

A Guide to Confession - *Confessing Who I AM*

“The essence of sin consists not in the infringement of ethical standards but in a falling away from the eternal Divine life for which man was created and to which, by his very nature he is called...Every sin, manifest or secret, committed by each one of us affects the rest of the universe...Sin will, inevitably pass beyond the boundaries of the sinner’s individual’s life, to burden all humanity and thus effect the fate of the whole world (St. Sophrony).”

Confession is a movement of the heart towards God that begins with a desire to draw near to Him. What is more important to confessing what you have done is to confess who you are. Confession is not just about listing the rules we have broken or what offenses we have committed. We also need to look deep into our hearts, into the deep dark places and confess the deepest, parts of ourselves, those things that which most deeply inform and underlie our way of life. The confessing of sins is about knowing ourselves as we truly are and how we have deformed the image of Christ in ourselves. The goal of a Confession to become known to ourselves as we truly are. To bring to my awareness the sins in my life means to admit to myself that they are part of me. We cannot confess if we do not know ourselves as we truly are and not lie hidden behind a superficial outward appearance – a mask of who I want others to see. This is the beginning of humility. This is a joyful process because it is freeing.

Confession is a standing before the person of Christ with an un-masked heart. To expose our shame and guilt that lies hidden with us so that He can heal and restore His image in us. To confess correctly is to divulge all that we hide and cover, it is an opening of our hearts and becoming vulnerable. To *confess* means to expel, to expose that which lies within the heart.

Through a prayerful reflection the grace of the Holy Spirit opens oneself to the realization that my life has drifted away from God. This realization of our sinful state is a divine gift that creates an inner-awareness of the *weight* of our sins. Confession is at the same time a passageway into the very love, mercy and forgiveness of God. Confession is about our need for healing inner-wounds. Sit silently repeating the Jesus Prayer at first out loud and then silently with your mind in your heart - “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me a sinner.”

What to Confess?

There are numerous “guides to confession” with long lists of particular sins. These *lists* may assist in self-examination however they imply a legalistic view of the mystery of Confession i.e. *I committed an infraction, I need absolution from a priest which he magically bestows through a prayer and I can now go on my way free of guilt.* Confession is not a transaction but is a drawing near to Christ with a humbled and repentant heart.

What takes place during a Confession?

- ❖ Confession can happen anywhere but the Church is preferred and is scheduled by appointment. Catechumens will have an initial life-confession and additional confessions as determined in consultation with the parish priest.
- ❖ It begins with you kneeling before an icon of Christ and the priest pronouncing the prayers of forgiveness. It is understood that you have arrived already prepared with a heart that has already begun the process of repentance. To repent is simply to turn ones’ life away from sin and towards God.

- ❖ You will recite the 50th Psalm of repentance. King David had committed adultery and murder and in repentance he wrote the 50th Psalm. It is a psalm Christians can utilize anytime they have sinned and are seeking repentance.
- ❖ An additional prayer of forgiveness is read by the priest
- ❖ You will read a general prayer of seeking forgiveness that has been written out for you.
- ❖ Then you will sit down with the priest and make your confession.
- ❖ The priest will offer guidance
- ❖ Confession concludes with a final prayer of forgiveness.

Four Areas of Reflection

Through prayer and fasting, by the grace of God, we are examining our faithfulness in relation to Christ. It is recommended that to assist in self-study that we pray and reflect upon four areas of our lives in preparation for Confession. For an elaboration of these see “An Orthodox Confession Which Leads to Humility” from The Way of the Pilgrim posted here - <https://assumptionaz.org/confession>

1. Sins in relation to God: I don't love God, weak faith, doubts, anger, church attendance, fasting
2. Sins against others: indifference towards the sufferings of others, selfishness, lack of interest, love, envy, gossip, slander, cruelty
3. Sins against ourselves: sins of the flesh, self-love, self-control, drug or alcohol dependency, defiled my body as the temple of God
4. Sins against the Kingdom: I live a worldly life - I have no real belief in the Kingdom of God

The Beatitudes – *the end of the life of virtue is to become like God (Gregory of Nyssa)*

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

Without humility we cannot know ourselves as we truly are.

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

Knowing and accepting the deepest, darkest parts of my heart leads to freedom. What lies hidden is now known and can be comforted by the Holy Spirit, through forgiveness and grace.

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

Repentance is the Way of salvation. To be meek before God is to always seeking to being obedient to His Word, to be His servant.

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

Have I tried to cultivate a righteous life through prayer, fasting, worship, receiving Holy Communion and deeds acts of mercy toward others? How regularly do I pray? Do I have a prayer discipline that I follow? Have I truly yearned for God's will to be done in all things?

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Have I shown compassion and assisted the stranger, the hungry, the isolated and lonely, those suffering illnesses 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?