

## Examination of Conscience

One of the most important preparations for a true and fruitful celebration of the Sacrament of Penance (or confession) is the examination of conscience. This is a mental review of one's spiritual life, so that one knows what to confess. While there are many ways to do so, the Ten Commandments make an excellent point of reference.

A healthy examination of conscience will find trends of sinfulness and distance from God. Honesty and humility are important -- we must not gloss over or lightly dismiss our sins, but neither do we need to confess temptations, unintentional errors, or things which have truly happened beyond our control (for instance, missing Mass due to serious illness is not a sin). Sins of omission -- that is, failing to do the good one ought to do -- are perhaps often more numerous than sins of commission. Our goal as disciples of Christ is to become perfected in His image, not merely to avoid obvious evils. Our pilgrimage is not just away from sin (conversion and repentance), but towards the fullness of life in Christ Jesus.

Though it is not possible to make an exhaustive list of all possible sin, here is one form of an examination of conscience to begin your reflections.

### *1) I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no gods before Me.*

Have I put something or someone in my life ahead of God: money; drugs or alcohol; work; leisure activities; TV; the Internet; etc.? Have I tried to compromise my faith, thinking God should understand? Have I presumed on God's mercy in doing things I know are wrong? This Commandment is a positive invitation to a relationship of faith, hope and love with God; have I been lukewarm or indifferent to God? Have I used magic or superstition? Have I committed sacrilege?

### *2) You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.*

Do I use the names of God and Jesus as curse-words? Do I use other improper and coarse language? Do I take my religious duties seriously, and pray with reflection and devotion?

### *3) Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.*

Do I participate in Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation, or have I missed Mass? Am I reverent and attentive while there? Do I refrain from truly unnecessary work on Sundays, dedicating time for family, friends, and charitable works? Do I allow myself relaxation of body and mind needed for good balance in my life?

### *4) Honor your father and your mother.*

Do I show proper respect to my parents? Do I show proper respect to those in authority, both in the Church and in society? Do I pray for my parents, whether they are alive or already deceased? Do I visit the elderly, lonely and sick?

### *5) You shall not kill.*

Besides the obvious prohibition on actually taking a life, do I show due reverence for life? Do I take risks with my life, or with others' lives at work, at home, while driving or in other activities? Am I ever violent or abusive, either in words or actions? Do I grow angry and hold grudges? Do I take reasonable care for my health and the health of those who depend on me as a gift from God?

### *6) You shall not commit adultery.*

Have I abused God's gift of sexuality through adultery, fornication, masturbation, or activities which naturally lead to intercourse? Have I deliberately fostered lust and impurity in thought, language, use of television, movies, the Internet, or pornographic literature? Have I used contraception? If married, have I shown proper respect for my spouse as a whole person? Have I fulfilled my responsibilities as a parent, looking after the welfare of my children spiritually, socially, physically, emotionally?

### *7) You shall not steal.*

Have I taken things to which I have no right? Have I failed to give a day's work for a day's pay, or in other ways chosen to ignore obligations? As an employer, have I paid a just wage? Have I been honest in paying taxes? Have I been wasteful and careless with the goods of the earth?

### *8) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

Have I been guilty of lies, either to deceive another, to make myself look good, or to keep myself out of trouble? Have I been guilty of rash judgments about others? Do I gossip and expose the faults (real or imagined) of others? Have I detracted from another person's reputation?

### *9/10) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife/your neighbor's goods.*

Have I been jealous of the relationships and goods of others? Have I looked at others with lust or been angry at the good fortune of others?