

Preparation for the Holy Mystery of Repentance and Confession

Introduction

The following is by no means a complete treatise on the Holy Mystery of Repentance and Confession. Rather, it is a humble guide to help you examine your life and to make a good and complete confession before God and your priest-confessor.

Do not be afraid or embarrassed to speak in confession of all things that you have done. Do not let any sin linger on your conscience and in your soul to condemn you on that dread and awful Day of Judgment before God almighty; it will be too late at that time to repent, to confess, or to ask forgiveness.

Remember that three things are necessary for the complete abolishment of your sins: forgiveness, remission, and repentance. God will “set aside” your sins if you ask Him to forgive you; after all, He knows your weaknesses and your faults. God has paid the price which your sins cost you: your very life; Jesus Christ remitted your sins by giving His life in payment for your sins when He, the Sinless One, died on the Cross. You, however, must be repentant; this means that you must have a change of heart, a change of attitude, a change of life.

From this day forward, from this moment on, love God above all else, and live your life as though this day were your last on earth and tomorrow you expect to stand before God in judgment with the hope of entering His heavenly Kingdom for all eternity.



For all these reasons, overcome any obstacles that stand in your way to Holy Confession. The priest-confessor awaits you with love and much affection as the representative of Christ. As a man like you he is capable of understanding and sympathizing with his brothers and sisters who are fellow sinners.

Do away with any thought of embarrassment or fear. What is there to be fearful of, or embarrassed about, when your soul is suffering and being torn by the terrible consequences of sin? Why let fear and embarrassment keep you from receiving the great gift of peace and consolation which our Lord offers to you through His

Church and this great Mystery? It is surely the Evil One who tells you to be afraid and embarrassed; he does not want you to be healed and to slip away from his clutches. But remember, he is like a prowling lion, seeking someone to devour.

Do not be misled by some people who simply ask to have the absolution prayer read over them without going through the actual confession. Whenever this takes place through ignorance or negligence, a terrible fraud is committed which is a sin and mockery of God.

With faith and sincerity walk toward the Mystery of Holy Confession. Be absolutely certain that the infinite love of the Crucified Savior will receive you and deliver you, and will take away the weight that is upon your shoulders. It is the Lord Himself Who says: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Ask yourself the following questions about your relationship with God:

1. Do I believe in God and the Holy Trinity, in the Divinity of Christ, and in the Holy Spirit? Do I believe in the Church and Her Mysteries (sacraments)? Do I believe in the existence of Paradise and Hades (hell)?
2. Do I entrust myself always — and especially in difficult times — to the providence of God; or do I become discouraged and show lack of faith?
3. Do I lose my faith and courage, and/or do I grumble against God, at times of affliction, illness, and trials in my life?
4. Do I believe in psychics, card-readers, palm-readers, astrologers, and/or horoscopes? Have I advised others to believe in these false and demonic practices?
5. Do I believe in superstitions, and/or in "bad omens" (such as the number 13, walking under a ladder, crossing the path of a black cat, spilling salt, or other such foolish "bad luck" beliefs)?
6. Do I believe in "luck" or in "fate"?
7. Do I faithfully recite my prayers in the morning, at mealtimes, in the evening, and before going to bed? Am I embarrassed to make the Sign of the Cross in public, or in front of other people (such as in a restaurant or whenever passing in front of an Orthodox church)?
8. Do I study the Holy Scripture, as well as read other Orthodox religious books? Do I read religious books or tracts not published by the Orthodox Church?
9. Do I attend Church on Sundays and on major feast days?

10. Do I attend the Divine Liturgy from beginning to end, or do I arrive late and/or leave early?
11. Do I go to Church dressed modestly, or do I dress to look good or to be attractive to others? Am I careful not to start conversations with others during the services of the Church, or even to make comments to them?
12. Do I hinder my spouse, children, parents, brothers or sisters, or any other person from attending Church? Do I tell others not to attend Church, or not to attend certain services?
13. Do I receive Holy Communion often? Although no one is worthy to receive Holy Communion, do I prepare myself to receive the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ?
14. Do I swear for no reason, or falsely? Have I broken an oath or a promise?
15. Do I use the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, or of the Virgin Mary, the Panagia, or of the saints in any other way than with the deepest of respect and in my prayers? Do I use these names as a curse, or as idle, obscene, and/or vulgar talk?
16. Do I use obscene and/or vulgar words?
17. Do I abide by the fasting rules of the Church: Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year; Great Lent; Holy Week; the Apostles Fast (the days before June 29); the Dormition Fast (August 1 through 15); the Nativity Fast; the day before the Feast of Theophany (January 5); the feast day of the beheading of Saint John the Baptist (August 29); the feast day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14)? Do I fast before Holy Communion (from after the evening meal the night before)? Do I have health problems that mitigate or affect my ability to abide by the fasting principles?
18. Do I treat religious objects carelessly (such as piling papers or books on top of icons; or tossing religious books or pamphlets in dirty places or in the trash)?

Ask yourself the following questions about your relationship with other people:

1. Do I have hatred, or a strong dislike, toward someone, even if they may have treated me badly or insulted me?
2. Am I suspicious of others, or do I distrust others without good reason or cause? Do I think that others may be talking about me, that they do not want me, that they do not like me, or that they do not love me?
3. Am I jealous and/or bothered by the progress, happiness, beauty, or possessions of others?
4. Am I untouched and/or unmoved when I see or hear about the misfortune(s) or serious need(s) of another person?

5. Am I honest, straightforward, sincere, and upright in my every day dealings with friends, partners, co-workers, and/or customers?
6. Have I slandered, libeled, or accused another person?
7. Do I speak sarcastically or make fun of others? Do I belittle or make fun of those who are pious and devout? Do I put down or make fun of those who are handicapped by physical, emotional, or spiritual weakness?
8. If I heard some information or an accusation about someone, did I repeat it to another person? Have I damaged the reputation and honor of another person? Do I gossip about others?
9. Do I judge the behavior, deeds, mistakes, shortcomings, or weaknesses of others? Do I do so even if such attributes appear to be true?
10. Do I curse those whom I dislike, or who have done wrong to me, or who have hurt me? Have I cursed myself in difficult times or circumstances in my life? Have I regretted the day I was born?
11. Have I sent people "to hell" in my words, either in idle talk or in anger? Have I used insulting gestures toward others?
12. Do I respect my parents, despite their faults? Do I care for my parents, and do I put up with their weaknesses if they have any? Do I help them with their physical and spiritual needs? Do I help them go to Church and to receive Holy Communion? Have I deserted my parents, or do I treat them with indifference and neglect?
13. Have I sought to receive a greater share of inheritance from my parents, and thus dealt unfairly with my brothers and/or sisters?
14. Do I get mixed up in other people's lives, work, family, or personal affairs; do I cause arguments and/or fights?
15. Did I strike any one in my anger, or abuse anyone verbally?
16. Did I ever kill anyone; have I committed murder in any way?
17. Have I had an abortion, or have I urged or encouraged someone else to have an abortion? Have I helped someone have an abortion?
18. Do I carry out my vocation in life with integrity and honor?
19. Do I steal? Have I robbed any one, or embezzled from my employer? Do I suggest these acts to others, or have I helped them do it? Have I covered for a thief, or have I knowingly received stolen items?
20. Have I committed forgery? Have I taken advantage of my position or authority for my own gain? Have I borrowed money or other objects and failed to return them?

21. Do I hang around with the “wrong crowd,” and/or am I involved in sinful relations or actions with others? Have I pushed or encouraged someone to sin either by my example or through my words?
22. Am I ungrateful and thankless to God, and to those people who are good to me?
23. Do I give to the poor, to the needy, to orphans, to widows, to the elderly, to large or disadvantaged families?

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Have I been attached to material things and/or to worldly items?
2. Have I been selfish, stingy, or “cheap,” or a lover of money?
3. Have I been greedy?
4. Have I been a spendthrift? I must remember that my surplus belongs to the poor, and what I have kept back from them is theft.
5. Have I been conceited, or “puffed up” with pride?
6. Do I like to show off my clothes, my wealth, my success, my — or my child’s — grades or accomplishments? Do I brag about myself or my family?
7. Do I crave admiration and adulation from the people around me?
8. Do I accept praise with pleasure, and/or do I seek praise? Do I want others to flatter me, and/or do I get angry when they offer suggestions or constructive criticism? Do I say that there is no one like me, or better than me in some aspect of my life?
9. Do I get upset when someone points out my mistakes and errors; or when I am corrected or reprimanded by my seniors and/or supervisors?
10. Am I stubborn, obstinate, egotistical, self-proud, or self-centered? I must pay attention to these sins because it is very hard to get rid of them.
11. Do I engage in useless and/or idle pastimes that have no purpose or good? Do I play cards to “kill time”? Do I gamble?
12. Have I polluted my body and soul with carnal sins? Do I masturbate? Do I read “dirty,” lewd, indecent, or obscene material? Do I look at “dirty,” lewd, or indecent pictures or photographs? Do I purchase or look at pornographic materials? Do I go to places of “entertainment” that have such displays? Do I watch movies or television shows that have such images, words, or suggestions?
13. Do I control my eyes so that they do not curiously examine provocative people or pictures?
14. Do I dress indecently? Do I wear clothing appropriate to the opposite sex? Do I dress provocatively, or cause scandal by my appearance? Have I entered a Church dressed in these ways?

15. Do I take part in frantic or sinful dancing? Do I sing or listen to immoral, violent, or negativistic songs — especially to many of the songs and music that are produced today and such as are featured on MTV?
16. Do I expel from my mind any bad thoughts that come to pollute my thinking?
17. Have I ever considered suicide? Have I been seriously or severely depressed?
18. Have I been using obscene, insulting, or improper words for the sake of being comical or to insult or humiliate another person?
19. Do I drink alcohol heavily or to excess? Have I been drunk?
20. Do I take drugs without proper medical supervision? Am I addicted to drugs or other substances?
21. Do I smoke tobacco? I must remember that smoking destroys health and is a sinful waste of money.
22. Do I practice humility; do I have a spirit of self-denial?
23. Do I practice obedience; do I quietly accept the directions of others who are my seniors, my guides, my leaders, or my supervisors?

If you are married, ask yourself the following questions about your relationship with your spouse:

1. Am I loyal and faithful to my spouse? I must remember that it is terrible when one of the partners is having extramarital relations, whether these are physical or even if they are simply an affection for another that is more important or more “interesting” than the relationship with their spouse.
2. Have I offended or saddened my spouse publicly or in the presence of others?
3. Do I overlook my spouse’s weaknesses? Have I been insensitive?
4. Do I encourage my spouse to follow the latest fashions or popular attitudes which contradict God’s Law and my Orthodox faith? Do I influence my spouse to attend parties or social gatherings so that I — or both of us — can “be seen”? Do I insist on having money to spend on myself, on clothes, new fashions, or other selfish pursuits?
5. Am I sensitive to the personal struggles that each of us may have outside the house and inside the home, so that we can support each other in the daily struggle by providing emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual comfort for each other?
6. Am I overly demanding of my spouse?
7. Do I inhibit or prevent my spouse from going to Church or from attending spiritual gatherings, sermons, or instruction?

8. Is my spouse guilty of a habitual sin or a sinful habit; if so, have I patiently urged him/her through example and through kind words to repentance?
9. If I am the husband, have I assumed my ordained role as a Christ-like head of the family by sacrificing myself in every way to love, cherish, and care for my wife and my children? Do I make the "tough decisions" fairly and with total self-denial for the good and welfare of my wife and children? Do I come home at an early and reasonable hour from work? Do I spend unnecessary or excessive time away from my family with friends or associates in business, athletic, or social activities? Do I put my wife and my children first, or do other pursuits, occupations, or my career come before them? I must remember that I will learn humility by being a Christian husband and father; and the gates of heaven will open unto me.
10. If I am the wife, have I given over my natural inclination and desire to be the head of the family to my husband? Do I accept his decisions regarding the family with patience, or do I seek to argue and criticize him? Do I encourage him with patience and kindness to assume his proper role in the family?
11. If I am the husband, am I under the false impression that child-rearing and development is a responsibility of my wife? Do I understand that I also am responsible to care for them physically, to read to them, to advise them, to teach them, to spend time with them, to let them feel my kind and patient presence? Do I teach them by my example that they must hold back, restrain themselves, and not get into trouble; or do I mislead them through neglect, abandonment, and/or bad example?
12. Do I love and respect my in-laws? I must remember that the most severe test of my love for my spouse is the degree to which I can love the parents who nurtured him/her, who fashioned him/her according to their lives, and who presented him/her to me as my groom/bride. I must remember that in many cases the things that I consider irritating in my in-laws are the very things that are difficulties in my relationship with my spouse; overcoming them in one will help me deal with them in the other.

If you have children, ask yourself the following questions about your relationship with them:

1. Do I teach my children that the Lord God is Lord alone, and that they must love Him with all their heart, all their soul, and all their might?
2. Do I take an interest in the whole education of my children, personal, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual; or do I ignore certain of these?
3. Do I take my children to Church, to Holy Confession, to Holy Communion, to the Church (Sunday) School?

4. Do I teach my children by word and example; or does my example contradict my words?
5. Do I teach my children to pray each morning and each night? Do I teach them to pray at mealtimes?
6. Do I know what my children are reading? Do I encourage them to read books that will profit them and help them develop intellectually and spiritually?
7. Do I know who my children associate with and play with? Do I encourage them to associate and play with other moral, Christian, and Orthodox children?
8. Do I take my children to sinful movies, shows or other such entertainment? Do I carefully monitor what they are watching on the television, and listening to on the radio?
9. Do I let my children engage in useless pastimes? Do I allow them to watch television indiscriminately, or to waste their time in idle pursuits?
10. Do I teach my children humility and obedience — above all, by my example?
11. Do I encourage my children to dress modestly and appropriately to the occasion?
12. Do I curse my children when I am angry with them?
13. Am I unjust or unfair to my children in the distribution of food, toys, belongings, necessities, or their inheritance?
14. Have I physically struck my children inappropriately?
15. Have I hurt my children emotionally?
16. Have I abused my children physically and/or emotionally?

Summary

Do I see how many things there are to consider? Do I see how much I will discover about myself if I will retreat to a quiet place and carefully examine my life?

I must use this opportunity to search deep within myself; I must seek to be rid of all that is unworthy and undignified in my life. Instead, I must ask God to fill my life, and I must live my life in such a way that I will love, honor and serve Him all the days of my life.

I must not neglect to approach the Mystery of Holy Confession; this is the greatest gift that I can — and should — offer myself and others.

May the All-Good God enlighten me and strengthen me on this uphill yet beautiful path which passes through Holy Confession and Holy Communion into the Kingdom of Heaven.

A Brief Form of Confession

When indicated by the priest to do so, the penitent may say the following: I confess to the Lord my God before you, reverend father, all my sins which I have committed up to the present day and hour, in deed, word, and thought. Every day and every hour I sin through ingratitude to God for His great and numberless blessings to me and His most gracious providence and care for me, a sinner. I have sinned through:

The penitent then mentions those sins from the following list he is guilty of:

anger	sexual sins
concealing sins in confession	impure thoughts
disobedience	missing church services
disrespect	sleeping in church
insubordination	neglect of prayer
drunkenness	attachment to things
gluttony or over-eating	love of glory or honor
evil speech	pride
foul speech	self-love
saying unseemly things	self-will
gossip	vainglory or false values
grumbling	envy
idle talk	jealousy
lying,	remembering wrongs
greed	reproaching others
inattention	judging others
carelessness	condemnation of others
laziness	resentment
negligence or carelessness	scorn
love of money	slander
love of sensual pleasure	theft

The penitent then mentions any other sins which he is guilty of, and concludes:

I repent of all my sins, and I beg forgiveness of our almighty God. I also ask forgiveness for all those sins I have not confessed because of their multitude and my forgetfulness. Forgive and absolve me, reverend father, and bless me to receive the Holy Communion of the precious, holy, and life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins and life everlasting.

Taken from the website of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, Grand Junction, CO

<http://www.saintnicholasgj.org/ResourceLinks.dsp>