mankind, accept this, Thy servant, *N.*, who repents of the sins he (*she*) has committed, overlooking all that he (*she*) has done, forgiving his (*her*) unrighteousness, and passing by his (*her*) transgressions.

For Thou, O Lord, hast said: "I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he turn from his way and live"; and that sins shall be forgiven even unto seventy times seven. For as Thy majesty is incomparable, so is Thy mercy immeasurable. For if Thou shouldst mark iniquities, who should stand?

For Thou art the God of them that repent and unto Thee do we send up glory: to the Father, and to

the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Let us pray to the Lord.

And another Prayer:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, the Shepherd, and the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world, Who gavest remittance unto the two debtors, and didst grant remission of her sins unto the harlot: Do Thou Thyself, O Master, loose, remit and pardon the sins, transgressions and iniquities, whether voluntary or involuntary, whether known or unknown, whether by mistake or in disobedience, which Thy servants have wrought, and whatsoever they have done, as men bearing flesh and living in the world, being beguiled by the devil.

And if by word, or by deed, or in knowledge, or in ignorance they have sinned, or have despised the word of a Priest, or are under a priestly anathema, or are fallen under their own anathema, or are bound under an oath, do Thou Thyself as Thou art good and gentle, O Master, be pleased that these, Thy servants, be loosed by Thy word, forgiving them their own anathema and oath, according to the greatness of Thy mercy.

Yea, O Master and Lord, O Lover of Mankind, hearken unto us who are entreating Thy grace for these Thy servants; and, as the

greatly-merciful One, overlook all their transgressions, and deliver them from eternal torment. For Thou hast said, O Master: "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

For Thou only art sinless, and unto Thee do we send up glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

After this, he says to him (her):

Priest: Behold, My Spiritual Child, Christ stands invisibly here receiving your confession. Do not be ashamed, neither be afraid, and hide nothing. Rather, do not be afraid to tell all that you have done, so that you may receive forgiveness from our Lord Jesus Christ. Behold, His Holy Icon is before us. I am only the witness, bearing testimony before Him of all that you shall say. But, if you conceal anything you shall have the greater sin. Take heed, therefore, that having come to the Divine Physician, you not depart unhealed.

**PRAYER OF ST. SYMEON THE NEW
THEOLOGIAN**

Penitent: 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 decent 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.

And then the priest shall question him (her) diligently, question by question, and shall await his (her) answer to each question.

Customarily, the Confessor sits, while the penitent kneels before the Analogion.

And first of all he shall question him (her) concerning his (her) faith, saying:

Priest: Tell me, Child: Do you believe that which has been transmitted and taught by the Catholic Apostolic Church which was planted and nourished in the east and which has spread from

the east into all the universe and which abides even to this day undivided and unchanged? And do you doubt any of its traditions?

And if he (she) believes in an Orthodox manner, without doubt, let him (her) read the Symbol of Faith:

THE CREED

Penitent: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried.

And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who

proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; Who spoke by the prophets.

In one Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

And when this is finished, the Priest shall question him (her):

Priest: Confess now, therefore, of all your sins which you have committed to the present hour:

The questions that follow in the Book of Needs, coming down from Byzantine times, although retained in earlier editions, are not now asked. (They are, however, appended at the end of the Order of Confession.) Instead, the Confessor waits for the penitent to reveal his (her) offences, and, when necessary, asks suitable questions, according to the penitent's condition, sex, age, etc.

CONFESSION OF ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT

I CONFESS TO THE LORD MY God and before you as witness, reverend Father, all my countless sins which I have committed till the present day and hour: in thought, word, and deed. Every day and every hour I sin through ingratitude to God for His great and numberless

blessings to me and for His most gracious providence and care for me, a sinner.

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, by having 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 by being unchaste 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.

Therefore, by the Grace of God, forgive and absolve me, reverend Father, and bless me to partake of the Holy and Life-giving Mysteries of Christ for the remission of my sins and for eternal life.

PRIEST: In all these things which you have confessed you must henceforth be on your guard. For you receive a second baptism, according to the Christian Mystery. And you must see to it that, God helping you, to make a new and good beginning.

But, above all, you must not take these sins which you have confessed lightly, lest you become a cause of scorn to men and the angels; for these things are not befitting a Christian. But may God, by His grace, help you to live honorably, uprightly and devoutly.

At the end the penitent bows their head and the priest, reads the following prayer of absolution:

PRIEST: Bow your head unto the Lord.

Let us pray unto the Lord.

PENITENT: Lord, have mercy.

PRIEST: O Lord God of the salvation of Thy servants, merciful, compassionate and long-suffering; Who repents concerning our evil deeds, not desiring the death of a sinner, but that all should turn from their evil ways and live.

Show mercy now on Thy servant/handmaiden *[name]* and grant to them an image of repentance, forgiveness of sins and deliverance, pardoning all their sins, whether voluntary or involuntary.

Reconcile and unite them to Thy Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to Whom, with Thee, are due dominion and majesty, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

PENITENT: Amen.

At the end the penitent comes forward, kneels on the kneeler (if able), and the priest laying his stole upon their head pronounces the following absolution over the Penitent:

PRIEST: May our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, by the grace and compassion of His love for mankind, forgive you, my child, *[name]*, all your transgressions. And I His unworthy Priest, through the power given me, forgive and absolve you from all your sins, in the Name of the Father, and

of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Now, having no further care for the sins which you have confessed: Depart in peace, knowing such sins are as far from you as the East is from the West. Amen.

Greek Form

May God Who pardoned David through Nathan the Prophet when he confessed his sins, Peter who wept bitterly for his denial, the Harlot weeping at His feet, the Publican and the Prodigal;

May our same Merciful God forgive you all things, through me a sinner, both in this world and in the world to come, and set you uncondemned before His terrible Judgment Seat. (*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...*)

Now, having no further care for the sins which you have confessed, depart in peace; knowing that your sins are as far from you as the east is from the west!

And finally, the Priest, while saying the Absolution, signs the penitent with his right hand with the Sign of the Cross.

Then:

Priest: It is truly meet to bless thee, O Theotokos, ever blessed and most pure and the Mother

of our God, more honorable than the Cherubim and, more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim. Without defilement thou gavest birth to God the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

And the Dismissal.

After this, the Priest gives the Cross to the penitent to kiss.

The penitent rises, kisses the Cross and the Gospels and, receiving a blessing from the priest and the embrace of Christian fellowship, steps away thanking God, and saying the following prayer (attributed to St. John Chrysostom).

Penitent: What praise, of what hymn, or what thanksgiving, or what recompense shall we offer unto Thee, the Only God, Who lovest mankind?

For when we were condemned to destruction and immersed in our sins, Thou didst bestow freedom upon us, and hast given us the immortal and heavenly nourishment of the Body and Blood of Thy Christ.

Therefore we pray Thee: Deliver us from judgment, together with Thy servants who minister unto Thee.

Keep us and them in honor

and holy living; and those who pray with us, and who have been partakers of Thy Mystical Table, preserve free of condemnation unto their last breath.

May it be unto them a sanctification of soul and body, unto the keeping of Thy Commandments; and thus may we be granted to attain Thy Heavenly Kingdom, together with all who have been well-pleasing unto Thee from all ages:

Through the prayers and intercessions of our holy, all-pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, the Birthgiver of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, of the Patron Saint of this Holy Church, St. John Chrysostom, and of all Thy Saints, have mercy on us and save, for as much as Thou art good and lovest mankind; now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen.

And the Spiritual Father makes an exhortation to the Spiritual Child after the confession of his (her) sins:

EXHORTATION FROM THE SPIRITUAL FATHER TO THE SPIRITUAL CHILD AFTER THE CONFESSION OF SINS

My beloved Child in the Holy Spirit, *N*, the unconquerable mercy of God, the Lover of Mankind, desiring not that one sinner should perish, but summoning all to repentance, for the sake of the inheritance of future good things, does not leave you to rot spiritually in sins, for it is better that you should obtain life eternal.

And He is well pleased to turn unto you, the apple of His eye, His own deep compassion, and to touch you with the finger of the grace of the Holy Spirit, rousing you, that you might quickly arise from the sleep of sin, to stand up from the bed of transgressions, and to receive the most important healing of soul-destroying harm—Holy Repentance; and to make manifest your own sickness through confession of sins in the presence of me who am unworthy, and to receive, with joy, a penance for sins that works for good.

For this you must always render great thanksgiving unto Him, for this is not done according to your sins which you have committed, nor has this been given you according to your transgressions, but according to the compassion that proceeds out of His own goodness has He been merciful to you. And He has done

this to you that you might be counted worthy of the remission of your iniquities—all of them. Like the dust from the face of the earth by the wind, they have been carried away from your soul by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Like the leprosy of Na'aman by the waters of the Jordan, for the sake of your tears they have been cleansed.

And as through the word of the Lord the Ten Lepers were made healthy in their bodies, thus has been done today, rendering your soul safe from harm through the word of absolution from our Lord.

And, as the Paralytic, who for thirty-eight years lay by the Sheep Pool, having been healed by the word of the Lord, heard from the Lord, "*See, thou art well. Sin no more*" (*John 5:14*), likewise, the same has been given you, through grace: at the word of petition by me a sinner being freed of paralysis of the soul, you hear from my wretchedness: "*See, thou art well. Sin no more.*" "*Sin not*".

I say, that having been given the precious pearl by the grace of God through repentance you not be found destroyed, and that you not be deprived of the meet adornment of Heaven. "*Sin not*", that the lamp of your soul not be extinguished, inflamed with the fire of the love of God, by whose radiance you may be able to walk easily the dark path of

this life, and that it may be easy for you to enter into the land of unblinking light, and again, without this, to suffer on this path that always brings harm from the snares and delusion of enemies, and, having run to the doors of the chamber of the heavenly Bridegroom, finding it necessary to remain with the foolish virgins who had their lamps extinguished, to be left outside.

I say in a few words, "*Sin no more*", that you not be likened unto mindless beasts, according to one of the proverbs adopted by St. Peter: "*It has happened unto them according to the true proverb: 'The dog turns to his own vomit again', and, 'the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire'*" (2 Pet. 2:22); for those who are like these beasts shall not enter into the heavenly Kingdom. Henceforth, sin no more, that having come to repent of sins, you not continue to sin.

[Yet, a penance is laid upon you, which you must strive to fulfill with diligence and devotion, and beyond this, as far as it is possible for you to do, to do it well; for this is not according to the multitude of transgressions, but is applied taking into account usual human weakness, hoping on the merciful kindness of God Who is well-pleased to accept the efforts of them that are not able and to crown them.]

Abiding in continual repentance for sins, strive to increase good deeds, that, through

repentance, you not only be delivered of eternal torment, but also that you may be counted worthy, by God, of unending life for your good work, from whom will always come assistance to you for all your good beginnings, for the performing of good deeds, and mercy and blessing all the days of your life, and that you may be counted worthy to receive in the future age the gift of eternal life.

Then a penance is given him (her) opposite its transgression.

CONCERNING PENANCE

*(At this point in the **Book of Needs** there follow instructions concerning the imposition of a penance, which, according to the canons, consists of prohibition from Holy Communion for a lengthy time (one, two or many years) because of certain grave sins. These have not been translated.)*

Other Directives Concerning Penance

A distinctive penance is assigned according to the gravity of the sins, the age of the penitent, the circumstances, and also the measure of his/her repentance.

Assigning a penance to the penitent consisting of the exercise of some sort of virtue, the Confessor must choose virtues opposite the sins that have been confessed. Thus: covetousness presupposes the distribution of alms; fornication—fasting; weakness in Faith and Hope—the imposition of prayers; etc. But, it must also be taken into account whether or not it is possible for the penitent to fulfill the penance assigned to him/her; that is, a penance must not be assigned that is impossible to fulfill. For example, the distribution of alms is not assigned to one who is poor; or, for one occupied with many burdensome obligations—overly-frequent attendance at church services and lengthy time in prayer;

etc.

In that penance is not reparation to God for sins, it is possible and perfectly correct not to lay it on a penitent who, with a pure heart and with tears, repents for his/her own sins and promises henceforth with all his might to refrain from them.

Penances consisting of exclusion from communion of the Holy Mysteries (excommunication) for a long time, is imposed for more weighty sins. Such penances, according to the canons of the Holy Fathers, are applied for such sins as: apostasy, heresy, incest, adultery, murder, sodomy, bestiality, perjury, oath-breaking, witchcraft, and defilement of graves. (In times past, penances for such sins consisted of exclusion from Communion for a few or even many years, even extending to the end of one's life.) Only the Bishop has the power to lay such penances. In such cases, he *must* be consulted.

For less weighty sins, exclusion from communion of the Holy Mysteries is permitted the Priest, but, a penance consisting of exclusion from the Holy Mysteries for a *long* time is not permitted.

A penance consisting of exclusion from church services, or a *publicly announced* exclusion from communion of the Holy Mysteries, is laid only by the Bishop.

If, due to the seriousness of the sin(s) confessed a penance has been laid upon the penitent consisting of abstinence from communion of the Holy Mysteries, then the Prayers, "Lord God of the salvation..." and that of absolution are not read. When the term of the prohibition has ended, then, after Confession, before the reading of the aforementioned Prayers, it is necessary to read a special *Prayer on the Absolution from Penance*, which follows the **ORDER OF CONFESSION**. It is necessary, however, that it be read over the one being absolved *in private*, and *not* at Divine Liturgy.

Absolution is possible only from the Priest who laid the penance. It is not possible for another Priest to absolve him/her who has been penanced, excepting circumstances when the one under penance is dying. In such cases any Priest may absolve, providing him/her with the Holy Mysteries before death.

A Priest is not permitted to absolve one under penance if such was laid by the Bishop.

CANON FOR CONFESSION

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This little known Canon in preparation for Confession is to be found in the Greek Great Euchologion. As the concluding prayer makes clear, the Confession is in preparation for Holy Communion. The prayer might well be used as a prayer of absolution when penitents come for Confession before the Liturgy.

The Gospel, from that according to St Mark, is translated from the Church's text. Virtually all modern editions of the Greek and all modern translations, following the reading of the best manuscripts, omit the final verse, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your offences".

CANON OF SUPPLICATION

TO THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD AT THE CONFESSION OF A SINNER

A Composition of Monk Euthymios, the Chancellor

Ode 1. Tone 6. Crossing the sea.

How may I lament my sordid life, Sovereign Lady, and the multitudes of my numberless evil deeds? What may I say to you, Pure Virgin? I am at a loss and I quail. But help me.

From where shall I, wretch that I am, begin to tell my wicked deeds and my dreadful offences? Also what will then become of me? But, Sovereign Lady, before the end take pity on me also.

I have trodden every road of sins, O Immaculate, and have in no way found the path of salvation. But I run to you, loving Lady: Do not despise me as I repent from my soul.

I think continually on the hour of death, O

All-pure, and the fearful tribunal, but by habit I am terribly a prey of evils. But help me.

The corrupter of what is good now seeing me naked, leaderless and far from God of godly virtues, is eager to swallow me down. Sovereign Lady, rescue me.

Ode 3. None is holy as you.

I have shamefully befouled my soul, Sovereign Lady, Mother of God, through numberless offences, wretch that I am. And, wholly in the grip of despair, as I am, where may I now go?

Alas, I have defaced that which is according to God's image by my proud disposition, wretch that I am! And where now may I go? But hasten, O Virgin help me.

There is altogether none born in this life among mortals who has done the lawless deeds of dire licentiousness as I, loving Lady; for I have befouled divine Baptism.

I have reached the limit of evils, All-holy Virgin; but speedily help me; for heaven and earth bitterly cry out against my numberless outrageous acts.

Ode 4. Christ my power.

Ranks of Angels and the armies of heaven, the Powers of your Son tremble at your might, Pure Lady; while I, though despaired of, am in the grip of foolhardiness.

The whole earth is amazed and trembles as it watches one who dreadfully and wickedly does outrageous deeds.

I have wickedly befouled the temple of the body, and the Temple of Lord, which mortals enter trembling, I the prodigal, alas, enter without shame.

Do not make me, Sovereign Lady, do not

make me a stranger, who have been estranged from the shelter of your Son and am utterly unworthy. But wash me clean also from the stain of my offences.

Ode 5. By your divine light, O Good One.

Adam transgressed one commandment of your Son, O Virgin, and suffered exile. But how may I lament the abyss of my offences, I, rebel and transgressor against God?

Cain was revealed of old as a destroyer and murderer of his brother before he had been cursed by God. But what then shall I do who have dared all? For I have slain my soul, and now I am not ashamed.

I have rivaled dread Esau, I have defiled soul and body by gluttony and pleasure, befouling my life with drunkenness and lechery. Who would not weep at me, wretch that I am.

By your divine light, O Good One, heal the passions of the soul, which the Corrupter has sown in me. Deliver me from his bitter captivity. For he laughs as he sees me leaderless.

Ode 6. Watching life's sea.

My life is dissolute, my soul filthy and my life utterly wretched, while I have defiled my whole body by wicked deeds. Therefore hasten, O Virgin and help me.

The end is upon me and I cannot endure, loving Lady. My conscience reproves me, for it sets before me my wicked deeds and the disorder of my life; and I quake with fear at the tribunal of your Son, pure Virgin.

Truly, O all-pure, the fearful and unquenchable river of fire and the unsleeping worm await the burning fever of my flesh. But deliver me from them by your prayers.

I am in the grip of terror and I quail before

the assaults of the foe, loving Lady; for before the end the Corrupter grinds his teeth at me, seizing me as a prisoner stripped bare of virtues.

Ode 7. An Angel made the furnace.

The Crafty One has heated the flame of my passions sevenfold and with adulteries of the heart has slain me utterly. But with the streams of my tears water me, Mother of God, and do not reject me.

Sovereign Lady, do not let me be drowned in the mire of my offences; for the most evil foe, seeing me in despair, loving Lady, laughs at me. But with your mighty hand raise me up again.

My wretched and unfeeling soul, fearful is the judgment and terrifying and unending the punishment; but none the less fall down now before the Mother of your Judge and God, and why did you despair of yourself?

All my hope, Sovereign Lady, I the prodigal have placed in you. Do not turn your face away from me; do not shut your compassionate heart against me, Mother of God, but help me.

Wretch that I am, I have become dark by the multitude of my numberless evils, and changed for the worse in the eye and the mind of my soul. Bring me swiftly therefore with the beams of your light to the sweetness of dispassion.

Ode 8. From the flame you made dew well up.

Virgin Mother, who gave birth to God, one of the Trinity, and carried him in your arms, quench the fiercely flaming furnace of the passions and wash my soul with streams of tears.

I tremble at death's coming, O all-pure, and do not wholly fear that judgment; while I do not wholly cease from doing

evils. Take pity and save me by your prayers before the end.

Grant me never silent groans and a fount of tears, Sovereign Lady, that I may wash away my many faults and incurable wounds, so that I may reach eternal life.

I have declared to you the multitudes of my evils, for no one else in the world has angered God, your Son and Lord, as I, Sovereign Lady. Reconcile me to him speedily by your prayers.

Master, compassionate by nature, do not stand me with the condemned at the hour of judgment, but at the prayers of your Mother, have mercy and place me with the sheep at your right hand.

Ode 9. It is impossible for humans to see God.

See, I approach you, O all-pure, with great fear and love, for I, your servant, know the strength of your fervent prayer. For the supplication of a Mother, O all-blessed, has great strength with her Son. For he is moved by compassion.

Take with you the Choirs of Archangels and the multitude of the hosts on high, the Forerunner, the companies of Apostles, the Prophets, Martyrs and Ascetics, and Martyr Bishops, and make intercession for me, pure Virgin, to God.

May I find your help, pure Virgin, both now and at the moment when my spirit departs. Speedily rescue me from the demons and deliver me from their tyranny, O all-immaculate, and do not let me, loving Lady, be handed over to them.

I await a compassionate Judge who loves mankind, your Son, pure Virgin. Do not disdain me, but make him merciful to me, to stand me then at the right hand of his most pure tribunal, O all-praised; for in you have I hoped.

Principalities, Archangels, Dominions and Seraphim, Powers, Authorities and Angels, Thrones with the many-eyed Cherubim as they and we now honor your Offspring, Virgin Mother, we all devoutly glorify you.

Then:

It is truly right to called you blessed, who gave birth to God, ever blessed and most pure and Mother of our God. Greater in honour than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, without corruption you gave birth to God the Word; truly the Mother of God we magnify you.

And at once the Gospel according to Mark [11:22-26]

The Lord said: Have faith in God, for Amen I say to you, if anyone tells this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea', and does not doubt in their heart, but believes that it will happen, it will be done for them. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you are receiving it, and it will be yours. Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your offences. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your offences.

Then:

Have mercy on us, O God, according to your great mercy, we pray you, hear and have mercy.

Also we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, visitation, pardon and forgiveness for the servant of God *N*.

And that he/she may be pardoned every offence, both voluntary and involuntary.

For you, O God, are merciful and love mankind, and to you we give glory, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now

and for ever, and to the ages of ages.

Amen.

And this Prayer of our venerable Father
John of Damascus.

Let us pray to the Lord.

Master, Lord Jesus Christ our God, who alone have authority to forgive sins, as you are good and love humankind, overlook all the offences of your servant N., both in knowledge and in ignorance, voluntary and involuntary, in deed and word and by thought, and count him/her worthy to partake of your divine, holy, immaculate and immortal Mysteries; not for burdensome misery and punishment and increase of sins, but for sanctification, illumination, purification, support, a pledge of eternal life and your heavenly Kingdom; for a wall and help and a warding off of every foe, for the wiping away his/her offences and for the glory of your might. At the prayers of our most holy Lady, Mother of God, of the honored, heavenly, spiritual, immaterial, bodiless Powers and of all the Saints, who have been well-pleasing to you from every age. Amen.

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PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

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 whole-heartedly?
- 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.

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The Sacrament Of Confession (Index)

SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

Perhaps the most misunderstood sacrament of the Christian Church is confession (or repentance). How did it originate? What role does a priest play? Is there a special procedure for confession? The Holy Scriptures hold answers to these questions.

God's Word promises "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The faithful are to bring their sins to God in repentance and receive cleansing and forgiveness.

The early Christians would stand and confess their sins to God in the presence of the whole congregation. Jesus encouraged His followers to walk in the light together, to confront problems corporately, to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17). Thus James writes, "Confess your trespasses to one another" (James 5:16). But as time went on and the Church grew in numbers, strangers came to visit and public confession became more difficult. Out of mercy, priests began to witness confessions of sin privately on behalf of the Church.

Jesus, giving His disciples the authority to forgive sin, said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23; c.f. Matt. 16:19, 18:17-19). From the beginning, Christians understood that the grace of ordination endowed the shepherd of the flock with the discernment and compassion to speak the words of remission, on behalf of Christ, regarding the sins of those who confess and turn from sin. For God has promised the removing of sin from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). St. John Chrysostom says, "The priests decree below, God confirms above, and the Master agrees with the opinion of His

slaves".

"You did not choose Me," Jesus told the Twelve, "but I chose you and appointed [ordained] you." (John 15:16). To these same disciples Jesus promised, "It is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11). Whom God calls, He equips. Paul writes to Timothy, "Stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Tim. 1:6). It is the grace of the Holy Spirit which enables the priest to serve God and the people. Priests are only the visible instrument of God's mercy at the performance of the Mystery, which is performed invisibly through them by God Himself. It is God (the Holy Triune) who forgives our sins.

Thus the Church has encouraged her faithful: If you know you have committed a specific sin, do not hide it but confess it before coming to the Holy Eucharist. St. Paul wrote, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28), and "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31).

King David learned a lesson regarding his sin which is recorded for our benefit. For about a year, he had hidden his sins of adultery with Bathsheda and the murder of her husband (2 Sam. 11:1-12:13). Then, confronted by Nathan the prophet, David repented from his heart and confessed his sin in a psalm which is used for general confession to this day (Ps. 51). The joy of salvation was restored to him.

People ask, "Can't I confess to God privately?" Certainly, though there is no clear biblical basis for it. Even general confession occurs in the Church. In His mercy, God provides the sacrament of confession (more properly called the sacrament of repentance) to give us deliverance from sin and from what

psychologists call denial. It is easy to pray in isolation, yet never come clean. It is far more effective to confess aloud to God before a priest, and benefit from his guidance and help.

It is essential to remember that the remission of sins in the Sacrament is an act of mercy. It is given for our spiritual profit, "for edification, and not for destruction" (2 Cor. 10:8).

Thus we come before the holy icon of Christ, to whom we confess, and are guided by the priest, our spiritual father, in a cleansing inventory of our lives. When we tell God all, naming our sins and failures, we hear those glorious words of freedom which announces Christ's promise of forgiveness of all our sins. We resolve to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

(Reference: The Orthodox Study Bible, p 571. Copyright © 1993 by St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy, Nelson ISBN 0-8407-8391-4)

A PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

God does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn away from his sins and live. In the Holy Sacrament of Penance we have the means whereby we may obtain forgiveness of our sins, and be restored to the favor of God, our heavenly Father.

In order that you may make a good confession it is necessary for you to prepare yourself carefully. Ask God to give you Grace to make a thorough examination of your conscience, courage to make a sincere and complete confession, and strength to amend your way of life in the days to come.

Begin your examination with the time of your last Confession; try to recall whether you omitted anything through carelessness or lapse of memory, or from fear of embarrassment. Examine yourself with the assistance of the form of self-examination according to the Ten Commandments of God which follows.

It is most necessary that you be truly sorry for the sins which you have committed, and that you firmly purpose amendment of your manner of living.

Self examination based on the Ten Commandments

First Commandment

Have I believed in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? Have I failed to trust in God and His mercy? Have I complained against God in adversity? Have I been thankful for God's blessings? Have I doubted the Christian faith and the teachings of the Church? Have I tried to serve God and keep His Commandments? Have I given way to superstition? Have I frequented the religious meetings of

heretics and schismatics? Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or persecution? Have I failed to pray to God faithfully? Have I put myself before God?

Second Commandment

Have I made an idol of any person or thing? Have I given to anyone or anything the worship that is due to God alone? Have I set before myself the Holy life of Jesus and tried to imitate Him? Have I read the Holy Scriptures regularly? Have I been irreverent during Church Services, let my attention wander, or been insincere? Have I neglected to receive Holy Communion regularly or without due preparation?

Third Commandment

Have I profaned the Holy name of God in any way? Have I cursed anyone or anything, or sworn a false oath? Have I failed to give proper reverence to holy persons and things? Have I had due respect for the clergy of the Church or hindered them in performing God's work? Have I broken any solemn vow or promise? Have I entered into any unlawful contract or made an unlawful promise?

Fourth Commandment

Have I stayed away from Church on Sundays or prevented others from going? Have I done unnecessary work on Sundays? Have I spent the day in unwholesome fashion or profaned it by improper conduct? If I could not go to Church because of illness or other grave cause, have I prayed at home? Have I caused anyone else to profane the Lord's Day? Have I kept the Fasts and Festivals prescribed by the Church?

Fifth Commandment

Have I respected my parents and been obedient to them? Have I been guilty of deception, or caused them pain by my

words or actions? Have I neglected them or failed to help them? Have I done my duty towards my family? Have I been wanting in love or kindness towards my husband (or wife), or harmed him (or her) in any way? Have I set my children a good example and tried to bring them up properly? Have I corrected their faults with patience and not with anger? Have I over-indulged or spoiled them? Have I neglected my God-children and failed in my obligations towards them. Have I worked for my employers honestly and diligently? Have I treated fairly all those who have worked for me? Have I honored God as my Heavenly Father by treating others as my brothers, and have I honored the Church as my spiritual Mother by honoring and practicing my religion in accordance with her teachings?

Sixth Commandment

Have I caused the injury or death of any one, or wished that I were dead? Have I done anything to shorten my own life or that of someone else by injuring health, or through evil and intemperate living? Have I given way to anger, or harmed others with words or actions? Have I defamed others who needed help, or failed to stand up for those unjustly treated? Have I been cruel to anyone? Have I mistreated animals or destroyed any life unnecessarily? Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against them?

Seventh Commandment

Have I given way to impure thoughts, words, or deeds? Have I committed any unworthy actions alone or with others? Have I degraded myself in any way, or forgotten human dignity? Have I read immoral books or magazines, or delighted in obscenity of any kind? Have I associated with bad companions or frequented unsavory places? Have I eaten or drunk or

smoked too much? Have I been lazy, idle, or wasted my time? Have I led others to commit sinful acts? Have I been unfaithful to any trust confided in me?

Eighth Commandment

Have I stolen anything or wished to do so? Have I kept anything that did not belong to me? Have I tried honestly to find owners of lost articles I have found? Have I cheated anyone? Have I paid my debts? Have I lived within my income, and not wastefully and extravagantly? Have I given to charitable causes in proportion to my means? Have I been honest and upright?

Ninth Commandment

Have I told lies, or added to or subtracted from the truth? Have I made careless statements or spoken evil of anyone? Have I told any secrets entrusted to me, or betrayed anyone? Have I gossiped about anyone or harmed their reputation? Have I concealed the truth, assisted in carrying out a lie, or pretended to commit a sin of which I was not guilty? Have I tried to see the good in others rather than their shortcomings?

Tenth Commandment

Have I envied anything good that has come to others? Have I been jealous of another's good fortune? Have I wished for anything that was another's? Have I damaged or destroyed the property of others? Have I wished for things God has not given me, or been discontented with my lot? Have I been stingy? Have I held back anything due another? Have I hoped for the downfall of anyone so that I might gain by it? Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone. Have I expected God to give me that which I would refuse one of my fellow men?

CONFESSION

BY FR. DIMITRI TSAKAS

Confession is an important and integral aspect of Christian life. Its foundation is Scriptural and its practice goes back to Apostolic times. The ongoing forgiveness of sins in the Church rests in Him that makes all things possible in the Church: the Holy Spirit sent by Christ from the Father to those who are His.

When Jesus sees the Apostles after His resurrection, He breathes on them and says, "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). The presence and the power of Christ's forgiveness remains in the Church in which all of His gifts reside.

Jesus tells His disciples to hear the sins of the people and impart His forgiveness, just like at the Last Supper He tells them to perform what we know as the Eucharist and Holy Communion. Confession was a public part of Christian life in the early Church. In his epistle, James teaches his readers to "confess to one another" (James 5:16). In fact, in the early Christian Church, confession was public. Secret and private confession (at home by oneself) is a modern idea completely unknown in the Bible and throughout Christian history. A Confession which is not made before God, humanity and creation, is no confession at all. This is the Orthodox Faith.

In the early Church, confession was made to the whole congregation. Afterwards the priest read a prayer over the person which manifested God's forgiveness. With time this practice became difficult to keep up because of growth in Church membership. Confession to the whole congregation ceased by the fourth century and the priest came to represent the whole congregation

in Confession.

The priest would hear the person's sins, offer guidance and encouragement and then pray over the person. This is how confession is still practiced today. Confession is totally based on the Bible and Holy Tradition. Any person who is seriously trying to live an Orthodox Christian life will go to Confession regularly. They will choose a priest they feel comfortable with and make time to confess their sins and seek guidance in their spiritual life. The priest is not a judge, but a fatherly friend. He cannot forgive sins, only God does that, but Christ has given him the authority to hear sins and pray over the person for forgiveness. The priest helps our confessions to be more reflective, less rationalized and more honest, He can act as a mirror for us which feeds back things we would be more likely to avoid on our own. The priest may guide us into a deeper prayer life and Scripture reading. He slowly becomes what the Orthodox call, our Spiritual Father, nurturing us with the words of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in our Journey to the Father.

If you haven't been to confession, then pray for guidance, see a priest and make some time to get together. Ask him how you should prepare and then make the commitment to seek regular confession in a spirit of sincere repentance and faith in God. The rewards to your life will be immense.

REASONS FOR INNER DISCORD

**BY ARCHIMANDRITE ALEXANDER
(MILEANT)**

THE GREATEST PARADOX OF OUR LIFE is that while we all instinctively strive for happiness, most of the time we are unhappy and dissatisfied even when no danger threatens us. Philosophy is helpless in satisfactorily clarifying the reason for this paradox. The Christian faith, however, explains that the reason for our dissatisfaction and dark feelings lies within ourselves. It results from our sinfulness - not only from our personal sins but also from our very nature that is marred by the primordial sin. Sinful corruption is the main source of our grief and suffering.

Sin is a spiritual sickness that grows and expands with time like cancerous cells. Left unchecked, sin gains in strength and enslaves its victim, and in doing so, it taints his mind, weakens his will towards good, permeates him with uneasiness and bitterness, arouses in him passionate feelings and evil thoughts and compels him to sin again and again.

We all are, to a greater or lesser degree, damaged by sin, although we often fail to recognize the full extent of our inner sickness. The main reason that the Lord Jesus Christ came to our world was to eradicate in us the roots of sin and return to us spiritual health and with it eternal bliss. However, because sin is so intimately interwoven with our mind and will, with our subconscious, it cannot be removed instantly or by external means. It is essential that we become actively involved with its extermination, but even our own efforts are not enough to accomplish total eradication of sin. Only the grace of Christ can give us complete spiritual recovery.

Indeed, this is the essence of the great advantage of the Christian faith. In

contrast to other religions and philosophical teachings that are powerless in spiritual warfare, only the Christian faith has all the necessary resources and can strengthen us to overcome sin and achieve moral perfection.

The first turning point of spiritual healing is in the Sacrament of Baptism. Here the believer is cleansed from all sins and is spiritually reborn for righteous living. However, the predisposition towards sin, which is interwoven with his free will, is not completely eliminated. As time passes, an individual falls into sin due to carefree ways, inexperience, and different temptations. Supposedly eliminated, sin, similar to cancerous cells left after surgery, begins to propagate once again, gaining strength and striving to totally control the individual's will. The individual once again becomes spiritually sick and consequently unhappy and bitter.

In this difficult and dogged battle with sin, the Sacraments of Confession and Communion are powerful tools available to us. In the Sacrament of Confession the penitent Christian, in the presence of the spiritual confessor, opens to God his darkened and sick heart and allows the heavenly light to enter, cleanse and heal it. In Confession, as in Baptism, the great rebirthing power of the crucified Son of God is concealed. This is the reason that after this Sacrament, the truly penitent person feels cleansed and renewed, as a newly baptized infant. He obtains new strength to battle the evil within himself and to restart a righteous life.

To help our reader gain the most benefit from Confession, we will explain here the meaning and strength of this Sacrament and provide some aids in preparation for confession and prayers read during this Sacrament.

LOOKING INTO ONESELF

IN OBSERVING THE COURSE OF OUR FEELINGS and thoughts, we become quickly convinced that within us constantly battle two entities: one good and one evil. Real Christian life begins only after we consciously elect the good and reject the evil. When we disregard our spiritual growth, passively succumbing to our desires and tendencies, whatever they may be, not making any evaluation of them, we are not yet living a Christian life. Only when we become painfully aware of our shortcomings, when we judge ourselves in the light of the Gospel and decide to improve our moral condition, only then can we begin to ascend on the path to salvation. The Gospel has many vivid examples of the sudden change in people who decided to turn to God. One of them is illustrated by the parable about the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:4-14). The Pharisee is an example of self deception. He frequents the temple and observes the established religious rituals. Yet it cannot be said of him that he is a pious person, because he is quite content with himself, full of pride, and despises others whom he considers not so religious. He boasts of his righteousness because he fails to see his own moral deficiencies - lack of compassion and love, selfishness and formalism - to mention a few. The Publican, on the other hand, illustrates a sinful person who realizes his poor moral condition and repents. He judges only himself and wants to become a better person. He asks God only for mercy and guidance, and God accepts his prayer while He rejects the boasting of the Pharisee. Jesus Christ makes the repentant Publican an example for us so that we thoroughly examine our hearts and make every effort to correct our moral condition! Another genuine repentance is seen in St.

Mary of Egypt. Having been a reckless and passionate sinner from her youth, after visiting the Resurrection church in Jerusalem she repented deeply, went to the desert and after living there the rest of her life she became one of the greatest saints. (She died at the beginning of the 6th century.) The Church observes her memory in the 5th week of Lent as an example of true repentance.

Often a person, even when considering himself a Christian, pays no attention to his shortcomings and for many years lives unconcerned with any moral improvement. Then suddenly, sometimes after a personal tragedy and sometimes without any apparent reason, his spiritual eyes open, and he decides to turn to God. He becomes a completely different person. In many cases, though, this turning to God happens slowly after much hesitation and repeated falls.

Let us now verify whether the above conditions apply to us. Observe carefully your actions during the last several days, your feelings and intentions, words you said. Just yesterday, for example, you cruelly hurt someone with harsh words, or with an insulting suspicion, or by a caustic sneer. It has been three days now that you have been disturbed by some dirty, base desire, and you not only did not drive away this sinful desire, but even dwelt on and enjoyed it. Or you were given an opportunity to do something good for somebody, but you felt that this would disrupt your peace and comfort, so you failed to do it. If you were observant and conscientious, you would realize that passions comprise a great deal of your existence, that your whole life is like a large braid made of small and great sins: unkind thoughts, feelings, words and deeds. If we pay no attention to the moral content of our life or think that it is quite

normal, we still are pagans in our mentality. We will have no reason to try to change. Our true spiritual life will begin only after we say decisively, "No, I do not want to slide down any more! I want to become a true Christian!"

But as soon as you choose the path to righteousness, you will discover that the battle against bad habits and temptations is extremely difficult, painful and exhausting. You will see how frequently impure thoughts, feelings and desires, often against your own will, take hold of you and push you toward sinful actions. In many cases, only some time after you have uttered a cruel or offensive word or have perpetrated an unkind deed, you begin to realize that you should not have spoken so or have done that. But before you have actually sinned, you did not understand where your thoughts and feelings were pushing you. So over and over again we fall into actions that we later regret. This is the way we start to learn the great truth of the words of the Apostle Paul: "For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Romans 7:15). Where do we find help, and how can we be delivered from our inner conflicts? Some people share their difficulties with someone in the family or a close friend; some visit a psychiatrist. But these are only partial and often ineffective solutions. Only after you experience the total difficulty of spiritual warfare and the ineffectiveness of human means do you begin to realize how effective is the regenerating power of Divine Grace.

A prolific pre-revolutionary spiritual writer, Saint Theophane the Recluse, relates the following story: "There was a youth who was greatly saddened because of his numerous sins. Once in grief he fell asleep. And there, in his dream, as if out of the sky, he saw coming down an Angel.

The heavenly visitor slit open his chest with a knife, took out his heart, cut it into pieces, and removed from it all the spoiled and corrupt parts. Then he carefully replaced the heart in its original spot, and finally healed the wound as well. The youth awakened and felt cleansed of all his sins. He was so happy that God had accepted his repentance in such a sudden and unexpected way and relieved him from this unbearable burden. In truth, wouldn't it be good," asks Bishop Theophane, "if we could experience a similar healing from a light-bearing Angel!" And such an Angel is available to us. It resides in the healing Grace of our Redeemer which operates through repentance in the Sacrament of Confession!

We know that Jesus Christ brought to earth the holy life. Through the Holy Sacraments of the Church this life is transmitted to all of us. Confession or Repentance is one such sacrament. It is not just a ritual or a venerable old tradition but is an extremely powerful tool for moral healing and correction. It responds to one of the most essential demands of our damaged nature. To decline Confession is the same as suffering from some physical ailment and knowing the right medication but, due to laziness, not using it and thereby letting the illness run rampant.

POWER OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

FOLLOWING THE TEACHING OF OUR SAVIOR and His Apostles, we believe that the Sacrament of Repentance cleanses the soul of the repentant Christian and heals his spiritual ills so that after the absolution of his sins, he once more becomes innocent and sanctified, as he was after Baptism. Confession reinstates the living ties between the Christian and the Body of Christ, i.e. the Church. The power of this

Sacrament comes from the blood of the Lamb of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who because of his infinite love and compassion toward us took upon Himself all our sins, nailed them to the cross and suffered what we had to suffer as transgressors of God's commandments. Freed from the burden of sins, the Christian once again rises to spiritual life and gains strength to strive for moral perfection.

To receive the most from the Sacrament of Repentance, a person must prepare for it with prayer, reading of Scripture and introspection. Fasting is an old and a helpful tool for repentance and spiritual renewal.

From the external aspect, the Sacrament of Repentance consists of two parts: a) the verbal confession of all sins done by the repentant, and b) the prayer of absolution administered by the pastor-confessor. The loud articulation of one's sins, i.e. confession, is an indispensable factor of true repentance because it forces the penitent to overcome pride, which is the source of most of our spiritual ills. Besides, the acknowledgment of one's faults and bad habits draws a person closer to overcoming them. This is a well known psychological fact. Many non-religious people go to psychiatrists and receive help just by openly discussing their inner difficulties. The Sacrament of Confession, beyond the psychological, has a sacramental aspect, because through it operates the healing power of the Grace of Jesus Christ.

Repentance, to be effective, should not be limited just to awareness of one's sinfulness or to a cold admission of unworthiness. It should be accompanied with a deep feeling of regret and a sincere desire to become a different person. It requires the decision to battle with one's evil inclinations and the will to correct one's way of life. The

penitent opens his soul to God, the true and loving Physician, and asks for mercy and help in the battle with bad tendencies. Such heartfelt contrition is necessary so that the effectiveness of the Sacrament will extend not only to the removal of committed sins but also to bring the Divine remedy into the receptive soul and strengthen it against future temptations.

Upon finishing his confession the penitent kneels before the cross and the gospel, and the priest-confessor places the stole upon his head and prays for the absolution of sins. The priest requests the heavenly Father not to turn away from the repentant as He did not turn away from the prodigal son but to again make him a new creature and a worthy member of His Divine Kingdom. At this time the invisible Grace of God descends upon the Christian and renews within him the spirit of righteousness.

Jesus Christ spoke twice of the Sacrament of Repentance. The first time He said to the Apostle Peter that He "will give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven so that whatever he will bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever he will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Some time later He gave the authority to forgive and to retain sins to all the apostles. This was done in conjunction with their task to resolve problems among the members of the Church: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the Church. But if he refuses even to hear the Church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever

you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:15-18). The Lord solemnly established the Sacrament of Confession soon after His Resurrection. He appeared to His disciples and said to them, "Peace unto you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21-23). The apostles transmitted this power to absolve and to retain sins to their disciples - bishops and priests - who were to continue their task of saving human souls.

St. John Chrysostom, commenting on the authority given to the pastors of the Church "to bind and loose," wrote, "What the priests determine on earth, God affirms on high in Heaven. Here the Master conciliates with the opinion of His servants." However, the priest-confessor does not absolve sins by his own power, and there is nothing mechanical in the prayers of absolution. The priest-confessor is only a witness of one's repentance and a mediator of Divine Grace. God appointed him to be an instrument of His mercy. Ultimately it is up to the repentant to make his soul receptive to the healing Grace.

By its wide magnitude and power, the invisible work of Grace in the Sacrament of Repentance covers all of man's lawlessness. There is no sin which is beyond forgiveness. What is crucial here is to have sincere regret for committed sins and to decide to become a better Christian. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). New Testament Scriptures are full of examples of God's mercy to sinners. Great was the Apostle Peter's sin of denial, but when he

repented, Jesus forgave him and reinstated him as an Apostle. After the Pentecost, when the Apostle Peter started to preach the Gospel, he called to repentance even those Jews who crucified the Messiah (Acts 2:38), and later he called to repentance Simon, who was a sorcerer and at the end became a heretic (Acts 8:22). Saint Paul, before becoming an apostle, hated the Christian faith, persecuted the Church and took part in the death of the first martyr, the deacon Stephen. Later he was forgiven by God and received from Him abundant grace. Remembering God's infinite mercy, St. Paul once absolved a person guilty of incest, subjecting him first to temporary excommunication (2 Corinthians 2:7).

With all this one should remember that absolution of sins in the Sacrament of Confession is an act of mercy, not of thoughtless pity. It is given for the spiritual benefit of man "for edification and not for your destruction" (2 Corinthians 10:8). This fact places a great responsibility on the priests when they perform this Sacrament.

The Holy Scripture mentions instances or conditions in which sins are not forgiven. Specifically, it mentions that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this world nor the next (Matthew 12:31-32). In addition it speaks of especially devastating "mortal sins." "All wrongdoing is sin," explains the Apostle John, "but there is a sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that [person who commits such mortal sin]" (John 5:16). The Apostle Paul teaches that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again through repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and

put Him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6). All these warnings refer to people with a cynical attitude toward God; they either reject His mercy or they don't want to abandon their sinful habits.

In all cases the reason for unforgiveness comes not from any limitations of the Sacrament of Confession but from the unrepentance of the sinner. Indeed, in the case of speaking offensive words against the Holy Spirit, how can any sins be forgiven when His mercy is ridiculed and rejected? On the other hand we must believe that even the sin of blasphemy can be forgiven when it is followed by a true repentance. St. John Chrysostom says the following about this: "For even this guilt [blasphemy against the Holy Spirit] was forgiven to many repentant Jews. Many of them who blasphemed against the Holy Spirit [during Jesus Christ's preaching] later believed, became Christians and everything was forgiven to them" (Sermon on the Gospel of Matthew). The Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787 A.D. in the city of Nicea, near Constantinople) said the following about mortal sins: "A mortal sin is the one which remains unrepented ... These [sinners] will have no share with the Lord, unless they humble themselves and turn away from their transgressions."

The Gospel teaches that all must be allowed to repent, "I say to you that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). These words include Christians who have fallen into sin.

Some contemporary Christians mistakenly believe that their faith alone makes them holy and free of sin and that for this reason there is no necessity to repent of anything. Referring to these self-satisfied "righteous" ones, the Apostle James writes, "For we all

stumble in many things" (James 3:2). The Apostle John teaches that even Christians, not only pagans, need to cleanse their conscience: "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. If we confess our sins, He [Jesus Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9-10).

The Holy Fathers of the Church explain that the absence of a penitent attitude occurs in people not because they are actually sinless but because of their spiritual hardening. Indeed, the brighter the light, the clearer one detects the dust and other defects on objects. Similarly, the closer man approaches God, the clearer he sees his shortcomings and the humbler he becomes. In the lives of saints we see that the more they succeeded in Christian virtues, the more unworthy they felt about themselves. Even saints who performed great miracles repented with grieving and tears of their insignificant faults and considered themselves unworthy.

AID TO REPENTANCE

A SPIRITUAL LEAFLET FROM MOUNT Athos gives the following directive: "Intending to confess, before going to the priest, seclude yourself, beloved brother, even if for an hour. Put aside all secular matters, collect your thoughts and thoroughly examine your conscience: How did you sin in thought, word or deed? In what did you offend God and your neighbor? Try to remember all the sinful events and their details. After this pray, grieve and wash your conscience with tears of repentance. Feeling relief in your heart, make a firm resolve to fight your bad habits and to become a better Christian. After preparing yourself in this way, go to the priest-confessor believing that God will forgive you --- for He has never rejected a contrite and humble heart.

When you come to the priest, confess without shame, do not hide anything, do not try to 'save face.' For many of us have become accustomed to putting up a front for others, and try to appear better than we really are. Being used to hypocrisy, we are often ashamed to honestly admit our faults, omitting some and leaving others incomplete. Remember, my brother, that the Holy Spirit says in the Scripture: 'Who hides his sin receives no benefit.' So speak openly without self-justification and without blaming others. If someone offended you, make peace with him and forgive him with all your heart, according to the words of the Lord: 'If you forgive others then God the Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you do not forgive those who sin against you, then the Father will not forgive you your sins.' Amen."

The following prayers of repentance with enumeration of sins can help an individual to repent at home and to come to church prepared for Confession:

I bring to You, my merciful Lord, the heavy burden of my innumerable transgressions, which I have committed from my very youth and up till today.

Mental and sensual sins: I have sinned, my Lord, by being insensitive towards Your mercies, by neglecting Your commandments and by being ungrateful. I have sinned by being indifferent towards Your Truth, by having doubts about faith, by being superstitious and curious about unorthodox teachings. I have sinned by thirst for pleasure, love for money and luxury items, by passionate interest in another person and sinful thoughts. I have sinned by spiritual weakness, vanity, suspicion, jealousy, envy, irritability and anger. I have sinned by excessive sadness, depression and despair. I have sinned by contempt for people, gloating over misfortunes others, self-reliance, pride and

blasphemous thoughts. Forgive me, O Lord, and help me to become a better Christian.

Sins of the tongue: I have sinned, my Lord, by idle talk, unnecessary laughter, speaking in the church and by using Your Holy Name in vain. I have sinned by criticizing of others, by using rude words, yelling, and by making sarcastic comments. I have sinned by cursing people and wishing them evil, by mockery and insults. I have sinned by telling indecent jokes, bragging and breaking my promises. I have sinned by complaining, irreverent conversations and damning. I have sinned by spreading unkind rumors, gossiping, lying, slandering and denunciation. Forgive me, O Lord, and help me to become a better Christian.

Sins through deeds: I have sinned, my Lord, by not loving You, my Creator and Benefactor, with all my heart and all the time as I should. I have sinned, by being selfish, lazy and by wasting time. I have sinned by careless and disoriented prayer, by missing church services and coming late to church. I have sinned by being disrespectful with my parents, by refusing to help them and to do what they said, by disobedience and stubbornness. I have sinned by negligence towards family needs and by failing to instruct my children in the Christian faith. I have sinned by self centeredness, over-preoccupation with my career and success in life, greediness, stinginess and by failing to help the needy. I have sinned by over-eating, over-indulgence, breaking fasts, smoking, abusing alcohol, using stimulants, squandering resources and by gambling. Forgive me, O Lord, and help me to become a better Christian.

I have sinned, my Lord, by looking at someone with lust, looking at indecent films or magazines, listening to music

which evokes crude or lustful desires, listening to indecent jokes and stories. I have sinned by wasting too much time in front of a TV, by watching scenes of violence and sin. I have sinned by being obsessed with my appearance, by behaving in a tempting matter, masturbation, lasciviousness, sexual perversions, adultery, and other corporal sins which are too shameful to say aloud. I have sinned by losing my temper, displaying anger, by crudeness, rude treatment of close ones, by non-reconciliation and revenge. I have sinned by hypocrisy, insolence, impertinence and careless handling of sacred objects. I have sinned by being cruel, deceitful, stealing, and taking bribery. I have sinned by consenting to abortion, having interest in occult subjects, astrological forecasts and by visiting fortune tellers.

Dear brother or sister in Christ, never despair! Remember that there is no sin which is beyond God's mercy. For the Lord Himself promised through His prophet, "Though your sins may be like scarlet, I shall whiten them as snow; Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

NOTES AND CONCLUSION

THUS, IN THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION God gave us a powerful tool to battle sin. In preparing for our confession of sins, we learn to watch over our inner life more carefully, to realize our weak points and the cunning methods of our tempter, the devil. Sincere confession before a priest helps us combat our pride and thus to become free from the bonds of passion with which the devil wants to ensnare us.

After a deep repentance and the Divine cleansing that follows it, a Christian feels as if a heavy stone was removed from his

heart. He finds himself renewed and enlightened, willing to love God and other people. This feeling should be the most obvious proof of the great spiritual power of the Sacrament of Confession. For this reason let us cherish this Divine tool of spiritual healing and ask God to give us wisdom and willingness to lead the remaining days of our life in righteousness, so that all our thoughts, words and deeds will be directed toward His glory and our salvation. Amen.

OTHER POINTS ON CONFESSION:

"Epitimia" or penance is to be understood as an interdiction which, according to Church canons, the priest as a spiritual physician has to apply in certain cases in order to treat the moral diseases of his spiritual children. For example he might impose a fasting beyond that which others do, some additional prayers of repentance, performing of a certain amount of prostrations, works of mercy, reading of the Holy Scripture and other righteous exercises.

Special penance or epitimia imposed sometimes by the priest-confessor is not a punishment but represents an action for correction or pedagogical healing. The purpose is to deepen contrition for sinning and to support the will for correction. The Apostle Paul said, "For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). One of the canons of the Sixth Ecumenical Council declares: "Receiving from God the power to bind and loose, the priest must evaluate the nature of sin and preparedness of the repentant, and thus utilize appropriate means of healing. But if not applying appropriate means to this or the other, salvation will not be available to the sinner. For all sins are not similar, but different and specific, and represent many

aspects of harm from which evil develops and disperses further, unless it is stopped by the healing power."

In the ancient Church Confession was accomplished somewhat differently from the contemporary practice. At that time Christians had Communion every Sunday or in any case often, so that Confession was not necessary each time. Christians came to Confession as needed, when they had committed a serious sin if their behavior was a temptation to other Christians. Usually the Confession of sins was done aloud before the priest and the congregation as well. At present time in the Greek Orthodox Church, Confession is not done before each communion and is separate from the Liturgy. Confession is heard at a time assigned by the priest and in a place specifically designated for this purpose, a confessional. Closer to our times the Russian St. John of Kronstadt, having no opportunity to hear individual confessions, often performed communal Confession, in which thousands of people participated. During this Sacrament many confessed their sins aloud and repented in front of the whole congregation. These communal confessions had a very beneficial effect on those who took part in them.

In whatever outward form the Confession is performed, it is necessary to remember that it is a great Sacrament and requires our most serious and reverent attitude. Its purpose is to achieve beneficial healing of the soul. That is the reason that a quick Confession just before the presentation of the Chalice is not the proper attitude towards this Sacrament. It is imperative to appear for Confession in advance, and one must repent with heartfelt sorrow and faith in the power of the healing grace of God.

CONFESSION: FROM AN ATHONITE PAMPHLET

BY AN ATHONITE

Bless me, O Lord and my Saviour, to confess to Thee not only with words but with bitter tears as well. There is much to weep for...

My faith in Thee is shaken, O Lord! The thoughts of little faith and faithlessness crowd into my soul more often than not. Why? Of course, the spirit of the times is guilty, the people with whom I associate are at fault, but above all, I myself am guilty, in that I do not struggle with faithlessness and do not pray to Thee for help; I am incomparably more guilty if I become a scandal for others by deed, by word, or by a cold silence, whenever conversations concerned the faith. I am sinful in this, Lord, forgive and have mercy and grant me faith.

Love for my neighbor and even for my close relatives fails me. Their incessant requests for help, their forgetfulness of how much has been done for them already, arouse mutual discontent among us. But I am guilty above all in that I have the means to help them, but help them grudgingly. I am guilty in that I help them, not out of pure Christian motives, but out of self-love, out of a desire for thanks or praise. Forgive me, Lord, soften my heart and teach me to look not at how people act towards me but at how I act towards them. And if they act in a hostile way, remind me, O Lord, to pay them back with love and good, and to pray for them!

I am also sinful in that I seldom, very seldom, think about my sins. Not only during week days, but even when preparing for Confession I do not remember them, do not strive to bring them to mind for confession. General

phrases come to mind: "I'm not guilty of anything in particular, like everyone else." O Lord, it were as if I didn't know what sin is before Thee - that every vain word and the very desire in the heart is an abomination before Thee. And how many words and desires come each day, not to mention in a year! Thou alone, Lord, knowest them; do Thou grant me to behold my sins and be compassionate and forgive!

Moreover, I realize that my constant sin is the virtual absence of any struggle with evil within me. As soon as any excuse or suggestion appears, I already dive headfirst into the abyss of sin, and only after my fall do I ask myself: what have I done? A fruitless question, because it does not help me grow better. And if I feel sorrow at the same time, it comes from the fact that my self-love is wounded, and not from the awareness that I have offended Thee, O Lord!

I do not struggle with obvious evil, nor even with the most trifling and harmful habits. I do not control myself and do not even try. I have sinned; forgive me!

Furthermore, there is the sin of having a short temper. This passion rules over me, does not leave me at all. When I hear a sharp word, I do not reply with silence, but act like a pagan: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. An enmity arises from something insignificant and continues for days and weeks, and I do not think of reconciliation, but rather try to be, as it were, stronger, to get revenge at the first chance. I have sinned beyond reckoning, O Lord, be compassionate, forgive me and put my heart at peace!

Apart from these major sins, my entire life is a chain of sins. I do not value the time which Thou hast granted for the acquisition of eternal salvation. I often stand irreverently, pray mechanically,

judge others as to how they pray, and do not look after myself. At home I pray sometimes only with great effort and scattered thoughts, so that often I myself do not even hear my prayer, and I even omit my prayers sometimes. Such are my relations to Thee, O Lord, and I cannot say anything except: forgive and have mercy!

In my relations with others I sin with all my feelings - I sin with my tongue, by pronouncing false, profane, provocative and scandalous words; I sin with my eyes; I sin with my mind and heart. I judge others and harbor enmity often and for long periods of time. I sin not only against the soul but also against the body, taking food and drink without restraint. Accept, O Lover of mankind, my repentance, that I may approach Thy holy and life-giving Mysteries with peace for the forgiveness of sins, for the setting-aright of temporary life and the inheritance of life eternal. Amen

"I am unworthy to ask forgiveness, O Lord," Thus exclaimed once the great teacher of repentance, St. Ephraim the Syrian.

"How can one keep from falling into sin? How can one block the entrance to the passions?" St. Basil the Great asked St. Ephraim; and the answer was his tears alone.

Then what can I say before Thee, O Lord, I so great and habitual a sinner?

By the prayers of our holy Fathers Ephraim and Basil grant me, O Lord, repentance and tears! Help me to expel from myself, like deadly poison, my evil deeds, vain words, wicked thoughts. And if I forget to mention any sin, Thou knowest all, remind me, for I do not wish to hide anything. Thou commandest me: State your cause, that you may be justified (Is. 43:26), and I say: my sins are multiplied Lord, and multiply themselves without ceasing, and

there is no limit to them. I know and I remember, that even an impure thought is an abomination before Thee; and at the same time I not only think but even do that which grieves Thee. I know that I commit evil, and do not turn away from evil...

Thus, the beginning has not yet been made for my repentance, and the end is not in sight of my lack of concern over my sins. In truth, there is no end to the vile thoughts within me, the bursts of self-love, vanity, pride, judgments, bearing grudges and vengeance. I often argue, for no cause at all become angry, cruel, jealous, lazy, and blindly stubborn. I myself am of very little significance, but I think a great deal of myself. I do not want to honor those who are worthy, but demand honor for myself without any basis. I constantly lie and am angry at liars. I condemn slanderers and thieves, but I steal and slander. I corrupt myself with lustful thoughts and desires, but strictly judge others for lack of modesty. I do not endure jokes about myself, but I like to tease others, considering neither the person nor the place - even in church. Whoever speaks the truth about me, I consider my enemy. I do not want to bother myself with serving others, but if I am not served, I grow angry. I coldly refuse my neighbor who is in need, but when I myself am in need, I make my requests of him without end. I do not like to visit the sick, but when I am sick, I expect someone to care for me without my even asking.

O Lord, send the light of Thy heavenly light into the depths of my soul, that I may see my sins! My confession almost always ends with the merely external recounting of certain sins. O my God, If Thou be not merciful, if Thou grant me not help, I perish! Innumerable are the times my conscience has given promises to Thee to begin a better life, but I violated my

promises and live as before.

Without correcting myself, I am ashamed to show my face before another person, before whom I have not kept my word. How then can I stand before Thee, my God, without shame and self-abasement, when I have made promises so many times before Thy holy altar, before the angels and saints, and then did not keep my word? How low I am! How guilty I am! Thine, O Lord, is righteousness, and mine is a shameful presence (Dan.9:7). Only Thine infinite goodness can endure me. Thou didst not condemn me when I sinned; do not condemn me as I repent! Teach me how to call to mind and recount the sins of my former life, the careless sins of youth the sins of self-loving adulthood, the sins of day and night, sins against Thyself, O Lord my Saviour! How can I recount them in the few minutes when I stand in this holy place! I remember, Lord, that Thou didst attend to the brief words of the publican and the thief; I know that Thou wilt mercifully accept even the readiness to repent, and I pray Thee with all my soul, my Lord, accept my repentance, even in a daily confession of sins, according to the Prayer Book. I have far more sins than are mentioned in it, and have nothing with which to erase them.

I now offer only my striving towards Thee and the desire for good, but I myself do not have the strength to correct them myself. O Lord and Lover of mankind, Thou dost not drive away the sinner who comes to Thee, begging Thee for forgiveness. Even before he approaches the doors of Thy Mercy, Thou dost already open the way for him; even before he falls before Thee, Thou dost stretch forth Thy hand to him; even before he confesses his sins, Thou dost grant him forgiveness. Grant this to me, as I repent, grant this according to Thy great mercy; forgive all the evil that I have done, said

and thought. And by granting forgiveness, send me, O Lord, the strength that henceforth I might live according to Thy will and not offend Thee. Help me, and I will be saved; help me by receiving Thy Holy Mysteries. And for the worthy reception of them, speak to me the grace of mercy and forgiveness through the lips of the servant of Thine altar, speak by Thy Holy Spirit not heard by the ear but heard in the contrite heart and peaceful conscience. Amen.

JOHN OF KRONSTADT:

SAINT OF COMMUNION,

SAINT OF CONFESSION

BY BISHOP KALLISTOS OF DIOKLEIA

In the Epistle (1 John 4:7-11) and the Gospel (Luke 6:31-36) that are read in honor of St. John of Kronstadt, we notice the emphasis upon love. Our Holy Father St. John of Kronstadt, Wonderworker of all Russia, is an example to us of loving compassion, of pastoral love. In the Gospel in particular, the Lord emphasizes that our love should not simply be towards the people that we find congenial, not just towards those who show love towards us. It is to be far wider, we are to love our enemies, we are to love all our fellow humans, our love is to be without limits.

It is very clear that when St. John in his Epistle and our Savior in the Gospel speak about love they do not just mean something sentimental, something emotional, they mean something far more profound. The kind of love that they envisage, a universal all-embracing love, a love without limits, can only be a result of prayer, of ascetic effort. Such love is something for which we must struggle and suffer. Such love cannot be based just upon our emotional feelings, it has got to have a deeper basis.

What is this deeper basis? It is precisely the service that we are celebrating together now, the service of the Holy Eucharist, which is indeed a sacrament of mutual love. Our love has its foundation and inspiration in the Divine Liturgy. If we are to show more vividly the kind of love of which the apostle John and our Lord speak, that can only come first and foremost through a deeper experience of Holy Communion, through frequent Communion received after profound and

searching preparation.

St. John of Kronstadt was above all a Eucharistic Priest. He put The Holy Liturgy at the center of his life, and this was the source that enabled him to show such a dynamic and universal love. Our receiving of Holy Communion, while it is with the blessing of our spiritual father to be frequent, should never be mechanical or automatic. We are to prepare. And how should we do it? We are to prepare above all through the use of the sacrament of Confession.

Here there are as we know different disciplines. Some have been brought up to go to confession before every Communion, others have a blessing from their spiritual father to go more frequently to Communion without confession every time. But undoubtedly in our Eucharistic experience the sacrament of healing which we call Confession or the sacrament of repentance plays a central part.

Why do we need to go to confession? Is it not enough to confess our sins with sincerity in our private prayers each evening, will not God forgive us from the very moment that we confess our sins? Yes, as soon as we turn to God in true repentance He forgives us. God is always more ready to forgive than we to repent. Even the slightest turning of our heart will be blessed by God. Why then are we taught also to go to the sacrament of confession? I can think of three reasons certainly, perhaps you can think of more.

First of all there are no private sins, all sins affect our brothers and sisters in Christ. All of our sins, however secret, have an effect on the community. If I feel in my heart anger towards someone else, even if I do not show it by word or action, that evil disposition in my heart has a destructive effect on others around. Every

sin is a sin against the community; every sin however secret is a stumbling block for others and makes it harder for them to serve Christ.

In the early Church confession was public. After the fourth century, with the growth of the Christian community, that gave scandal and so confession assumed its present form, as an opening of the heart before the priest alone, under conditions of secrecy. But let us remember that during confession the priest is there, among other things, as the representative of the community, of the people. The fact that we confess not just to God, but in the presence of a fellow man, shows that we acknowledge the communal social dimension of all our sins. In confessing in his presence we are also asking forgiveness from the community. I heard a story once told about St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco. I have also heard it told of others, but the same thing can happen more than once.

Once before the Divine Liturgy he was hearing the confession of a man, and the man said: *"Yes I know that what I have done is a sin, I ask God's forgiveness, but my heart is like a stone, I do not feel any sorrow for my sin, it is all just in my brain."* So St. John said to him: *"Go out into the center of the church in front of the people and make a prostration before them and then come back to me."* As the man did this and knelt to ask forgiveness from the people before him, something broke inside his heart and it came alive again. Suddenly he felt real compunction for what he had done. He said *"now it is different,"* and the Archbishop gave him forgiveness.

That was the moment of turning for him because he acknowledged that his sin was a sin against the community and he asked their forgiveness. So in our confession let us first of all recall that dimension. We are

also asking for forgiveness of our brothers and sisters for what we have done. That is one reason to go to confession, because sin is social.

There is a second reason. **The spoken word, the uttered word has great force.** This applies in two ways. First of all we listen to the spoken word of the priest, the council that he gives, and it may be that what he says if written down and put in a book would not seem so striking. It may be that it wouldn't seem so remarkable.

But in confession the priest is praying and we are praying for the light of the Holy Spirit, and he is addressing those words under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to each one of us, to each penitent personally. The words which looked at in the abstract might seem obvious, common place, can prove words of fire when we realize that they are being said to me personally here and now under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I can remember at the Russian convent in London many years ago there was a priest, Fr. John, who didn't much like hearing confessions; he didn't much like giving sermons either. He was a person of few words and very humble, and didn't feel he really had the authority to offer counsel in confession, but he was blessed by the bishop to hear confessions so he did so. On one occasion a woman was telling him at immense length of her quarrels with her husband: *"I said this and he said this and I told him he was wrong and told him this"* and so it went on *"and I told him this and this."* When she had finally stopped all Fr. John did was to turn to her and say *"And did it help?"* and then he gave her absolution.

That came as a sudden revelation to her, the futility of the endless arguments she had with her husband, of her endless desire to prove that she was right and that

he was wrong. Suddenly she saw that there was no point to all this, it was quite simply unnecessary and she stopped from that moment.

So the uttered word can have great power and that applies also to what you or I utter when we make our confession. Yes we can confess our sins secretly in our evening prayers and we should do so, but when we come before the holy icons in church, when we have listened to the prayers and speak in the presence of the priest, when we have to say these things aloud, often then it becomes powerful, immediate, personally significant in a way it was not before.

The uttered word has great force and we find ourselves in confession, by God's grace, saying things that we never said in our private prayers. Suddenly we are able to understand more deeply and to express it more openly. Therein lies much of the grace of confession. The desert fathers say that a thought which is concealed has great power over us, but if we can find a way to bring it into the open and to speak of it, it loses its power. That is also what the modern psychiatrists tell us, but the desert fathers said it first! So, the uttered word that we bring in confession can have a sacramental force and a healing grace which will surprise us.

But then there is a third thing, not just what the priest does when he offers advice, not just what we do when we try to speak the truth in Christ. There is also what Christ does. **Confession is a mystery of the Church that confers sacramental grace, there is power within it, Divine power.** When the priest lays his hand upon our head in Confession, it is Christ who lays his hand upon us, Christ who forgives and that is certainly the deepest and most profound reason why we should go to Confession. When such grace and such healing is offered to us, who among

us dare refuse to accept such an opportunity.

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*From the September 1998 issue of *In Communion*, quarterly journal of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship*

CONFESSION WITH SAINT JOHN OF KRONSTADT



Those wanting to confess to Fr. John became so numerous that to satisfy this desire was physically impossible. When Fr. John served the cathedral was so packed that an apple couldn't find place to fall.

With absolute openness of heart, uninhibited by the crowd, people shouted out their sins without holding back even the worst of them. And they shouted

loudly, so that, if possible, Fr. John might hear them. A penitential lamentation the cathedral; the crowd was covered in sweat--not from heat but from emotion.

Literally everyone wept openly, without the slightest constraint, and together with their outcries and groanings, the souls of the people were wondrously cleansed, just as a piece of gold is purified in a fiery crucible.

Fr. John, aflame with prayer, stood on the ambo before an icon of the Saviour, entreating the merciful Lord's

forgiveness for the entire crowd of weeping and repentant people. He looked at us with his penetrated gaze and suddenly --large tears streamed copiously down his cheeks. He wept for us. With his pure tears he washed away the filth of our sins. Yes, Fr. John wept, mingling his tears with our tears. At that moment the tearful ferment of the crowd reached its peak of intensity. The vast cathedral filled with lamentation; it seemed to shake from the uninterrupted outcries.

(Translated from the biography of St. John by I. K. Soursky; Belgrade, 1941)

HOW TO MAKE A CONFESSION

One should come for confession in the evening, i.e., on the eve of the day one plans to receive the Holy Mysteries of Christ. Before confession you should try to bring to remembrance all your sins, whether committed voluntarily or involuntarily; you should carefully examine your life in order to recall all your sins, not only the ones committed since your last confession, but past sins which you have forgotten to confess. Then, with compunction and contrition of heart, approach the Cross and Gospel and begin your confession.

Confess your sins openly; remember that you are telling them not to a man but to God Himself. He already knows your sins but He wants you to acknowledge them yourself. And there is no need to be ashamed before your spiritual father. He is a human being just as you are, he knows well human failings and man's inclination to sin, and for this reason he cannot be your dread judge. But are you not ashamed before your spiritual father because you are afraid of losing his good opinion of you? On the contrary, a spiritual father, seeing your sincere, honest confession, will cherish an even greater love towards you. Furthermore, if you are ashamed and afraid of revealing your sins before one man, a priest, then how will you bear that shame when you appear at God's Dread Judgment, where your sins, if you were not cleansed of them through sincere repentance, will be opened before God Himself, the angels and all the people---acquaintances and strangers alike.

Confess all your sins thoroughly, each sin separately. St. John Chrysostom says: "One mustn't say simply 'I sinned,' or 'I am a sinner,' but you must indicate the various forms of these sins," i.e., you must mention each sin individually. "The revelation of sins," says St. Basil the Great, "is subject to the same laws as the revelation of physical infirmities..." A sinner is one who is spiritually ill, and the spiritual father is the doctor or physician;

consequently, you must confess or tell your sins to the spiritual father just as a man who is physically sick tells his physical woes to the doctor, hoping to receive healing through him.

Don't involve other people in your confession; don't complain about anyone. That is not confession but judgment, and this judgment is yet another sin.

During confession don't try to justify yourself in any way, giving the excuse of illness, habit, etc. In confession, the more a person justifies himself the less he will be justified by God. And conversely, the more a person reproaches himself, judges and blames himself the more he will find justification before God.

When the father confessor asks you about something, don't say "I don't remember; maybe I'm guilty of this also..." God has exhorted us always to remember our sins. In order not to use forgetfulness as an excuse, we should confess as often as possible; because those who, through indifference or carelessness, rarely prepare themselves for Holy Communion and give time to forget their sins are themselves at fault and cannot therefore expect to be absolved of sins, they have not confessed. For this reason we must unfailingly try to recall our sins. When someone is indebted to us, we have no trouble remembering the debt, but we forget our debts to the Lord! Does this not show on our part an utter carelessness and negligence towards our soul? So, to, if the father confessor asks you about a certain sin, you shouldn't answer, "I try not to do this" This is not an answer; it only masks the substance of the reply and appears as a cover-up for sin.

Unless asked by the father confessor, don't speak about that of which you are not guilty, or what you did not do like the Pharisee in the Gospel. In doing you are boasting rather than confessing your sins and this only increases your condemnation.

You should make your confession with sorrow and heartfelt contrition over your sins through which we grieve the Lord God. It is not good

that many people relate their sins without any feeling, with out any remorse, as though they are conducting an ordinary conversation. What is worse, some people even allow themselves to smile at their sins. All this indicates a lack of repentance; and if we confess in this manner we are not cleansed of our sins but only add to them.

Finally, confess your sins with faith in Jesus Christ and in hope of His mercy. For it is only through believing in Jesus Christ and hoping on Him that we can receive forgiveness of our sins. Without faith this is impossible. We have as an example, Judas, the traitor.

Here, then, is how we should confess in order to receive from the Lord God forgiveness of our sins. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (I John 1:9)

Translated from Blogovest, Parish Bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral in San Francisco; March 1989

SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION



**“IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS
FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US
OUR SINS AND TO CLEANS US FROM
ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS”**

1 John 1:9

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a holy sacrament, by which the sinner returns to God, confessing his sins before the priest to be absolved by the priest through the authority granted to him by God. By this absolution the confessing person is granted the forgiveness of those sins which he confessed.

Confession means admitting and declaring a certain matter. The Sacrament of Confession means verbal confession before the priest of sins and mistakes committed by a person, and confessing and humbly repenting, in order to be granted the absolution and forgiveness.

Instituting the Sacrament of

Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession when He said to His disciples, the pure apostles: “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven” **(Matthew 18:18).**

Also, after the Resurrection the Lord said : “As the Father sent me, I also send you.’ And when He said this He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any they are retained” **(John 20:21-23).**

By this He gave them the authority of binding sins or loosing them, through the authority given to them by the Holy Spirit, and according to the contriteness of the confessing person.

Conditions of Repentance

True repentance has four conditions:

- Contrite heart and remorse for previous sins.
- Steadfast intention to improve.
- Strong faith in Christ and hope in His love to forgive.
- Verbal confession of sins before the priest.

Right Age for Confession

Parents must teach their children about the Sacrament of Confession from an early age, say, about twelve years old, so they may be acquainted from childhood with the Sacrament, for as the proverb says: “Teaching in childhood is like engraving on rocks”.

In the book of Ecclesiology entitled

'The Precious Diamond' by John Bin Elsabaa, is written the below mentioned text. In its time, it was adhered to and considered most beneficial:

Releasing the Guardian of Responsibility

When the child grows up in Christian virtues, the Church or guardian takes him before the temple of God, where he received him from the priest at Baptism and says (in the presence of the priest) :

"My son/daughter, when you were a child and a slave to Satan, your parents wanted to set you free through the Holy Baptism, and they asked my weakness to guarantee you before this priest of God. I received you from him, I renounced Satan on your behalf denied him and his deeds, confessed the Lord Jesus Christ for you, took you to receive His Holy Body and Precious Blood and you became a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now you stand before the Temple of God from where I received you, you must know that the one who renounced Satan and believed in Christ, must abandon the deeds of Satan which are pride, hatred, anger, murder, adultery, lies, swearing, curses, idleness in going to church and hearing God's word. As you believe in Christ, you must seek the virtues of love, humility and holiness, for without which no one sees the Lord. From this place I received you, and here I surrender you to yourself and God. Do not request from me anything further; from now on, you are mature and conscious of what is good and what is evil.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus

Christ be with you, and abide your heart in the Orthodox faith until the end, Amen."

From that hour the priest will receive the child, teach them confession, and so the priest becomes a father and spiritual guide for the person who starts to practice the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession directly guided by the priest.

The Necessity of Confessing to a Priest

Verbal confession to a priest is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, for the Lord said to His Pure Apostles: "*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (John 20:23.)

How can the fatherly priests forgive or retain sins if they are not aware of them? How can a judge decide a sentence if he is not aware of the case details? For this reason, the authority given to the Apostles and their successors to retain or forgive sins, oblige the congregation to confess their sins before those who have the authority of absolving or retaining absolution.

Confessing to the priest is necessary for gaining the forgiveness of sins. It also has many other benefits:

From a humane perspective ...

Human beings by nature require comfort and wise counseling, and the need to speak to someone regarding problems or worries. They feel the need to have someone share their joys as well as their sorrows, and this is especially so when disclosing sensitive issues to a person who is a priest, a confession father, a teacher, or a guardian; one who keeps

secrets, and has a nurturing nature.

From the Old Testament perspective ...

Confession was a necessary act for the repentance of a sinner who brought the sacrifice, laid his hand on its head and confessed his sins to God before the priest. The priest then took the sacrifice and slaughtered it, offering it onto the altar of burnt sacrifice as an atonement for sin. The Lord said: *"If a person sins or touches any unclean thing ... or if a person swears ... he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing, and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned ..., so the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin"* (Leviticus 5:1-6).

Hence, the sinner is obliged to confess all his trespasses.

When Achan the son of Carmi sinned and stole, the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel, and they were conquered before the men of Ai. Then Joshua brought Achan the son of Carmi and said to him: *"My son I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done, do not hide it from me."* And Achan answered Joshua and said, *'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel'"* (Joshua 7: 19,20).

When David the King sinned and committed adultery and murder, his conscience did not rebuke him and the Lord sent Nathan to him who persuaded David to confess saying, *"I have sinned against the Lord', so Nathan the prophet said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die'"* (2 Samuel 12).

"Then Nathan declared to David the divine punishment for his sins. The Lord will strike his child and the child would die, the sword shall never depart from your house. I will raise up adversity against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun" (2 Samuel 12), *"and the child died and when Absalom rebelled against his father, he did what the Lord said exactly"* (2 Samuel 16:2-22).

It is worth mentioning that the sins David committed against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah the Hittite was considered by God as personally committed towards Him, as Nathan said: *"Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord and do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife"* (2 Samuel 12).

When David confessed to Nathan the prophet, he heard the declaration of putting away his sin and that he would not die the eternal death or perish because of it, but certain punishments were imposed on him, necessary for repentance. Solomon said: *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13).

From the New Testament perspective ...

John the Baptist preached repentance saying, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand ... then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins"

(Matthew 3:1-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ gave the authority to the Apostles and their successors by saying, "Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" **(Matthew 18:18), and after His resurrection,** "He breathed on them and said to them, 'As the Father sent me, I also send you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" **(John 20:21,22).**

When the prodigal son was aware of his sins, he returned to his father saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight" **(Luke 15:21).**

The book of Acts tells us that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession was practiced during the days of the Apostles : "And many who had believed came, confessing and telling their deeds" **(Acts 19:18).**

Our teacher St. Jacob advises us saying : "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed" **(John 5:16).**

Once the believer confesses all his sins before the priest, the priest prays for him the absolution prayer and asks God to forgive his sins and help him not to sin again. (Priests also have confession fathers, who are perhaps older and more experienced).

NOTES:

When the Apostle says: "Confess your trespasses to one another", he does not mean for priests to confess

to laymen, as laymen confess to priests, but what he meant is :

"Teach each other" as the educated teach the ignorant.

"Heal one another" as the physician heals the patient.

Hence, in the words, "Confess to one another," he means the congregation should confess to those who have the authority of forgiving sins.

St. John tells us : "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" **(1 John 1:9).**

God forgives our sins and cleanses us from our trespasses, when we confess to God in the presence of the priest, with humility and contrite hearts. St. Athanasius the Apostolic said, "As the Baptized is enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, by means of the priest, the repentant is granted forgiveness of his sins by the grace of Christ, also through the priest."

And St. Augustine said, "The Lord Jesus Christ rose Lazarus from the death and those around him (the apostles) loosed him from the grave clothes that bound him." Was the Giver of life unable to loosen the grave clothes? By loosening them, the apostles denoted their authority of absolving and forgiving sins, which the Lord granted to them and their successors.

St. Gregory of Nyssa said : "Regard the church priest as a spiritual father for you, reveal to him your secrets openly, just as a patient reveals his hidden wounds to the physician, and so is healed."

It is mentioned in the Apostolic Orders, "You must honor your

spiritual fathers as they are given the authority of life and death from God, to judge the sinners and punish them, or to absolve the repentants from their sins."

The Apostolic Church approves Confession as a Sacrament of the Church, and this is strong proof of the correctness and necessity of confession to a priest, for Church Sacraments are performed by priests only.

The priest is entrusted with the Sacrament of Communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, and is required not to give it except to the true repentant, otherwise he will be condemned and held responsible before God for his neglect. In the commandment of ordination of the new priest, the Bishop commands him saying : *"Watch this treasure as the Cherub watches the tree of life. Be careful concerning these mysteries to rid yourself from crisis and traumas, do not give except to the good mannered, pure hearted persons. Rescue the sinner so he does not perish and you be held responsible."*

Here we wonder how would the priest know whether someone is pure hearted, and another is an unworthy sinner who is prohibited from the Holy Communion?

Is it not through confession before the priest? The priest has the right to prevent a person who does not practice the Sacrament of Confession, from receiving Communion and from the Holy Sacraments, just as Christ the Lord gave His Holy Body and precious Blood only to His trusted disciples whom, He well knew were worthy of Holy Communion. Judas

Iscariot, on the other hand, did not receive the holy Body and precious Blood of Christ because of his iniquity and evil.

Confession to a priest and hearing the absolution comforts the soul, as sins confessed are forgiven according to the authority given to the priests.

Confession to a priest benefits the confessing person as he receives instruction and advice from the priest, who is wise and experienced, and so he will benefit in his struggle against sin if he obediently applies the advice.

Embarrassment during confession, is the penalty the soul must bear for falling into sin, but the penance imposed by the priest is the Church's chastening for the body, which together with the soul, shared in sin.

Due to embarrassment, many people try to escape from confessing before a priest, claiming that they confess directly to God. However, the embarrassment experienced is very profitable to the repenting sinner, for through it we feel the shame of the sin committed in the presence of God. Reasons for escaping confession before a priest is due to pride and false dignity, for the proud find it hard to humble themselves before he priest.

**CHURCH PENANCE FOR THE
REPENTANT TO EXAMINE THE
TRUTHFULNESS OF THEIR
REPENTANCE, IF OBEDIENTLY
ADHERED TO**

Abstinence

Prostrations for repentance and humility

Almsgiving to the needy

Prevention from Communion for a certain time

Returning stolen money

Apology to whom we insulted

Extra prayers other than the usual, to ask God's mercy.

These Church penances are spiritual remedies to help heal the sinner's wounds, as it implants reverence and remorse in a repentant, and initiates the hatred of sin so that we may remain watchful and not fall into sin again.

STEPS NECESSARY FOR AN ACCEPTABLE CONFESSION

True repentance because of our love for God, and not for fear of punishment, we should aim for spiritual healing in order to receive God's grace of forgiveness, and gain eternal life.

To be honest with ourselves, without being biased, so as to avoid the Lord's warning: "He who loves his life will lose it" (John 12:25).

To have honest intention and steadfast will, and so abandon sin and its causes.

To examine our conscience and self carefully, to be aware of the sins committed by deed or word or thought or senses, to repent and humble ourselves so that we may not fall into sin again.

To be truthful in confession, knowing that lying to the confession-father is lying to the Holy Spirit. As in the example of Ananias lying to St Peter : "*Why has Satan filled your heart to be lying to the Holy Spirit?*" (Act 5:3).

Not to hide any secrets and hidden thoughts, but to reveal all frankly before the priest to enable him to offer the best remedy in order to build and revive the spiritual life of the confessing person. Jeremiah the prophet speaks to the human soul saying: "*Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord*" (Lamentations 2:19). When water is poured forth, it leaves no trace or smell, but if oil is poured it leaves behind a trace, and if vinegar is poured, it leaves behind a smell. So just like water which leaves behind no residue, we also should pour forth

all our confessions before the priest in order to be cleansed.

Not to find excuses for yourself, and blame others, for confession is about blaming yourself for the sins committed, and not condemning others. King Solomon advises us: "*Do not say before the messenger (Priest) of God that it was an error*" (Ecclesiastes 5:6).

A person must be fair with oneself, not too sympathetic nor too harsh, doubtful or anxious, but rather, should confess with a straightforward, mature conscience.

The confessor must adhere to the advice given them by their confession father, and be diligent in following his advice as a remedy necessary for spiritual life.

To practice all the spiritual exercises given by one's confession-father, and with love and patience, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12). As St Basil the Great says, "*As we bear the scalpel of the physician to remedy the body and the medicine's bitterness, we also should bear the suffering of rebuke, chastisement and various practices so that the soul may be remedied from its sins and weaknesses.*"

To confess bravely without embarrassment, all the sins and its details, and if the priest asks concerning certain points, one must not complain or hide, but answer honestly, knowing that it is for our own benefit that the priest will provide us with useful advice.

A confessing person must struggle with God in prayer as the Lord says: "Come now, and let

us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" **(Isaiah 1:18)**.

After repentance, absolution and forgiveness, we must thank God who opened the door of repentance and saved us from the dangerous road of death, as Isaiah said: "*For wickedness burns as the fire, it shall devour the briars and thorns and kindle in the thickets of the forest; they shall mount up like rising smoke*" (Isaiah 9:18), and our teacher St. Peter said: "*The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness*" (2 Peter 2:9,10). When the repentant knows that through repentance they are rescued from all this, they will deepen in their love toward God and seek to always abide in God, in order to receive power in their struggle against sin. God will make us victorious over Satan and all his enticements, and bring our bodies and all its weaknesses and lusts into subjection.

Our teacher St. Paul advises us saying: "*And having done all, to stand*" (Ephesians 6:13). **The repentant must walk on the pure path of repentance**, and not be willingly returning to sin again.

The confessing person must not venture from one confession father to another, as this may be cause delay in one's spiritual growth. Unless for very strong reasons, one should not change their confession father.

The person who confesses must have strong love and confidence in the confession-father to trust his guidance, obey and benefit from him, like a patient trusting their doctor.

We advise every husband and wife to have the same confession-father so that the spiritual providence for their marital life become one, and the priest will know their natures and guide them adequately for the welfare of the family. And if a problem exists between them, the priest gives the correct solution without interference from a third party who might have a different opinion, and hence cause harm to the family. Hence, a mutual confession-father is a necessity for the family welfare.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR A CONFESSION FATHER

- To be a legally ordained priest
- To have permission from his Bishop to accept congregational confessions, for he will be accountable for such a responsibility.
- To be wise and experienced in psychology, and knowledgeable about souls and their depths.
- To be spiritual and close to God, so that he can pray for his children and plead with God to solve their problems.
- To have a strong personality, not double-faced, and not afraid to speak the truth and rebuke the sinner, regardless of who they may be.
- He must be righteous with an ability to listen to problems without being affected. He must also be patient with the confessing person and treat them as his son/daughter. He must be able to give them comfort so that they may be able to confess their sins.
- He must be strong in spirit, able to bear the weakness of the weak, accept their confession, listening to their sins without despising or judging them, they must be attentive and able give the person enough chance to say everything they need to say. Then he must give the appropriate advice and instructions necessary for helping the person overcome the sins in future.
- He must be wise and spiritually experienced in order to guide his children, so as not to give them wrong instructions that may harm their spiritual life.
- He must be biblically knowledgeable

as well as being informed concerning areas such as psychology and education, so that he may be able to understand different phases of growth and special psychological reactions. Hence, he must give the correct medicine for every illness, without hurting feelings, but rather, to encourage a person to confess.

He must be old enough to accept confessions, reverent and sober so that every one respects and listens to him.

He must be pure in intention, thoughts, heart and body so he can accept the confessions of women and guide them without causing disruption to himself.

He must be honest with people's secrets, not to reveal them to anybody whatever the causes are, knowing that Church rules forbid this and punishes the priest who reveals secrets and the confessions of people and so cause them embarrassment (Basilian Laws, 34).

He must be well learned about church laws in order to apply them wisely to those confessing to him.

He must imitate St. Paul in his love for his children: "*My little children for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you*" (Galatians 4:19), readily laboring for them until they become true Christians in their virtues and manners.

He must be convinced that Confession is a source of comfort for a person who confesses, and growth for spiritual life. If a person does not feel comfortable confessing to him and seeks his permission to change confession fathers, he must not forbid them, for by so doing, he may cause

the person to rebel and cease from confessing again. It is important, however, that the priest be aware of the reason for the person wanting to change confession fathers, so that he may help them in choosing another who will be a source of help and comfort. If the priest insists on not allowing them to change confession fathers, the person may go directly and seek permission from the bishop, without involving the priest. It is also important to note that the priest is an adviser in personal matters, such as marriage or career decisions, and so should never enforce his opinion on others.

He must never attempt to intimidate any person confessing to him, such as those without a confession father. A priest should be considerate of the feelings of other priests he serves with, such as in accepting the confessions of a person who has recently been absolved from confessing to his fellow brother the priest.

In the Sacrament of Confession, the priest is a father, judge and teacher.

FIRST: A FATHER



Who yearns for the repentance of every one of his children, as their repentance and salvation will be a cause for his salvation, and so at the last day, he will say to the Lord: "*Here am I and the children whom God has given me*" (Isaiah 8:18), and together with St. Paul he will proclaim: "*For now we live, if you*

stand fast in the Lord" (Thessalonians 3:8). He resembles the father of the prodigal son, who awaited his son's return every single day, and, "*When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him*" (Luke 15:20), and accepted his repentance and forgave him all his sins, rejoicing for his return, and saying to the elder son: "*It was right that we should make mercy and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found*" (Luke 15:32).

SECOND: A JUDGE

Who judges the case of his children according to the authority given to him: "*Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 18:18).

The priest must be accountable to this divine responsibility, neither favoring nor neglecting or oppressing or using this authority unduly, for personal purposes. He must be strict with sin regardless of who the sinner may be, just like a physician who loves the patient but hates the disease, and so tries to abolish it by the best possible medicine.

THIRD: A TEACHER

Who teaches according to the Holy Bible, and makes disciples of Christ of all those coming to him. He teaches them the way to God and Christian perfection, through his knowledge, experience and trials. The priest who wants to teach and make disciples of Christ, must himself be a disciple and be obedient towards his confession-father (who may be older, wiser and more experienced). Hence, he resembles our teacher St. Paul who

says: "*I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me*" (Roman 15:18). He experiences, learns then teaches.

The priest must teach his children that absolution is granted after practicing the Sacrament of Confession directly. Group absolutions which are granted during the Holy Mass, (when each person remembers their sins, confesses before God and bows to receive the priest's absolution), is sufficient to receive Communion. It is not necessary, therefore, for the priest to read the absolution in the Church for each individual who has not confessed. Following the transubstantiation of the holy Body and Blood, the reading of the absolution is a grave mistake, for the absolution itself (the Holy Sacrament) is present on the altar. It is not right that Jesus Christ, the great High Priest is present on the altar, and the priest, ignoring Him, gives the absolution.

The priest must care to give his children adequate spiritual practices for their lives, so that they may be able to abandon certain sins and habits and replace them with virtues.

He must follow these practices with them by praying for them and asking about them in every confession. It is also useful if a spiritual note-book is available, so that the priest can see it and provide them with advice and practical applications to help them in their spiritual life.



**THE RITE OF
PRACTICING THE
SACRAMENT OF
CONFESSION**

Before Confession:

The period of Confession must not exceed one month or a month and a half maximum. Delaying confession encourages a person to be negligent, and forget may sins committed. Delaying confession is a great loss to a person and delays their spiritual growth noticeably.

Some fathers use a notebook in which they write the names of their children in confession - when they confessed and the date of their next confession. This keeps the person confessing prepared at all times for confession.

A person must sit firstly with themselves, to examine themselves very carefully before going to confession. You may start with a short prayer to ask God's help in revealing your sins, as Jeremiah said: "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways*" (Jeremiah 17:9,10.)

In preparing for confession, it is advisable to write down on a piece of paper, all the sins committed, however, it should be written in such a way that only the writer understand. This is to prevent it from falling into wrong hands. The wisdom behind writing sins is so not to forget them during confession.

The confessing person must care for three important things while preparing for confession, and jotting

down notes :

Sins and mistakes committed

Thoughts and feelings encountered which need counseling from the confession-father in order to distinguish the good from the bad

Any questions regarding the spiritual life which need guidance or discussion with the confession father.

Self-examination must be honest, and without condemning others, for in confession we should blame ourselves, not other people or circumstances.

After having prepared for confession, the repentant prays before God in their private room, mentioning before Him every sin and pleading for forgiveness, and power from God so that they may abandon them.

Sins to be forgiven must be confessed three times :

Before the person whom we sinned against, as the wise King Solomon said: "For you have come into the hand of your friend: go and humble yourself, plead with your friend, give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, deliver yourself" (**Proverbs 6:3-5**), **rescue yourself from the results of sins and its harm by apologizing to whom you sinned against.**

Before God as the responsible Father for all people whom we sin against. When David sinned against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, God considered it a sin directed toward Him personally and blamed David saying: "*Why did you despise Me?*" and David confessed his sin saying, "*I have sinned against the Lord*" (2 Samuel 12). In the Psalm of Repentance, David spoke humbly

before God saying: "*Against You and You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight*" (Psalm 51:4)

Before the Church represented by the priest. The church is our mother and cares for her children's peace, their love and reconciliation with one another. The priest is the dove of peace and reconciles the rights of the just from the unjust. The confessing person receives the absolution and forgiveness of their sins from the mouth of the priest, the officiate of the Mysteries of God, who sees the truthfulness, or otherwise, of one's repentance. If otherwise, the priest provides penance and certain spiritual exercises in order to help the confessor fulfill the conditions of an acceptable repentance. Once accomplished, the person is granted absolution and forgiveness from the priest who receives the authority from the Holy Spirit: "*Make them absolved by the Holy Spirit, through me.*" Once absolution is granted from the priest, the person can receive the Holy Communion of our Lord Emmanuel, so that they may be cleansed of their sins by the Blood of Christ, just like the saints who, "*Washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:14), and, "*The Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*" (John 1:7).

During Confession :

Confession must take place be in a quiet corner in the Church, facing the altar, so that we feel empowered and sanctified. Confession, being a sacrament, should always take place in Church, however, if the priest comes across a person who has not been regular in church or in church life, but wishes to repent, the priest

may visit them at home and accept their confession there, and at the same time encouraging them to come to church. In addition, the Sacrament of Confession may take place at home if someone is sick, before they receive the Holy Communion.

The priest must wear a cloak or cape whilst accepting Confession, as he is taking part in a holy sacrament which needs physical and spiritual preparation.

In church there must be a waiting place for those awaiting confession, with various spiritual books which they can occupy themselves with.

The priest must always be alert. He must not eat or drink during confession, for confession is a sacrament, and as such should be practiced while fasting (similar to the rest of the sacraments). After the person comes to kiss the hand of the priest, they should sit before him respectfully, as he is the minister of the Mysteries of God, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The priest and the confessor make the sign of the cross, and together pray 'The Lord's Prayer'.

The priest then encourages the person to confess, asking them about their spiritual life.

The confessing person takes out the paper in which the sins are written, and begins confessing them one by one, without embarrassment, and waiting to hear the appropriate advice and instruction of the confession father. We can resemble this to one waiting for the verdict of a judge after having done wrong, or waiting for the doctor to prescribe the

best medicine possible to cure ailments. The confessor should acknowledge their sins completely and repent in contriteness, aiming to struggle against sin till death. Discussion with the priest should take place with respectfulness and decency.

The confessing person should commence by confessing the most grievous sins, followed by the less grievous. In this way, the confessor will be humbled.

It is important for the confessor to be mindful of the priest's time and others waiting, and so not divert from the confession by telling stories which may be unrelated. They must be mindful of the reverence of the sacrament and being in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The priest must be careful not to condemn or degrade the person confession, so they do not despair. On the other hand, it is important the priest is not too lenient, otherwise the confessor may become negligent. The priest must be wise and moderate, able to love those who confess, despite their failures and sins.

After confession, the confessing person kneels before the priest, bowing their head and repeating the words, "*God be merciful to me a sinner*" (Luke 18:13). The priest, standing, places the cross in his right hand on the confessing person's head, and prays the absolution.

NOTES:

The priest places the cross over the head of the confessing person, as the gift of absolution and forgiveness is obtained from the Blood of our Lord

Jesus Christ, which is shed on the cross. The head is humbly bowed from the load of sin, and the cross over it works mysteriously to sanctify the confessing person in thought, body and soul by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is called by the priest to grant absolution and forgiveness to the repentant. Hence, reconciliation between God and the repentant is fulfilled, as our teacher St. Paul says: "*Having made peace through the Blood of His Cross*" (Colossians 1:20), "*And now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

When the priest places his hand on the confessing person's head, holding their temples between his fingers, he denotes the compassionate fatherhood of God accepting the repentants, and it is also a symbol of the hand of God, the Pantocrator, who holds everyone in His hands, for He controls man's movements and thoughts and is able to sanctify them and guide them towards the right direction, for their welfare and salvation : "*Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 10:5), and applying the words of St. Paul : "*But we have the mind of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 2:16), and so become the servants of God who, "*shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads*" (Revelation 22:4). Hence, they have the name of God filling

their thoughts and lives.

PRAYERS TO BE SAID BY THE CONFESSOR, IN ORDER TO RECEIVE ABSOLUTION

Psalm 50 : "Have mercy upon me, O God ..."

The prayer of : "O God absolve, remit and forgive us our sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly and those which we committed knowingly and unknowingly, the hidden and the visible. O Lord forgive us for the sake of Your Holy Name that is called upon us, and according to Your Mercy and not to our sins." Followed by, "O Lord I have sinned, absolve me", or the tax-collector's prayer: "God be merciful to me, a sinner".

Then following the absolution, the 'Lord's Prayer' is said.

PRAYERS OF THE PRIEST ON THE HEAD OF THE CONFESSOR

Thanksgiving Prayer: To thank God for the return and the repentance of the sinner.

Psalm 50: for repentance and humiliation

Litany of the Sick: for the sinner is in need of remedy

The Three Absolutions: What is noticeable is that the priest prays them in the plural form placing himself with the confessing sinner, asking absolution and forgiveness for both of them, with all the other blessings. In these absolutions are many meaningful and touching supplications, which deserve contemplation. The priest should pray them quietly but audibly, so that he and the confessing person may meditate on every word. It is worth

mentioning also that these absolutions which are read on the head of the confessing person, are prayed in Church during the Matins and Vespers Prayers, and in other Church Rites, such as the Sacraments of Unction of Sick, Matrimony and others.

THE FIRST ABSOLUTION : PRAYER OF SUBMISSION TO THE SON

"Oh Lord who has given authority unto us to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy, crush his heads beneath our feet speedily, and scatter before us his every design of weakness that is against us. For You are the King of us all, O Christ our God"

Notes on the First Absolution:

God gave the authority to His pure Apostles saying: "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (**Luke 10:19**).

"Crush his heads beneath our feet speedily," as the devil does not have only one head but many heads, denoting his plans and deceit, thoughts, and seduction which are various and destructive to those attracted to them.

"Scatter before us every design of weakness that is against us." The Satanic designs are the evil thoughts which he tries to implant in us, we ask God to scatter them before us so we do not perish.

THE SECOND ABSOLUTION : ALSO CALLED THE PRAYER OF SUBMISSION TO THE SON

"You, O Lord, who created the heavens, You descended and became man for our salvation. You are He who sits upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, and beholds them who are lowly. You also now, our Master, are He unto whom we lift up the eyes of our hearts, the Lord who forgives our iniquities and saves our souls from corruption. We worship Your unutterable compassion, and we ask You to give us Your peace, for You have given all things unto us.

Acquire us unto Yourself, God our Savior, for we know none other but You; Your Holy Name we do utter. Turn us, God, into fearing You and desiring You. Be pleased that we abide in the enjoyment of Your good things, and those who have bowed their heads beneath Your hand, exalt them in their ways of life, and adorn them with virtues. And may we all be worthy of Your Kingdom in the heavens, through the goodwill of God, Your good Father...".

Notes on the Second Absolution:

In this absolution the priest asks God,

To give us the peace we lost through committing sins, for sin destroys peace, as fire destroys hay. For thus says the Lord, *"There is no peace for the wicked"* (Isaiah 48:22).

To instill within us the fear of God, as, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,"* (Proverbs 1), and when one's heart is filled with the fear of God, one becomes enlightened, as Abba Anthony said: *"As light entering a dark house casts out its darkness, so if the fear of God entered into a human heart, it casts*

out ignorance (by which he falls into sin)."

To cause us to desire the Lord, and taste those things which are spiritual and divine, rather than partake of those things which cause us to sin and thus result in death. For this reason, the priest asks God to return this desire to the hearts of those confessing, so that together with King Solomon, they may declare : *"Lead me away! We will run after You"* (Songs 1:4).

The priests asks God to exalt the repentant who is bowing in contriteness beneath the hand of God (which is symbolized by the hand of the priest placed on the head of the confessing person), and adorn them with virtues, after having saved them from sin, so they may glorify God and become worthy of Eternal Life and the Kingdom of God, which is prepared for those who struggle diligently in order to perfect their holiness.

THE THIRD ABSOLUTION

"Master, Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son and Logos of God the Father, Who has broken every bond of our sins through His saving, life-giving sufferings, who breathed into the face of His holy disciples and saintly Apostles, and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained". You also now, our Master, through Your holy apostles, have given grace to those who for a time labored in priesthood in Your Holy Church, to forgive sin upon the earth and

to bind and to loose every bond of inquiry. Now, also, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind, for Your servants my fathers, and my brethren and my weakness, those who bow their heads before Your Holy Glory. Dispense unto us Your mercy, and loose every bond of our sins, and if we have committed any sin against You, knowingly or unknowingly or through anguish of heart, or in deed, or in word, or from faint-heartedness, You O Master, who knows the weakness of men, as a good and loving God, grant us the forgiveness of our sins (the priest signs the confessing person, then says...) Bless us, purify us, absolve us (and absolve your servant ...). Fill us with Your fear, and straighten us unto Your holy, good will, for You are our God, and all glory, honor and dominion and adoration are due unto You."

Notes on the Third Absolution:

By reciting this absolution and making the signs of the cross mentioned, the Holy Spirit comes upon the confessing person, and grants them the forgiveness of sins which were confessed to the Holy Spirit in the presence of the priest.

This absolution asks forgiveness for many types of sin : "If we have committed any sins against You, knowingly or unknowingly, or through anguish of heart (fear), or in deed, or in word, or from faint-heartedness (feeling of inferiority, despair or desperation)."

Now He asks God to grant him the necessary remedies: "*Bless us, purify us, make us absolved, straighten us*

unto Your Holy, good will". When the sinner is granted these divine remedies, he is healed from sins and walks in holiness which leads to eternal life.

After the absolutions, the priest says the blessing, and concludes with the Lord's Prayer, which is also said by the confessing person.

The priest breathes into the face of the confessing person three times asking the Holy Trinity to absolve and forgive them.

The confessing person prostrates, touching the ground with his forehead, then stands and kisses the priest's Cross and hand saying: "*Father absolve me*", and the priest answers: "*May God absolve you*". Then they leave confession, rejoicing for repentance, exalted by the praises of angels and saints, for, "*There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance*" (Luke 15:7). One feels a great burden released from one's heart after confession, the burden of sin and now a person is justified and feels victorious, and renews their hope for gaining entry into the eternal life together with the multitudes of repentants, who have been redeemed and saved.

NOTES:

The prostration (metania) done at the end of the absolution, is a sign of humility and remorse, repentance for sins, and an intention to struggle to change one's thinking and behavior for the better. Metania is Greek in origin, meaning 'repentance' and 'to change one's mind'.

After kneeling, the repentant kisses

the Cross and the priest's hand, for through the priest we are granted forgiveness and reconciliation with God, by the power of the Divine Blood shed on the Cross for our salvation. And from the priest's hand we receive the sacraments :

The priest baptizes us by his hands, and we are granted the Divine citizenship and rebirth.

The priest anoints the baptized by the Myron oil, through which the Holy Spirit comes and abides in us, and we become temples of the Holy Spirit.

The priest holds the Cross in his right hand and prays the absolution so the Holy Spirit comes upon us and grants us the Absolution and forgiveness of sins that were confessed.

The priest holds the Holy Communion in his hands, carries it and distributes it to the believers, in order for them to have Christ abiding in them, and so gain eternal life. For this reason, we kiss the priest's hand.

When the confessing person asks for the absolution saying, "*Absolve me father*", the priest answers, "*May God absolve you*", for it is God who grants the absolution, and is the source of absolution and forgiveness.

After confession and having received the absolution, the confessing person receives the Holy Communion as soon as possible, so that they may be empowered by grace to grow in virtues and gain strength in their spiritual struggle.

3. After Confession:

A person prays the 'Thanksgiving Prayer After Confession' (found at the end of the Agbia). This prayer thanks the Lord for accepting ones confession, and seeks God's help to

strengthen them in their life of repentance and honesty with God.

The repentant must be watchful over their spiritual life, so as not to fall again into sin, for every sin is caused by negligence or laziness.

To repentant must obey the advice and guidance of the confession father, regarding church rules, penance, or spiritual exercises, which are spiritual remedies to anoint our wounds and heal our illnesses and weaknesses.

We must adhere to the advice of the confession father in order for us to grow in grace and spiritual stature. St Basil said, "As we bear the bitterness of medicine to heal bodily pain, so must we bear the remedy of the spirit through chastisement and rebuke, for the spiritual healing from sins". As God teaches us, "Surely I will pour out My Spirit on you, I will make My words known to you" (Proverbs 1:23).

RITE OF A PRIEST'S CONFESSION TO ANOTHER PRIEST

For every priest there must be a confession-father who is older in age and priesthood, and more experienced so he confesses to him and becomes his disciple. He must be very regular in confession so that he does not neglect and lose his eternal life, as St. Paul says, "*Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*" (1 Corinthians 9:27), and every priest should take care to heed the advice of our teacher St. Paul : "*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in then, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*" (1 Timothy 4:16).

During confession the priest must sit down honestly before his confession-father, like a patient before the physician, and confess seriously and frankly, asking for absolution, forgiveness and salvation.

After confession the confessing priest removes his priestly hat and kneels before his confession-father bowing his head to accept the absolution.

During the absolution the priest does not place the Cross on the priest's head but on his shoulder, or otherwise, he lifts the Cross near the priest's head without touching it, and so prays the prayers and absolutions specified for confession.

By the end of Absolutions, the confessing priest bows to his spiritual-father, kissing the Cross and his hand, thanking God for the grace of absolution and the forgiveness granted by confession and absolution.

NOTES:

The priest does not place the Cross

on the confessing priest's head as he is equal to him in the rank of Priesthood, while the blessing is granted by the older to the younger, as St. Paul said, "*Beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better*" (Hebrews 7:17).

If a priest confesses to a Bishop, the bishop has the right to place his hand with the Cross on the confessing priest's head and pray the absolution, as he is higher in rank than the priest.

PRAYER FOR THE APOSTATE

For those who deny Christ (Apostasy) or profane their bodies by adultery, the Church does not grant, in the first place, the Sacrament of Confession on their return, but rather prays for them the 'Prayer for the Apostate', or 'Prayer of capability' as they call it, which requests forgiveness for grievous sins which need God's mercy.

This prayer, which is full of benefit and spirituality, is recorded from the book entitled 'Make Me Repent Lord' by Reverend Father Yousef Asaad, (pp 160-166), and is most beneficial for asking God for blessing and power.

RITE OF THE APOSTATE'S PRAYER

A new ceramic container of fresh water is filled with simple oil, which the priest pours three times, whilst making the sign of the cross. Then,

The priest prays the Thanksgiving Prayer.

Then the Verses of the Cymbals is chanted.

During prayer the priest raises incense whilst audibly praying the Pauline prayer: "O God the Great and the Eternal, without beginning and without end, great in His counsel and mighty in His works, who is in all places, and dwells with everyone. Be with us also, our Master, in this hour and stand in our midst. Purify our hearts and sanctify our souls. Cleanse us from all sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly and grant us to offer before You worthy sacrifices and sacrifices of blessing, and a spiritual incense entering within the veil of the holy

place of Your Holies" (and then he offers incense in the four directions).

Following the Verses of the Cymbals, the congregation pray : "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, Now and forevermore, Amen, Alleluia!"

The congregation then prays 'The Lord's Prayer'

Followed by Psalm 50: "Have mercy on me O God".

They conclude by kneeling, saying, "We worship You O Christ, with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us."

The deacon then reads the Pauline Epistle : "As I urged You when I went into Macedonian - remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which comes by faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they saw nor the things which they affirm. But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and in subordinate for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for killers of fathers and killers of mothers, for murderers, for liars, for perjurers and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust and I thank

Jesus Christ our Lord who has enabled me because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Jesus Christ. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise be honor and glory for ever and ever Amen" (**1 Timothy 1:3-17**). **May the grace of God the Father be with us all Amen.'**

The congregation sings the Trisagion (Agios).

Followed by the priest praying the Litany of the Gospel.

The gospel is then read by the priest: 'A Psalm of our teacher David the prophet and King, may his blessings be with us all, Amen. "Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. According to Your mercy remember me, for Your Goodness' sake O Lord... For Your name's sake O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great, alleluia" (Psalm 24: 6,7,11). Gospel according to St Luke, the evangelist and pure apostle, may his blessings be with us all, Amen. "So He spoke this parable to them saying: What man of You, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go

after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors saying to them: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15: 3-10) Glory be to You, O God forevermore.'

The congregation then says the appropriate response of the Gospel: "I have sinned, I have sinned my Lord Jesus Christ forgive me, as there is no servant without sin nor master without forgiveness. Grant me Lord repentance so that I may repent before death, and close before me the doors of Hades. Intercede on our behalf, O Archangel Michael, leader of the heavenly hosts, that He may forgive us our sins. Supplicate on our behalf, O my masters the fatherly Apostles and the Disciples that He may forgive us our sins. Blessed is Your name, O Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. We worship You now and forever Amen."

Then the priest prays the three Major Litanies for Peace, The Fathers, and The Congregations.

At the conclusion of the Prayer for the Congregations, the repenting person says together with the congregation, the Orthodox Creed.

The priest then prays the following for the repenting apostate: "O Lord, Master and Almighty God, the Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ who wants every one to live and come to the knowledge of truth, we ask You Master for your servant

(...name of Apostate), who bows his head and seeks You to absolve him from the hands of Satan and from every evil deed by which he rejected You. We ask and appeal to Your goodness, O Lover-of-mankind, send Your Holy Spirit and Your power to your servant (...name) at this hour. Cast away from his heart every vain and wicked intrigue. Purify his heart from all evil thoughts. If he profaned his body with an unbeliever, forgive him and justify him for righteousness, that which was preached by the prophets, apostles and church teachers. Your servant (...name) count him with Your people and the flock of Your inheritance. Grant him the forgiveness of all the sins done since his birth till this hour, by the coming and dwelling of Your Holy Spirit upon him so he lacks nothing from the Baptismal graces which he first accepted. Bless him, purify him, sanctify him, fill him with Your fear, straighten him towards Your Holy good will. Through the intercession of our lady the mother of God St. Mary, and all Your Saints, by the grace, mercy and love-of-mankind of Your only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Glory, honor, dominion and worship are due to You together with Him, and the life-giving and consubstantial Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen."

The congregation prays 'The Lord's Prayer'.

Then the priest says the following supplication : "Yes Lord our God, who does not allow any one to be tempted beyond what we are able, due to our weakness. We ask You to save us from these temptations to be able to quench the fiery arrows of the

adversary. Save us from the devil and his intrigues, through Jesus Christ our Lord, glory honor...".

The deacon says : "Bow your heads before the Lord."

The priest then prays : "O Lord who said, "I will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able," for with temptation You will also send us a redeemer, send from on high Your grace so that we may be able to stand. Save us O Lord our God from every troublesome temptation. Cast it away together with all the wicked deeds, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Glory, honor, dominion..."

The deacon says : "Let us attend in the fear of God."

Now the priest prays the following absolution: "O Lord God, healer of our souls, our bodies and spirits, You are He who said unto our father Peter through the mouth of Your Only Begotten Son, "You are Peter, upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, and I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens. That which you will bind upon the earth shall be bound in the heavens, and that which you will loose upon the earth shall be loosed in the heavens." Therefore, O Lord let your servant (...name of Apostate) be absolved from every sin, from every curse, from every denial, from every false oath and from every encounter with the heretics and the heathens, through Your Holy Spirit, O You, the Lover of Mankind. O God who takes away the sins of the world, hasten, to accept the repentance of your servant for a light of understanding and forgiveness of sins. For You are a compassionate and merciful God.

You are patient. Your mercy is great and true. Forgive him O God, and Lover of Mankind."

The deacon then says : "Saved, Amen. And with Your Spirit."

The priest makes the sign of the cross on the water three times whilst saying, "The Holies are for the holy people, blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, Amen."

The congregation responds : "One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit, Amen."

Finally, the congregation chants the hymn "Praise God" (Psalm 150), whilst :

Behind the curtain, the repentant undresses and the priest sprinkles water on him three times, saying: "I protect you (...name), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God Amen".

After the priest finishes pouring the water on his head and sprinkling him, He takes the oil and anoints his forehead, heart and palms, whilst saying: "*Blessed be God the Father the Pantocrator Amen. Blessed be His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete Amen*".

After the anointment is completed, he dresses, and bows his head, whilst the priest prays: "Master, Lord, the only God, and Logos of the unblemished Father, who came into the world to call sinners to repentance, who does not wish death for the sinner, but to repentance and life, who said if your brother sins against you, seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to

you saying "I repent", you shall forgive him. You now, our Master and King, look unto us bowing before You, we Your servants, and sinners, cast away all evil thought from the heart of your servant (...name), forgive all his sins, liberate him from all evil darkness to see the greatness of the glory of Your beauty. Lord grant us pursuit, repentance and freedom from our sins, iniquities and transgressions. Do not let us return to them once more, but raise us from falling, walk with us by Your power and save us from the intrigues of Satan. Restore us truly to You, manage our life as deemed fit and purify us from all impurity, liberate us from every unclean inclination. Blot out our transgressions and save us now, so we are able to be empowered by Your help against the evil hosts and its images so they retreat with failure in our second warfare and we come to the path of divine worshipping. Count us with the true strugglers who were saved by the goodwill of God the Father, with whom You are blessed, with the Holy Spirit, who is of one essence with You, now and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen."

Following this prayer, the priest prays the Absolution to the Son (which is the third absolution of the litanies), "*Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Logos of God the Father...*"

The priest concludes by ordering him not to commit the sin again. He says the blessing, and together they pray 'The Lord's Prayer'.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES



Many priests neglect giving their children some spiritual exercises during confession. This negligence may be due to the laziness of

some priests who are not ready to make an effort to follow up with their children during these practices, by encouraging them and praying for them. Some priests may find the excuse that those confessing have low levels of spirituality which cannot handle the spiritual exercises, or that the priests do not have time for follow up.

Hence, this causes a stop in one's spiritual growth, and confession becomes a routine, words said, and absolution read.

Some who are spiritually fervent or interested in their spiritual growth complain from lack of spiritual practices which help them in their spiritual life. At times they may ask their confession fathers for exercises, but this is very rare. Some make their own practices according to their needs. But this is not correct, for no spiritual exercises should be done without the permission of the confession-father. The reason for this is so that the devil does not intervene, for he may use one's innocence or inexperience to encourage them to struggle more and hence cause them to fall into the sin of pride, or any other wicked plan of Satan. The wise King Solomon warns us saying: *"But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up"* (Ecclesiastes:

4:10), and Abba Anthony says, *"Ask your father to tell you and your elders to speak to you"*, the person who proceeds in their spiritual life on their own, and without guidance, falls in Satanic traps, as Solomon says: *"Where there is no counsel the people fall, but in the multitude of counselors there is safety"* (Proverbs 11:14), and if he falls, he regrets saying: *"How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers"* (Proverbs 5:12,13). Priests must care to give their children in confession, certain practices and follow their progress, and those confessing must like spiritual growth. So ask for these practices in earnest, so that you may grow in grace and stature before God and others.

Examples Of Some Spiritual Exercises

For those who are sinning from **personal weakness**, such as lying, swearing, gossiping, for example, a penance such as five prostrations can be applied for each time the person commits these sins.

Spiritual exercises may also be taken from the **Holy Bible**, where there are many examples, such as in the **Ten Commandments** (Exodus 20) :

Remember the day of the Lord, keep it holy

Honor your father and mother (especially in old age)

Do not murder

Do not commit adultery (either in action of thoughts)

Do not steal (or bribe)

Do not bear false witness (such as

lying or forgery)

Do not covet that which is not yours

Another great Biblical example from which to apply spiritual exercises, is from Christ's **Sermon on the Mount**:

Spiritual poverty or humbleness

Meekness towards all people

Mercy for the needy

Struggling for purity of heart and simplicity.

Struggling to be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker.

Bearing tribulation and persecution and false witnessing with joy, as long as it is for God's sake.

Not provoking hostility with others, and hence hindering prayer.

Being lawful in all things.

Whoever asks anything of you, give unto them, regardless of your situation. Learn to give, even if it only a little.

Love your enemies, pray for them, ask for their blessing, help them in times of need.

Give in secret, and pray and fast in moderation.

Trust in God, just like the lilies of the field and the birds, who trust in God's providence. Trusting means to depend on God on not on oneself.

Struggle with all your might to hold your tongue so that you do not fall into condemnation. For the sin of the tongue is dangerous and may bring about the wrath and judgment of God.

Practice praying at all times. Ask, you will be given, seek and you will

find, knock and it will be open and to you. It is important to persevere in the life of prayer.

Follow the golden rule of treatment: Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.

From the first Epistle of our teacher St. Paul to the Corinthians, (Chapter 13), **let us practice all kinds of love** :

"Love suffers long and is kind"; bear all people kindly.

"Love does not envy"; let us practice not to envy others.

"Love does not parade itself"; a person must not boast before others concerning the things they may have.

"Love is not puffed up"; pride is a terrible vice, for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble.

"Love does not behave rudely"; a loving person does not speak rudely but decently, just like a clear spring bringing forth sweet water.

"Love does not seek its own"; the loving person is not selfish but loves others, sacrificing and giving readily. Avoid selfishness for it is the cause of many troubles.

"Love is not provoked"; does not get angry, for the anger of man does not result in the righteousness of God.

"Love thinks no evil"; for all things are pure to the pure minded. The pure person always puts others before themselves.

"Love does not rejoice in iniquity"; nor in catastrophes that may hurt others.

"Love rejoices in the truth"; rejoices for the good of others, whether it be

success, riches, joy, children, or any other blessings given by God. *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"* (Romans 12:15).

"Love bears all things"; practice being patient. Do not lose your temper quickly lest you fall and commit grave mistakes, and even lose the love and respect of others. To be able to bear is to be able to love. Bear all things, all situations and all people, without complaint.

"Love believes all things"; for love is simple, and is not deceiving. It is wise and insightful.

"Love hopes all things"; hopes for the good and happiness of others.

"Love endures all things"; practice patience, for with it comes the crown of life. Learn to bear others, even those who may be troublesome, knowing that your patience will result in goodness.

"Love never fails"; despite the various trials and tribulations which may occur, true love will never fail but will stand fast in the face of any test. *"Love is as strong as death ... many waters cannot quench love, nor can floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised"* (Songs 8:6-8).

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN HUMILITY

Do not provoke people to anger

Be quite and peaceful in all things; your speech and actions should be peaceful

Do not interfere in the affairs of others, regardless of who they maybe, relative or otherwise. Love

all and avoid all

Practice being a good listener, and listen patiently to all, regardless of whether they may be younger or in less of a position than you.

Do not complain to anyone, other than God, with humility.

Practice being cheerful with all people, regardless of whether they may be aggressive or rude.

Every Christian should be obedient, wise and flexible.

Spiritual Exercises In Prayer

Practice reverence during prayer : reverence of heart and body, and tranquility of the senses.

Learn the Psalms, Gospels, and prayers of the Agbia, gradually.

Practice praying at all times, whether while you are working, walking, or even sitting with others.

Practice reciting always the 'Jesus Prayer' : "O my Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner!"

Practice praying for others, and at all times, show love to all.

Practice the Lord's commandment of praying for enemies And For Those Who Insult You.

Spiritual Exercises In Fasting

Be committed to church fasts, with all care.

A period of abstinence during fasting is necessary, but may differ from one person to another.

Be moderate with the types of fasting food you may eat.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN READING

Daily reading of the Bible is very

important.

Read at least one chapter from the Old Testament daily.

Bible reading must be done on a regular basis, but not just as a habit.

Keep beside you a pen and notebook whilst reading the Bible, to jot down points.

Highlight or underline the verses which you find most effective, and write your notes or thoughts in the margins.

Write in the notebook the verses you need to learn during that day, and keep reciting it throughout the day. If possible, write a small contemplation of what you found effective and beneficial about the verse or the chapter read.

Record and make special note of the practical verses from the chapter, which you feel can benefit you and practically be applied, such as: *"Whoever asks you for anything, give to him", "Do not judge so that you will not be judged", "Love without hypocrisy", "Hate evil and do good", "Share in the needs of the saints", "Bless and do not curse - rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep."*

Try to practice these spiritual exercises, and learn to live by them.

CONDITIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Some conditions are necessary to ensure the success of the spiritual exercises, for those who practice them :

† **Clarity of the exercise: it is important that the instructions of what must be exercised are clear to the repenting person, and not**

vague or generic.

Specification of the exercise: specific points must be emphasized, such as, abstinence, no judging of others, no stealing, and so on.

The occasion of the exercise: for example, we cannot practice silence on a day when there is a special family gathering. Likewise, we cannot fast when there is a wedding, and so on.

Gradual progression in exercises: it is important for one to progress gradually in their spiritual life, lest they suddenly fall.

Duration of the exercise: these spiritual exercises must be ongoing so that they may eventually bear good fruits and result in good habits. St. Ephraim said, *"Every practice which does not take long, does not bear fruits."* One of the saintly fathers applied one spiritual exercise every year, which he would practice with diligence. St. Arsenius took three year to perfect the virtue of silence in his life.

Success of the exercise: requires the person to be convinced of its need and benefits.

Success of the exercise: requires the constant prayer of the confessing person, to God so that He may help and strength him in his spiritual life and progression so that his spiritual exercises leads to bearing good fruit. He also needs the prayers and fellowship of his confession-father, so that he may consistent in his spiritual life. This is especially so for those beginning in their life of confession. It is important for them to accurately write down the instructions given to them by their confession father, and

for them to strive diligently in compiling with his instructions.

Success of the exercise: requires the use of a spiritual notebook, which the confessing person to assist them in their progression, so that they may grow in spiritual stature and grace.

AMEN.

“COME TO ME , ALL YOU WHO LABOR

AND ARE HEAVY LADEN ,

AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.”

Matt 11:28

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.

Reprinted from The Shepherd, published by the Brotherhood of St. Edward the Martyr, London, England.

Confession: the Sacrament of Reconciliation

by Jim Forest

Without confession, love is destroyed.

It is impossible to imagine a vital marriage or deep friendship without confession and forgiveness. If you have done something that damages a relationship, confession is essential to its

restoration.

For the sake of that bond, you confess what you've done, you apologize, and you promise not to do it again.



In the context of religious life, confession is what we do to safeguard and renew our relationship with God whenever it is damaged. Confession restores our communion with God.

The purpose of confession is not to have one's sins dismissed as non-sins but to be forgiven and restored to communion. As the Evangelist John wrote: "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" (1 Jn 1:9) The apostle James wrote in a similar vein: "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." (Jas 5:16)

Confession is more than disclosure of sin. It also involves praise of God and

profession of faith. Without the second and third elements, the first is pointless. To the extent we deny God, we reduce ourselves to accidental beings on a temporary planet in a random universe expanding into nowhere. To the extent we have a sense of the existence of God, we discover creation confessing God's being and see all beauty as a confession of God. "The world will be saved by beauty," Dostoevsky declared. We discover that faith is not so much something we *have* as something we *experience* -- and we confess that experience much as glass confesses light. The Church calls certain saints "confessors" because they confessed their faith in periods of persecution even though they did not suffer martyrdom as a result. In dark, fear-ridden times, the faith shone through martyrs and confessors, giving courage to others.

In his autobiography, *Confessions*, Saint Augustine drew on all three senses of the word. He confessed certain sins, chiefly those that revealed the process that had brought him to baptism and made him a disciple of Christ and member of the Church. He confessed his faith. His book as a whole is a work of praise, a confession of God's love.

But it is the word's first meaning -- confession of sins -- that is usually the most difficult. It is never easy admitting to doing something you regret and are ashamed of, an act you attempted to keep secret or denied doing or tried to blame on someone else, perhaps arguing -- to yourself as much as to others -- that it wasn't actually a sin at all, or wasn't nearly as bad as some people might claim. In the hard labor of

growing up, one of the most agonizing tasks is becoming capable of saying, "I'm sorry."

Yet we are designed for confession. Secrets in general are hard to keep, but unconfessed sins not only never go away but have a way of becoming heavier as time passes -- the greater the sin, the heavier the burden. Confession is the only solution.

To understand confession in its sacramental sense, one first has to grapple with a few basic questions: Why is the Church involved in forgiving sins? Is priest-witnessed confession really needed? Why confess at all to any human being? In fact, why bother confessing to God even without a human witness? If God is really all-knowing, then he knows everything about me already. My sins are known before it even crosses my mind to confess them. Why bother telling God what God already knows?

Yes, truly God knows. My confession can never be as complete or revealing as God's knowledge of me and all that needs repairing in my life.

A related question we need to consider has to do with our basic design as social beings. Why am I so willing to connect with others in every other area of life, yet not in this? Why is it that I look so hard for excuses, even for theological rationales, not to confess? Why do I try so hard to explain away my sins until I've decided either they're not so bad or might even be seen as acts of virtue? Why is it that I find it so easy to *commit* sins yet am so reluctant, in the presence of another, to admit to having done so?

We are social beings. The individual as autonomous unit is a delusion. The Marlboro Man -- the person without community, parents, spouse, or children -- exists only on billboards. The *individual* is someone who has lost a sense of connection to others or attempts to exist in opposition to others -- while the *person* exists in communion with other persons. At a conference of Orthodox Christians in France not long ago, in a discussion of the problem of individualism, a theologian confessed, "When I am in my car, I am an individual, but when I get out, I am a person again."

We are social beings. The language we speak connects us to those around us. The food I eat was grown by others. The skills passed on to me have slowly been developed in the course of hundreds of generations. The air I breathe and the water I drink is not for my exclusive use but has been in many bodies before mine. The place I live, the tools I use, and the paper I write on were made by many hands. I am not my own doctor or dentist or banker. To the extent I disconnect myself from others, I am in danger. Alone I die, and soon. To be in communion with others is life.

Because we are social beings, confession in church does not take the place of confession to those we have sinned against. An essential element of confession is doing all I can to set right what I did wrong. If I stole something, it must be returned or paid for. If I lied to anyone, I must tell that person the truth. If I was angry without good reason, I must apologize. I must seek forgiveness not only from God but from those

whom I have wronged or harmed.

We are also verbal beings. Words provide not only a way of communicating with others but even with ourselves. The fact that confession is witnessed forces me to put into words all those ways, minor and major, in which I live as if there were no God and no commandment to love. A thought that is concealed has great power over us.

Confessing sins, or even temptations, makes us better able to resist. The underlying principle is described in one of the collections of sayings of the Desert Fathers, the Gerontikon:

"If impure thoughts trouble you, do not hide them, but tell them at once to your spiritual father and condemn them. The more a person conceals his thoughts, the more they multiply and gain strength. But an evil thought, when revealed, is immediately destroyed. If you hide things, they have great power over you, but if you could only speak of them before God, in the presence of another, then they will often wither away, and lose their power."

Confessing to anyone, even a bartender, taxicab driver or stranger in an airport, renews rather than contracts my humanity, even if all I get in return for my confession is the well-worn remark, "Oh that's not so bad. After all, you're only human" -- something like the *New Yorker* cartoon in which a psychologist reassures a Mafia contract killer stretched out on the couch, "Just because you do bad things doesn't mean you're bad."

But if I can confess to anyone anywhere, why confess in church in the presence of a priest? It's not a small question in societies in which the phrase "institutionalized religion" is so often used, the implicit message being that religious institutions necessarily impede or undermine religious life. Yet it's not a term we seem inclined to adapt to other contexts. Few people would prefer we got rid of institutionalized health care or envision a world without institutionalized transportation. Whatever we do that involves more than a few people requires structures.

Confession is a Christian ritual with a communal character. Confession in the church differs from confession in your living room in the same way that getting married in church differs from simply living together. The communal aspect of the event tends to safeguard it, solidify it, and call everyone to account -- those doing the ritual, and those witnessing it.

In the social structure of the Church, a huge network of local communities is held together in unity, each community helping the others and all sharing a common task while each provides a specific place to recognize and bless the main events in life from birth to burial. Confession is an essential part of that continuum. My confession is an act of reconnection with God and with all the people and creatures who depend on me and have been harmed by my failings and from whom I have distanced myself through acts of non-communion. The community is represented by the person hearing my confession, an ordained priest delegated to serve as Christ's witness, who provides

guidance and wisdom that helps each penitent overcome attitudes and habits that take us off course, who declares forgiveness and restores us to communion. In this way our repentance is brought into the community that has been damaged by our sins -- a private event in a public context.

"It's a fact," writes Fr. Thomas Hopko, "that we cannot see the true ugliness and hideousness of our sins until we see them in the mind and heart of the other to whom we have confessed."

* * *

This is an extract from Confession: Doorway to Forgiveness (Orbis Books, 2002). Jim Forest's earlier books include Praying with Icons, Ladder of the Beatitudes as well as biographies of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton.

Preparation for Confession

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 creation in heaven or on earth.
3. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor thy father and thy mother.
6. Thou shalt not kill.
7. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
8. Thou shalt not steal.
9. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
10. Thou shalt not covet that which is thy neighbors.

COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

1. To abstain for 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 once a year.
5. Not to solemnize marriage at forbidden times.
6. To pray to God every day, especially at morning and evening.

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.

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?

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!

AN ORTHODOX CONFESSION

WHICH LEADS THE INWARD MAN TO HUMILITY

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")

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 me 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 comandest 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 grieveest 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