



Archdiocese of Cape Town

Office of the Auxiliary Bishop of Cape Town

MAKING YOUR CONFESSION DURING THE LOCKDOWN

South Africa is among those countries with the most stringent lockdown conditions. Seeing that Canon Law does not supersede Civil Law, we have no authority to make provisions that conflict with Civil Law. During the lockdown we are asked to make the necessary sacrifices to ensure the wellbeing of all. It was noteworthy that when the State President extended the initial lockdown period he repeatedly used the rhetoric of ‘sacrifice for the benefit of others’. This accords very well with Catholic sentiment and with the Church’s Social Teachings.

How then does a Catholic cope with the need for the sacraments which cannot be provided at this time? With respect to the Eucharist, the Holy Father recently spoke of the meaningfulness of spiritual communion under the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We have put out prayers in this regard.

With respect to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation the same holds. We are encouraged to make a “perfect act of contrition”, and firmly resolve to celebrate the Sacrament as soon as circumstances permit. A “perfect act of contrition” is a lively sorrow for one’s sins because of one’s love of God. An “imperfect act of contrition” on the other hand refers to wanting forgiveness because of the fear of punishment.

This is how the Church cares for the faithful in these unusual circumstances. We are encouraged to entrust ourselves to the love and mercy of God. The prayers for a “spiritual confession”, with the necessary act of contrition, is available below the examination of Conscience.

*Sylvester David
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+Sylvester David OMI
Vicar General: Archdiocese of Cape Town

MAKING A PERFECT ACT OF CONTRITION

People who cannot get to confession because of the coronavirus lockdown or another serious reason can go to God directly, be specific about their sins, request pardon and experience God's loving forgiveness. [Pope Francis]



From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Acts of the Penitent

1450 "Penance requires... the sinner to endure all things willingly, be contrite of heart, confess with the lips, and practice complete humility and fruitful satisfaction."

Contrition

1451 Among the penitent's acts contrition occupies first place. Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again."

1452 When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.

1453 The contrition called "imperfect" (or "attrition") is also a gift of God, a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and the other penalties threatening the sinner (contrition of fear). Such a stirring of conscience can initiate an interior process which, under the prompting of grace, will be brought to completion by sacramental absolution. By itself however, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes one to obtain forgiveness in the sacrament of Penance.

1454 The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an *examination of conscience* made in the light of the Word of God. The passages best suited to this can be found in the Ten Commandments, the moral catechesis of the Gospels and the apostolic Letters, such as the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic teachings.

A simple Penitential Service without a Priest.

1. Prepare a quiet place and a quiet time. Have a lighted candle, a crucifix and a Bible opened to **one** of the following texts: **Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 11:28-30; or Luke 15:1-10**. Spend a few moments in silence and in private prayer.

2. **Make the sign of the cross** and pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable you to reflect honestly:

“O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen”.

3. Spend some time in recollection and look at your life. Look at relationships, areas of neglect, and also at un-Christian attitudes which may have crept in. Thank God for the good aspects and express sorrow for the negative ones. You may like to use the Examination of Conscience given at the end of this document.

Resolve to go to confession for serious sins as soon as circumstances change and movement is less restricted, saying:

I resolve to go to confession after the lockdown, but I pray for your forgiveness now.

4. Say the following act of contrition:

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven, and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen”.

5. Read one of the Biblical texts mentioned above and meditate on it for a few minutes.

6. For your penance:

- Pray the “Our Father” and “Hail Mary”
- Pray a brief prayer for the reparation of our Cathedral which has been vandalized and desecrated

7. Thank the Lord for the richness of his mercy and conclude by making the **sign of the cross**.

An Examination of Conscience

Before going to Confession you should make a review of mortal and venial sins since your last sacramental confession, and should express sorrow for sins, hatred for sins and a firm resolution not to sin again.

A helpful pattern for examination of conscience is to review the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church:

1. Have God and the pursuit of sanctity in Christ been the goal of my life? Have I denied my faith? Have I placed my trust in false teachings or substitutes for God? Did I despair of God's mercy?
2. Have I avoided the profane use of God's name in my speech? Have I broken a solemn vow or promise?
3. Have I shown Christlike respect to parents, spouse, and family members, legitimate authorities?
4. Have I cared for the bodily health and safety of myself and all others? Did I abuse drugs or alcohol? Have I supported in any way abortion, "mercy killing," or suicide?
5. Was I impatient, angry, envious, proud, jealous, revengeful, lazy? Have I forgiven others?
6. Have I discriminated against others because of race or other reasons?
7. Have I been chaste in thought and word?
8. Have I stolen anything from another, from my employer, from government?
9. Have I spoken ill of any other person? Have I always told the truth? Have I kept secrets and confidences?
10. Have I permitted sexual thoughts about someone to whom I am not married?
11. Have I desired what belongs to other people? Have I wished ill on another?
12. Have I been faithful to sacramental living (Holy Communion and Penance)?
13. Have I done penance by abstaining and fasting on obligatory days? Have I fasted before receiving communion?
14. Have I been mindful of the poor? Do I accept God's will for me?

A Brief Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten Commandments

I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.

- Have I treated people, events, or things as more important than God?

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

- Have my words, actively or passively, put down God, the Church, or people?

Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- Do I go to Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation? Do I avoid, when possible, work that impedes worship to God, joy for the Lord's Day, and proper relaxation of mind and body? Do I look for ways to spend time with family or in service on Sunday?

Honour your father and your mother.

- Do I show my parents due respect? Do I seek to maintain good communication with my parents where possible? Do I criticize them for lacking skills I think they should have?

You shall not kill.

- Have I harmed another through physical, verbal, or emotional means, including gossip or manipulation of any kind?

You shall not commit adultery.

- Have I respected the physical and sexual dignity of others and of myself?

You shall not steal.

- Have I taken or wasted time or resources that belonged to another?

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

- Have I gossiped, told lies, or embellished stories at the expense of another?

You shall not covet your neighbour's spouse.

- Have I honoured my spouse with my full affection and exclusive love?

You shall not covet your neighbour's goods.

- Am I content with my own means and needs, or do I compare myself to others unnecessarily?

Christ's Two Commandments

How well do we love God and others? Do we love as Christ calls us to? In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ gives us Two Commandments:

“He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments’” (Mt 22:37-40).

Not sure what love is? St. Paul describes it for us in his Letter to the Corinthians.

Is this how you love God and others? “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (1 Cor 13:4-8).