

Preparation for Holy Confession

The gift of God's forgiveness is received through private prayer, corporate worship, the disciplines of prayer and fasting, penitential services and above all through the sacrament of Holy Confession.

The value of Holy Confession is twofold. First, through this sacramental act of the ordained priest and the Christian believer we have the assurance of divine forgiveness, according to the words of Christ (Jn 20:23). Secondly, Holy Confession provides the opportunity to talk about one's deep concerns, to receive counsel and to be encouraged toward spiritual growth, all of which are universally recognized as extremely beneficial to personal life.

Holy Confession is appropriate whenever an Orthodox Christian feels the need for it. It is also a part of our total spiritual preparation during the fast periods leading up to the great feasts of Easter, Christmas,

the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos and the Feast of the Twelve Apostles. However, Holy Confession is especially necessary a) when a serious sin has been committed; b) when a habitual sin has overwhelmed a Christian, or c) when a Christian has stopped growing spiritually and needs a reexamination of priorities.

We confess our sins to God and the power of forgiveness is God's. However, the gift of God's forgiveness, although assured, is not magical. It does not automatically spare us from spiritual struggle—the continual vigilance against evil and the unceasing warfare against sin. Holy Confession will bear fruits in the Spirit only when the believer hates evil, utterly rejects sin and patiently cultivates positive habits of the life in Christ. "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ Jesus . . . Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life" (Rm 6:11,13)

How can one prepare for Holy Confession? Preparation for Holy Confession is a prayerful examination of feelings, thoughts, words, acts, attitudes, habits, values, priorities, goals, direction and way of life. This prayerful self-examination includes not only the

personal religious life, but also family relationships, social activities, job conduct, business dealings, political commitments and even recreational pursuits, because our entire existence should be lived in Christ. The goal of this sincere search of conscience under the light of the Holy Spirit is not to condemn ourselves, but to affirm our true selves in Christ who has given us access to God's mercy and forgiveness, and who has taught us to live for God's glory.

Pray and think about your confession over several days. Ask God to help you perceive your sins and to make a thorough confession of them. Sometime before the sacrament of Holy Confession, offer selected prayers from the previous Confessional Prayers, Psalm 51 (p. 43), or the following prayer of repentance:

A Prayer of Repentance

O Lord my God, I confess that I have sinned against You in thought, word and deed.

I have also omitted to do what Your holy law requires of me.

But now with repentance and contrition I turn again to Your love and mercy.

I entreat You to forgive me all my transgressions and to cleanse me from all my sins.

Lord, fill my heart with the light of Your truth. Strengthen my will by Your grace.

Teach me both to desire and to do only what pleases You. Amen.

Now, without justifications or self-pity, make a prayerful examination of your conscience regarding all things. As a help, reflect on your life in the light of the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. Take pencil and paper and specify your sins so that, at the time of the sacrament, you will be able to make a thorough confession from the list, without confusion or lapse of memory.

The Ten Commandments

I am the Lord your God, and you shall have no other gods before me.

Has God been the source, center and hope of my life? Have I put myself, others or things before God? Have I failed to trust in God's existence, love and mercy? Have I failed to pray to God, to worship Him and to thank Him for His blessings? Have I tried to serve God and keep His commandments faithfully? Have I murmured or complained against God in adversity? Have I praised and glorified God through my words and deeds?

You shall not make for yourself a graven image in order to worship it.

Have I valued anyone or anything above God? Have I given to anyone or anything the love, honor and worship that belongs to God alone? Have I made an idol of any person, idea, occupation, or thing?

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

Have I blasphemed God's holy name in any way? Have I sworn a false oath? Have I broken any solemn vow or promise? Have

I entered into an agreement, promise or contract against God's law? Have I cursed or used foul language?

Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.

Have I worshiped regularly on Sundays and major feastsdays and have I helped others to do the same? Have I worked unnecessarily on Sundays or major feastsdays or caused others to do so? Have I spent the Lord's Day in wholesome and edifying ways?

Honor your father and mother.

Have I loved and respected my parents as I should? Have I neglected them or failed to help them? Have I disobeyed them, deceived them or caused them pain by my words or deeds? Have I treated all my family members with patience and love?

You shall not kill.

Have I caused the harm, injury or death of anyone? Have I wished my own or anyone's harm or death? Have I been cruel

to animals or destroyed any life unnecessarily?

You shall not commit adultery.

Have I committed any immoral acts alone or with others? Have I caused others to commit immoral acts? Have I committed immoral acts in my heart?

You shall not steal.

Have I taken anything that was not mine from anyone or from anywhere? Have I cheated anyone? Have I caused others to steal or cheat? Have I tried to find the owners of lost things I have found? Have I damaged or destroyed anything that belonged to another? Have I defrauded anyone of rightful wages? Have I paid my debts? Have I given to the poor and to philanthropic causes in proportion to my means?

You shall not bear false witness.

Have I given false testimony against anyone? Have I spoken evil, told lies or

spread rumors about anyone? Have I disclosed to anyone the sins and faults of another? Have I made careless statements or done anything else to harm the name and reputation of another? Have I engaged in idle gossip?

You shall not covet.

Have I looked with envy, jealousy or hatred toward the possessions, talents or achievements of others? Have I desired the downfall or loss of others out of evil intent that I might benefit? Have I grieved that God has bestowed greater blessings on others than on me?

The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Have I truly recognized my complete dependence on God? Have I been proud, arrogant and self-righteous in my ways? Have I been selfish, possessive and self-seeking? Have I sought after status, power and wealth?

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Have I endured difficulties and afflictions with faith and patience? Have I felt sadness for the sufferings of the poor, the hungry, and addicted; the sick, the lonely and the sinful of the world? Have I truly been sorrowful for my sins and faults?

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Have I tried to serve or rather to dominate others at home, school, work, office, Church and elsewhere? Have I nursed hatred in my heart or desired revenge against anyone? Have I been resentful, bitter, unforgiving or insulting and abusive to others? Have I loved my enemies?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Have I truly yearned for God's will to be done in all things? Have I worked for justice in my family, society and the world in ways within my reach? Have I tried to

cultivate a righteous life through prayer, fasting, worship, receiving Holy Communion and deeds of love toward others?

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Have I shown compassion and help toward the poor, hungry, lonely and needy around me? Have I tried to understand and forgive others? Have I been indifferent, judgmental or legalistic?

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Have I loved goodness, purity and holiness? Have I succumbed to evil motives and intentions? Have I given way to impure thoughts, words or deeds? Have I been guilty of bias and prejudice? Have I been hypocritical, pretentious or self-indulgent to sinful passions?

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Do I have God's peace in my heart? Have I

been unfairly angry, aggressive or impatient? Have I worked for peace at home, work, Church and in society? Have I been irritable, polemical, or divisive?

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Have I complained when persecuted for God's sake? Have I prayed for my persecutors? Have I failed to defend anyone in the truth for fear of humiliation or persecution? Have I had the courage to stand up for what is right despite criticism, ridicule or persecution?

Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you on my account; rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

Is the joy of Christ in my heart even in trying moments? Have I been pessimistic, despondent or despairing? Have I truly delighted in the promise of God's treasures in heaven?