

Guides to the Examination of the Conscience



In Preparation for the Sacrament of Repentance

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salvation! And so, beloved, let us resolve to make use of these methods, and as often as possible fill our minds with thoughts of heavenly things; and love, poured down into our hearts from on high, will burst into flame within us. We will do this together and pray as often as we can, for prayer is the chief and strongest means for our renewal and well-being. We will pray, in the words the holy church teaches us: ‘O God, make me fit to love Thee now, as I have loved sin in the past.’”

Examination of Conscience (I)

The power and authority of absolution reside in the apostolic priesthood by virtue of our Lord’s express declaration: “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.” The Sacrament of Penance is the method by which this authority is exercised to remit sins committed after Baptism. Sin destroys the union between the soul and God, which was effected in Baptism. Thus, just as there is a sacrament (Baptism) to effect the union in the first place, so there is a sacrament (Penance) to restore this union when sin has broken it. The outward and visible sign of the sacrament is the declaration of a Priest of the apostolic succession. Its inward and spiritual grace is the application of the merits of the Cross to the life of the individual for the forgiveness of sin.

The part of the person approaching this sacrament is repentance. True repentance has three elements:

1. CONTRITION or sorrow for sin. This can be obtained only at the foot of the Cross. We may not have an *emotion* of sorrow, but when we see what our sins have done to Jesus, we shall *be* sorry.
2. CONFESSION of all known sin. This involves a careful examination of our conscience. We cannot confess our sins until we see exactly how we look to the all-seeing eye of God.

3. SATISFACTION AND AMENDMENT OF LIFE. We must intend to lead a new or better life. This intention is shown by our acceptance and performance of the penance imposed by the Priest in confession.

Self-Examination

Think of yourself as God's child, and of the wickedness of following Satan rather than your loving Father.

Do not be in a hurry, and do not vex yourself because you cannot remember everything. Be honest with God and with yourself; this is all God asks of you.

Write down briefly what you remember of your sins. Don't try to depend on your memory. If there is any question you do not understand, let it alone, and go on to the next one.

Do not fret about your sins. Remember, you are trying to recall them in order that you may be forgiven, not that you may be condemned, "A broken and contrite heart, O Lord, shalt thou not despise."

PRIDE is putting self in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or of some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by Him in a specific relationship to the rest of His creation.

believe, and in order to reach conviction you must get a full and exact knowledge of the matter before you. By meditation, by the study of God's Word, and by noting your experience, you must arouse in your soul a thirst and a longing – or, as some call it, 'wonder' – which brings you an insatiable desire to know things more closely and more fully, to go deeper into their nature.

"One spiritual writer speaks of it in this way: 'Love,' he says, 'usually grows with knowledge, and the greater the depth and extent of the knowledge the more love there will be, the more easily the heart will soften and lay itself open to the love of God, as it diligently gazes upon the very fullness and beauty of the divine nature and His unbounded love for me.'

"So now you see that the cause of those sins which you read over is slothfulness in thinking about spiritual things, sloth which stifles the feeling of the need of such thought. If you want to know how to overcome this evil, strive after enlightenment of spirit by every means in your power, attain it by diligent study of the Word of God and of the Holy Fathers, by the help of meditation and spiritual counsel, and by the conversation of those who are wise in Christ. Ah, dear brother, how much disaster we meet with just because we are lazy about seeking light for our souls through the word of truth. We do not study God's law day and night, and we do not pray about it diligently and unceasingly. And because of this our inner man is hungry and cold, starved, so that it has no strength to take a bold step forward upon the road of righteousness and

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 for 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?

On reading through this form of confession which the priest gave me I was horrified, and I thought to myself, “Good heavens! What frightful sins there are hidden within me, and up to now I’ve never noticed them!” The desire to be cleansed from them made me beg this great spiritual father to teach me how to know the causes of all these evils and how to cure them. And he began to instruct me.

“You see, dear brother, the cause of not loving God is want of belief, want of belief is caused by lack of conviction, and the cause of that is failure to seek for holy and true knowledge, indifference to the light of the spirit. In a word, if you don’t believe, you can’t love; if you are not convinced, you can’t

Irreverence. Deliberate neglect of the worship of God every Sunday in His Church, or being content with a perfunctory participation in it. Disregard of other Holy Days or of additional opportunities for giving God honor. Failure to thank God or to express our gratitude adequately.

Disrespect for God or holy things by deliberately treating them, in thought, word or deed, in a profane, contemptuous or over-familiar manner. Use of holy things for personal advantage, or the attempt to bribe or placate God by religious practices or promises.

Sentimentality. Being satisfied with pious feelings and beautiful ceremonies without striving to obey God’s will.

Presumption. Dependence on self rather than on God, with the consequent neglect of the means of grace – sacraments and prayer. Dispensation of ourselves from ordinary duties on the grounds that we are superior persons. Satisfaction or complacency over our spiritual achievements. Refusal to avoid, when possible, immediate occasions of temptation. Preference for our own ideas, customs, schemes or techniques. Foolish optimism.

Failure to recognize our job as a divine vocation, or to offer our work to God. Unwillingness to surrender to and abide in Christ, to let Him act in and through us. Failure to offer to God regularly in intercession the persons or causes that have, or should enlist our interest and support.

Distrust. Refusal to recognize God's wisdom, providence and love. Worry, anxiety, misgivings, scrupulosity, or perfectionism. Attempts to discern or control the future by spiritualism, astrology, fortune telling or the like. Magic or superstition.

Over-sensitiveness. Expectation that others will dislike, reject or mistreat us; over-readiness so to interpret their attitude, or quickness to take offense. Unfounded suspicions.

Timidity in accepting responsibility, or cowardice in facing difficulty or suffering. Surrender to feelings of depression, gloom, pessimism, discouragement, self-pity, or fear of death, instead of fighting to be brave, cheerful and hopeful.

Disobedience. Rejection of God's known will in favor of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of the legitimate (and therefore divinely ordained) laws, regulations or authority of the Church, state, husband, parents, teachers, etc.; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfill responsibilities or to consider the best interests of those under us.

Refusal to learn God's nature or will as revealed in Scripture, expounded in instructions or expert advice, or discernible through prayer, meditation or the reading of religious books. Absorption in our own affairs, leaving little time, energy or interest for the things of God.

Violation of confidence. Breaking of legitimate promises or contracts. Irresponsibility. Treachery. Unnecessary disappointment of another, or the

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

on the part of my brother I do not cover up with love, but proclaim abroad with censure. 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, and 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

causing of shame or anxiety to those who love us.

Impenitence. Refusal to search out and face up to our sins, or to confess and admit them before God. Disregard of our sins or pretense that we are better than we are. Self-justification or discounting our sins as insignificant, natural or inevitable. Self-righteous comparison of ourselves with others.

Refusal to accept just punishment or to make due reparation when possible. Deceit or lying to escape the consequences of our sins, or allowing another to suffer the blame for our faults. Overcompensation or attempts at self-reform or self-vengeance, to avoid surrender to God in humble penitence.

Shame (hurt pride), sorrow for ourselves because our sins make us less respectable than we like to think we are, or because we fear punishment or injury to our reputation, rather than sorrow for what sin is in the eyes of God. Refusal to admit we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can forgive our sins, or failure to use the means of getting assurance of His forgiveness when we need it. Unwillingness to forgive ourselves.

Vanity. Crediting to ourselves rather than to God our talents, abilities, insights, accomplishments, good works. Refusal to admit indebtedness to others, or inadequately to express gratitude for their help. Hypocrisy. Pretense to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgments on others for faults we excuse in ourselves.

Boasting, exaggeration, drawing attention to ourselves by talking too much, by claiming ability, wisdom, experience or influence we do not have, or by eccentric or ostentatious behavior. Undue concern over, or expenditure of time, money or energy on looks, dress, surroundings, etc., in order to impress others; or deliberate slovenliness for the same purpose. Seeking, desiring or relishing flattery or compliments.

Arrogance. Insisting that others conform to our wishes, recognize our leadership, and accept our own estimate of our worth. Being overbearing, argumentative, opinionated, obstinate.

Snobbery. Pride over race, family, position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions.

ANGER is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person.

Resentment. Refusal to discern, accept or fulfill God's vocation. Dissatisfaction with the talents, abilities or opportunities He has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint at the

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 nonessential 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 the 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

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

circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals of the blame for our maladjustment; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity or grumbling.

Pugnacity. Attack upon another in anger. Murder in deed or desire. Combativeness or nursing of grudges. Injury to another by striking, cursing or insulting him; or by damaging his reputation or property. Quarrelsomeness, bickering, contradiction, nagging, rudeness, or snubbing.

Retaliation. Vengeance for wrongs real or imagined, or the plotting thereof. Harsh or excessive punishment. Hostility, sullenness or rash judgment. Refusal to forgive, or to offer or accept reconciliation. Unwillingness to love, to do good to, or to pray for enemies. Boycotting or ostracizing another for selfish reasons. Spoiling others' pleasure by uncooperativeness or disdain, because we have not got our way, or because we feel out of sorts or superior.

ENVY is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging His gift and vocation to others.

Jealousy. Offence at the talents, success or good fortune of others. Selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or distress. Belittling others.

Malice. Ill-will, false accusations, slander, backbiting. Reading false motives into others' behavior. Initiation, collection or retelling of gossip. Arousing, fostering or organizing antagonism against others. Unnecessary criticism, even when true. Deliberate annoyance of others, teasing or bullying.

Contempt. Scorn of another's virtue, ability, shortcomings or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. Ridicule of persons, institutions or ideals.

COVETOUSNESS is the refusal to respect the integrity of other creatures, expressed in the inordinate accumulation of material things; in the use of other persons for our personal advantage; or in the quest for status, power or security at their expense.

Inordinate Ambition. Pursuit of status, power, influence, reputation, or possessions at the expense of the moral law, of other obligations, or of the rights of others. Ruthless or unfair competition. Putting self or family first. Conformity to standards we recognize as wrong or inadequate in order to get ahead. Intrigue or conspiracy for self-advancement.

What is there to believe in if not the Word of God, in which everything is true and holy? I wish well to all my neighbors, and why should I hate them? I have nothing to be proud of; besides having numberless sins, I have nothing at all which is fit to be praised, and what should I with my poverty and ill-health lust after? Of course, if I were an educated man, or rich, then no doubt I should be guilty of the things you spoke of."

"It's a pity, dear one, that you so little understood what I said. Look! It will teach you more quickly if I give you these notes. They are what I always use for my own confession. Read them through, and you will see clearly enough an exact proof of what I said to you just now."

He gave me the notes, and I began to read them, as follows:

A 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 love for my neighbors, 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:

First, don't bring into confession sins which you have already repented of and had forgiven. Don't go over them again, for that would be to doubt the power of the sacrament of penance.

Next, don't call to mind other people who have been connected with your sins; judge yourself only.

Thirdly, the holy Fathers forbid us to mention all the circumstances of the sins, and tell us to acknowledge them in general, so as to avoid temptation both for ourselves and for the priest.

Fourthly, you have come to repent and you are not repenting of the fact that you can't repent – that is, your penitence is lukewarm and careless.

Fifthly, you have gone over all these details, but the most important thing you have overlooked: you have not disclosed the gravest sins of all. You have not acknowledged, nor written down, that you do not love God, that you hate your neighbor, that you do not believe in God's Word, and that you are filled with pride and ambition. A whole mass of evil, and all our spiritual depravity is in these four sins. They are the chief roots out of which spring the shoots of all the sins into which we fall."

I was very much surprised to hear this, and I said, "Forgive me, Reverend Father, but how is it possible not to love God our creator and preserver?"

Domination. Seeking to use or possess others. Over-protection of children; refusal to correct or punish lest we lose their affection; insistence that they conform to our ideal for them contrary to their own vocation. Imposing our will on others by force, guile, whining, or refusal to cooperate. Over-readiness to advise or command; abuse of authority. Patronizing, pauperizing, putting others under a debt of gratitude, or considering ourselves ill-used when others' affection or compliance is not for sale.

Respect of persons, favoritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth, to fulfill duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked, because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the favor or approval of others. Leading, tempting or encouraging another to sin.

Avarice. Inordinate pursuit of wealth or material things. Theft, dishonesty, misrepresentation, or sharing in stolen goods. Cheating in business, taxes, school or games. Making worldly success the goal of our life or the standard for judging others.

Prodigality. Waste of natural resources or personal possessions. Extravagance or living beyond our income, to impress others or to maintain status. Failure to pay debts. Gambling more than we can afford to lose, or to win unearned profits. Unnecessary borrowing or carelessness with others'

money. Expenditures on self of what is needed for the welfare of others.

Penuriousness. Undue protection of wealth or security. Selfish insistence on vested interests or on claimed rights. Refusal to support or help those who have a claim on us. Sponging on others. Stinginess. Failure to give due proportion of our income to Church and charity, or of our time and energy to good works. Failure to pay pledges promised to the Church or charities, when able to do so.

GLUTTONY is the overindulgence of natural appetites for food and drink, and by extension the inordinate quest for pleasure or comfort.

Intemperance. Overindulgence in food, drink, smoking, or other physical pleasures. Fastidiousness, fussiness, demanding excessively high standards, or dilettantism. Condemnation of some material things or pleasures as evil in themselves, attempting to prohibit their use rather than their abuse.

Lack of Discipline. Negligence in keeping the days of fasting or abstinence, or failure to use other needed means of self-discipline. Neglect of bodily health – not getting sufficient rest, recreation, exercise, or wholesome nourishment. Failure to use or to cooperate with available medical care when ill. Use of sickness as a means of escape from responsibilities.

A Confession which Leads the Inward Man to Humility

Taken from "The Pilgrim Continues His Way," translated from the Russian by R.M. French

...Next day, by God's help, I came to Kiev. The first and chief thing I wanted was to fast a while and to make my confession and communion in that holy town. So I stopped near the saints, as that would be easier for getting to church. A good old Cossack took me in, and as he lived alone in his hut, I found peace and quiet there. At the end of a week, in which I had been getting ready for my confession, the thought came to me that I would make it as detailed as I could. So I began to recall and go over all my sins from youth onward very fully, and so as not to forget it all I wrote down everything I could remember in the utmost detail. I covered a large sheet of paper with it.

I heard that at Kitaevaya Pustina, about five miles from Kiev, there was a priest of ascetic life who was very wise and understanding. Whoever went to him for confession found an atmosphere of tender compassion and came away with teaching for his salvation and ease of spirit. I was very glad to hear of this, and I went to him at once. After I had asked his advice and we had talked awhile, I gave him my sheet of paper to see. He read it through and then said, "Dear friend, a lot of this that you have written is quite futile. Listen:

Have you excessively yearned for material goods without wishing to share them with others who need them?

Has miserliness taken possession of your soul?

Have you accepted stolen goods?

Have you disposed of others' goods when they were entrusted to you?

Ninth Commandment

Have you slandered your neighbor? Have you criticized others, spoken scandal or abused them for what you imagine are their sins and vices?

Do you like to hear bad rumors about someone and then readily spread them, being allured by gossip and idle chatter?

Do you tell lies? Do you always try to be truthful?

Tenth Commandment

Do you envy others? Envy always leads to malice and hatred and is capable of leading you to commit reckless acts, even killing.

LUST is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, debasing it from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us.

Unchastity. Violation of the Church's marriage laws. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfill the purpose of Holy Matrimony in the bringing forth and giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities of the work involved. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence outside matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others.

Immodesty. Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress or actions; or in oneself by reading, pictures or fantasies. Collecting or recounting dirty stories.

Prudery. Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil in itself. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempt to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex.

Cruelty. Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals.

SLOTH is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service or sacrifice.

Laziness. Indolence in performing spiritual, mental or physical duties, or neglect of family, business or social obligations or courtesies. Procrastination of

disliked tasks. Busyness or triviality to avoid more important commitments. Devotion of excessive time to rest, recreation, amusement, television, light reading or the like. Waste of employer's time, or shoddy or inadequate work.

Indifference. Unconcern over injustice to others, especially that caused by currently accepted social standards; or unmindfulness of the suffering of the world. Failure to become adequately informed on both sides of contemporary issues or on the Christian principles involved. Neglect of duties to state or community. Failure to provide adequately for or to treat justly those in our employ.

Ignoring of needy, lonely or unpopular persons in our own or the parish family, or in the neighborhood; or unwillingness to minister to them. Insufficient attention to the religious and other needs of our family. Failure to fulfill our obligation of Christian missionary witness, or to take a full and informed part in the effort to make the Church's unity and holiness a manifest reality on earth.

Do you blame yourself in everything or only in some things?

Have you had recourse to unlawful operations (abortions), which is also killing, a sin of both husband and wife?

Seventh Commandment

Have you lived with someone of the opposite sex in a carnal relationship without having had a church marriage?

Do you conduct yourself freely and loosely with members of the opposite sex?

Have you defiled yourself by giving in to impure and lewd thoughts and desires? Or by reading pornographic books or looking at pornographic pictures? This includes sinful songs, suggestive dances, dirty jokes, movies, public performances, immodest dress, etc.

Have you committed impure acts by yourself or with others?

Have you had carnal relations with another person?

Have you engaged in unnatural practices (bestiality, transvestitism, sodomy)?

Eighth Commandment

Have you taken someone else's property in a direct or indirect way? -- by fraud, diverse cunning, conspiracy?

Perhaps you have not done what you were obliged to do in return for the recompense you received?

Have you taken care of them in their illnesses and old age?

If your parents have died, do you often pray in church or at home for the repose of their souls?

Have you been disrespectful towards the pastors of the Church? Have you criticized them? Have you become embittered against them when they reminded you of eternity, of preparation for it, of the salvation of your soul, of sins; or when they call on you to be obedient to the Church and her rules?

Have you insulted someone older than you?

Sixth Commandment

You have not physically killed anyone in the literal sense, but perhaps you were the cause of someone's death indirectly: you could have helped someone poor or sick but did not; you did not feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, take in a stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and those in jail (Matt. 25:34-46)?

Have you committed spiritual murder, i.e., have you led someone astray from the proper path; have you been enticed by heresy or schism; have you tempted someone to sin?

Have you killed someone spiritually by a display of malice and hatred?

Do you forgive those who offend you?

Do you bear malice and resentment in your heart for long?

Self-Examination According to the Beatitudes (II)

Based on the self-examination from Father Thomas Hopko, If We Confess Our Sins, Department of Religious Education, the Orthodox Church in America, 1975

The following questions placed in the light of the Beatitudes are offered as a help toward the achievement of the most limited self-knowledge. They are given more as a general indication of what our approach should be, than as an exhaustive "examination of conscience." Before proceeding, however, we must ask ourselves the most fundamental question upon which everything else stands and falls: Do we really believe that the teachings of Christ are practical and applicable to our lives in the world? Do we really believe that the Holy Spirit is in us making "all things possible," including the keeping of the commandments of Christ? If we do not, then there is no reason to go further either to confession, or to the Church in general.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (St. Matthew 5:3)

Am I poor before God and men?

Do I cultivate the attitude of poverty?

Do I realize that all is God's and from God?

Do I use my life and everything I have as that which belongs to God?

Do I share the goods of the earth with others, knowing that all is God's?

Do I take my opinions and ideas from God?

Do I acknowledge my spiritual and intellectual poverty before God, accepting His wisdom and truth?

Am I possessive, selfish, self-satisfied, self-righteous, self-seeking?

Am I an idolater of my own opinions, ideas, possessions?

Do I lust after status, power, authority, wealth, position?

Do I really love and value poverty as the perfect ideal?

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted (St. Matthew 5:4)

Am I a person who mourns?

Do I lament over the suffering of men?

Do I weep over the troubles in Church and state, family and society?

Do I suffer with all who suffer, in poverty and squalor, in misery and sin?

Do I weep over sickness, disease, tragedy and death? Or do I simply "take it as it is" passing off as courage what is really hard-heartedness and lack of sympathetic concern?

Do I have compassion on the lowly, the lustful, the addicted, the selfish, the wretched, the evil and sinful of the world without judgment or condemnation?

despair have you given way to impudent grumbling at God or even reviling Him?

Have you sworn an oath and then broken it?

Have you given in to despondency?

Do you pray absent-mindedly or inattentively?

Fourth Commandment

Do you violate the sanctity of Sundays and great feast-days which have been fixed by the Church by working for gain or profit?

Instead of attending divine services on feast-days, do you spend time entertaining yourself, e.g. at a ball or the theater, movies or some gathering where there is no mention of God?

Have you yourself arranged such entertainments and gatherings and thus distracted people from attendance at church?

Do you conscientiously attend divine services? Do you come to church late, at the middle or end of the service? Do you leave it early?

Do you attend church on Sundays and feast-days?

Do you help the poor and those in need?

Do you violate the fasts?

Have you been drunk or used drugs?

Fifth Commandment

Have there been times when you were disrespectful towards your parents, or inattentive to their advice and concern?

Second Commandment

Does God take first place with you? Perhaps God does not take first place, but something else, for example, the accumulation of money, the acquisition of property, amusement and entertainment, food and drink, clothes, self-adornment, the urge to devote attention to yourself, to play the leading part, to receive praise, to spend your time in distractions, in reading frivolous books, etc.?

Are you distracted from God by a passion for television, movies, the theater, card games?

Perhaps because of worrying about yourself or your family you forget about God and fail to please Him and do not carry out what is required of you by the Church?

If so, that means you are serving an idol and that it, not God, has taken first place with you.

Perhaps art, sport or study take first place with you? Perhaps some passion (love of money, gluttony, carnal love) has taken possession of your heart? Have you made an idol of yourself out of pride or egotism? Examine yourself.

Third Commandment

Do you use foul language in ordinary everyday conversation? Have you been thoughtless and irreverent with the name of God or, what is worse, have you treated something holy as a joke? Or, God forbid, in a fit of bitterness or anger or

Am I sad over the sins and faults of others? Or do I, in fact, laugh and gloat and mock and take perverse pleasure in those things about which true Christians, in imitation of Christ, can only mourn?

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (St. Matthew 5:5)

Am I meek with the meekness of Jesus?

Am I meek in the sense that I only fight evil with good?

Do I accept and practice the fact that humble love and truth and courage in goodness is the only weapon available in any battle with sin and sinful people?

Do I lord it over others, at home, at work, at church?

Do I love and actually use force, brute command, blind authority, intimidation, coercion, to accomplish my will?

Do I bless those who curse me, pray for those who abuse me, do good to those who hate me, serve those who misuse me, speak to those who shun me?

Do I love my enemies and forgive my offenders?

Do I believe in the method of the meekness of Christ as the only way for genuine achievement?

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (St. Matthew 5:6)

Do I hunger and thirst for God?

Do I desire to be righteous?
 Do I work to be holy?
 Do I read or study or make any continued effort for
 love and for truth, for the Spirit of God?
 Do I pray?
 Do I fast?
 Do I read the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, the
 lives of the Saints, and other spiritually profitable
 works?
 Do I do any “spiritual exercises” which train me in
 goodness?
 Do I come to Church?
 Do I participate in the Mysteries?
 Do I go out of my way to help, to teach, to serve in
 some way?
 Do I do the things which I know bring righteousness?

**Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain
 mercy (St. Matthew 5:7)**

Do I show mercy to others?
 Do I forgive those who offend me?
 Do I try to understand those who are different?
 Do I take pleasure in judging and condemning?
 Do I talk about others?
 Do I revel in gossip?
 Do I say things, though possibly true, which need not
 be said but only can harm?
 Do I rejoice in wrong?
 Am I legalistic, loving the law more than the Spirit?
 Do I cover offenses, or do I stir things up by picking
 and condemning?

Questions for Penitents According to the Ten Commandments (IV)

*Taken from “Confession” A Series of Lectures on the Mystery
 of Repentance, by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky)*

First Commandment

Do you constantly have the thought of God in mind
 and the fear of God in your heart?
 Is your faith in God shaken by skepticism or doubt?
 Do you question the holy tenets of the Orthodox
 Faith?
 Do you ask God to strengthen your faith?
 Do you despair of God’s mercy?
 Do you pray to God every day, morning and night?
 Is your prayer zealous?
 Do you always attend divine services whenever
 possible? Do you miss them without good
 reason?
 Do you prefer religious books and in fact do you read
 them?
 Have you read atheistic and heretical books out of
 sinful curiosity?
 When the Church requests it, do you willingly make
 donations to charitable causes and to the Church?
 Have you consulted fortune-tellers?
 Have you taken part in séances?
 Have you forgotten about the most important thing in
 life, i.e., preparation for eternity and your answer
 to God if you have given yourself up to vanity,
 sloth, pleasure and carelessness?

21. Perhaps your husband is a blasphemer? Be patient and struggle so that he can quit the evil of blasphemy.

Am I petty and small?
Do I slander and shame?
Am I prejudiced, making judgments and coming to conclusions without proper facts but with preformed opinions?
Do I actually prefer strict judgment to tender mercy?

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (St. Matthew 5:8)

Do I love purity, cleanness, and wholeness?
Am I polluted by filthy thoughts and words and actions?
Is my mind stained by demonic rationalizations and prejudices? Or am I pure in my openness to all that is good?
Is my body corrupted by beastly sensuality and lust?
Are my thoughts and deeds pure, or are there always hidden motives and intentions?
Am I trusting and trustful, with a singleness of purpose and total integrity in everything? Or do I connive and deceive, cheat and lie?
Am I hypocritical and pretentious?
Am I caught by some passion: eating, drinking, smoking, working, playing, sleeping, or something else which has more control over me than I have over it?
Is there any darkness or impurity which blinds me and holds me from freedom and wholeness with God?

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God (St. Matthew 5:9)

- Do I love and make peace? At home, at work, at church, in society, and the whole world?
Am I angry and impatient?
Do I look for fights and arguments?
Do I provoke others to anger?
Do I believe in “turning the other cheek?” Or do I take refuge in physical force?
Do I love violence?
Do I worship aggression and power?
Do I seek inner peace and quiet which is the basic condition for peace in the world?

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (St. Matthew 5:10).

**Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
(St. Matthew 5:11)**

- Am I ever persecuted for what is right?
Am I ready to be?
Am I ready to give my life, without vengeance, for what is true?
Do I participate in good activities which may bring criticism from others? Or do I take the easy road of non-involvement in human affairs, in family or job or church or society at large?

10. Are you aware of whom they associate with and whom they have as friends?

11. Are you aware of what they read? Do you try and get them books and magazines of ethical and religious content?

12. Have you been taking them to sinful shows or movies, and do you allow them to watch television indiscriminately, timelessly, and without parental scrutiny?

13. Do you teach them humility and are you concerned that they dress modestly?

14. Perhaps you curse them when they aggravate you? Perhaps you send them to Hell?

15. Perhaps you had an abortion or you avoid childbearing?

16. Have you been unjust to your children with the distribution of your property?

17. You the husband, are you under the impression that child rearing and development is the responsibility of your wife? You are also responsible to read to them, to advise them and spend time with them so you can give your wife a break, and also let the children feel your presence so that they can hold back and not get into trouble.

18. Perhaps you abuse them verbally and you scold them with indecent words?

19. Do you love and honor each other's parents and relatives? Have your parents or relatives been interfering in your home life and become the reason for dissention and quarreling between you?

20. Perhaps you have been interfering in the home life of your child?

2. Perhaps one of the partners offended or saddened the other in the presence of others or privately?

3. Perhaps you don't overlook each others' possible weaknesses? Have you been insensitive?

4. Perhaps you the husband encourage your wife to follow the latest fashions and any crazy fad which contradicts God's law? Perhaps you the wife influence your husband towards parties, expecting him to give you the means to follow the different fashions and the way of the world?

5. Are you sensitive to the struggle that one of you has outside of the house and the other inside the house, so you can support each other in the daily struggle, thus providing comfort to each other psychologically, emotionally and physically?

6. As the husband have you been overly demanding?

7. Perhaps you don't allow your wife or your husband to go to church or to spiritual gatherings or to sermons?

8. Do you raise your children "with the teachings and the way of the Lord?" Have you been only interested in their intellectual education and ignoring the quality of their personality?

9. Do you take them to Church, to Holy Confession, to frequent Holy Communion, to Sunday School? Do you teach them with words and your exemplary virtues? Did you teach them to pray morning and night and also at mealtime with seriousness and devotion?

Do I go along with things which are wrong from fear or cowardice or laziness?

Do I flee responsibility?

Do I worship security?

Am I defending my own small life in contradiction to the righteousness of God?

Am I, in fact, ashamed of Christ?

Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (St. Matthew 5:12)

Is my joy and gladness in God? Or is it in this world with its passions, powers, possessions, and praise?

Am I mean and grouchy or jealous and moody?

Am I despairing and without hope?

Am I pessimistic and anxious?

Do I complain and spread darkness and irritation to others?

Is my faith of no consequence in my actions and attitudes to the events of life?

Do I really "consider the lilies of the field..." and trust in God and rejoice in this trust?

Is my treasure in God or in myself?

Is my life "hid with Christ in God" or am I, in fact, a man of this age in body, mind and spirit?

Do I believe and have in truth the "joy of believing?"

Guide to Confession (III)

St. Nicodemus Hagiorite Publication Society

You and God

1. Do you believe in God the Holy Trinity, the Divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit? Do you believe in the Church and her sacraments? Do you believe in the existence of Paradise and Hell?

2. Do you entrust yourself always, and especially in the difficult times of your life, to the Providence of God, or do you become discouraged and show lack of faith?

3. Perhaps at times of affliction, illness, and trials in your life, you grumble against God and you lose your faith and courage?

4. Perhaps you believe in psychics, card-readers, astrologers and horoscopes? In sorcerers and witches, in palm reading or general fortune tellers? Perhaps you advised others to believe and take refuge in these?

5. Perhaps you believe in superstitions and you pay attention to “bad omens” such as the number 13, walking under a ladder, crossing the path of a black cat, spilling salt, and other bad luck beliefs?

6. Perhaps you believe in luck?

7. Do you do your prayers in the morning and evening and also during mealtime? Perhaps you are embarrassed to cross yourself in front of other people *i.e.* at a restaurant or while passing by the outside of Holy Church?

8. Do you study the Holy Scriptures, along with

16. Have you ever been gluttonous?

17. Have you been lazy, insolent, and negligent?

18. Have you been using obscene, insulting, or improper words, for the sake of being comical or to insult and humiliate another person?

19. Do you have a spirit of self denial?

20. Do you expel from your mind any bad thoughts that come to pollute your head?

21. Do you control your eyes so that they don't curiously examine provocative pictures or people?

22. Do you control what goes into your ears?

23. Do you dress indecently? If you are a woman have you been wearing men's clothing or provocative clothing and been causing scandal by your appearance, and most importantly entering holy places in such a manner? If you are a man do you have a frantic appearance?

24. Perhaps you take part in frantic or sinful dancing? Do you sing or listen to immoral songs, especially rock and roll?

25. Perhaps you drink heavily?

26. Have you been smoking cigarettes? Smoking destroys a person's valuable health and happens to be a sinful waste of money.

For Couples

1. Are you loyal to your spouse? It is terrible when one of the partners is having extramarital relations.

Your Self

1. Have you been attached to material things and worldly goods?
2. Have you been stingy and a lover of money?
3. Have you been greedy?
4. Have you been a spendthrift? Your surplus belongs to the poor.
5. Have you been conceited?
6. Perhaps you like to show off your clothes, your wealth, your success of your child's grades?
7. Perhaps you crave admiration and adulation from people around you?
8. Do you accept praise with pleasure, wanting others to flatter you and say that there is no one like you?
9. Do you get upset when someone points out your mistakes and do you get hurt when you get reprimanded or corrected by your superiors?
10. Perhaps you are stubborn, obstinate, egotistical, self-proud, and self-centered? Pay attention to these sins because it is difficult to get rid of them.
11. Do you play cards – even though you may not use money – with people in your home or with relatives looking to “kill time?”
12. Have you polluted your body and soul with carnal sins?
13. Do you watch filthy programs on television or at the movies?
14. Have you been reading obscene books and magazines?
15. Have you ever considered suicide?

various other religious books?

9. Do you attend church on Sundays and on major feast days?
10. Do you attend the Holy Liturgy from the beginning to end, or do you get there late and leave before it finishes?
11. Do you go to church dressed modestly? Are you careful not to laugh or start conversation with others, even during the sacraments of Marriage or Baptism?
12. Perhaps you hinder your husband, wife, or children from attending church? Do you tell your acquaintances not to attend church?
13. Do you receive Holy Communion often, or once a year and that without going to Holy Confession?
14. Do you swear with no reason or falsely, and did you not keep an oath or a pledge you took?
15. Perhaps you blaspheme the name of Christ, the Panagia (Virgin Mary) and our Saints?
16. Do you fast if you don't have serious health problems; on Wednesday and Friday and during Lenten seasons?
17. Perhaps you throw religious books or pamphlets in dirty places?

Your Relations with Others

1. Perhaps you have hatred or strong dislike towards someone who treated you badly or insulted you in his anger?

2. Perhaps you are suspicious, and with no reason you distrust everyone, suspecting that they may be talking about you, that they don't want you, that they don't like you or love you?

3. Perhaps you get jealous and bothered about the progress, the happiness, the beauty, and the goods of other people?

4. Perhaps you stay untouched and unmoved in the presence of your neighbor's misfortune or serious need?

5. In your everyday transactions with your partner, co-workers, or customers, are you honest, straightforward, sincere, and upright?

6. Perhaps you slandered or accused your fellow-men?

7. Perhaps you speak sarcastically and make fun of the devout and those who fast and struggle to live a true Christian life? Or those that have physical or spiritual weaknesses or limitations?

8. While you happened to hear some information or accusation against a third person, perhaps you told others, and you damaged, without meaning to, the reputation and honor of your fellow human being?

9. Perhaps you pass judgment on the behavior, the deeds, the mistakes, or the shortcomings of others when they are absent, even when what you are saying happens to be true?

10. Perhaps you cursed someone who did you wrong, or cursed yourself in difficult situations of your life, or the time and moment that you were born?

11. Perhaps you send people to "Hell or the devil"

in your anger, or use insulting hand gestures?

12. Do you respect your parents? Do you care for them, do you put up with their elderly weakness if they have any? Do you help them with their physical and spiritual needs? Do you help them go to church and receive communion? Perhaps you may have deserted them and treat them with indifference?

13. Perhaps you influenced and convinced your parents to give you the lions share of their inheritance and in this way dealt unfairly with your brother?

14. Did you strike anybody in your anger, or abuse him verbally?

15. Do you carry on your vocation with integrity?

16. Do you steal? Or did you suggest it to someone or helped him do it; or agreed to cover for the thief, or receive any stolen goods knowingly?

17. Perhaps you are ungrateful and thankless to God, and to people that are good to you?

18. Perhaps you hang around with the wrong crowd and are involved in sinful relations? Perhaps you pushed someone to sin either by your example or talking them into it?

19. Perhaps you have committed forgery? Perhaps you have taken advantage of the public? Perhaps you borrowed money or other objects and failed to return them?

20. Did you ever commit murder in any way?

21. Do you get mixed up in other peoples' lives, work, or family, and cause arguments and fights?

22. Do you give to the poor, the orphans, the elderly, the large and poor families that you know?