

A GUIDE FOR EXAMINING YOURSELF BEFORE CONFESSION

A complete true confession is when you reveal yourself completely in front of your priest and when you feel that you have not hidden anything that you know about yourself from your priest. Therefore, you have to examine yourself very thoroughly and accurately before confession. These are some questions which may help you to know and examine yourself before confession. These are classified into topics: some concerning worship, relationships with people, and others concerning the kinds of sins.

A. Concerning Worship:

Prayer:

1. Do you neglect your prayers or are you regular in your prayers? Do you neglect them sometimes? Why? Is this negligence constant? Have you thought of a solution for it? What was the result?
2. When do you pray? When you wake up in the morning? Before sleeping? Before and after eating? Before leaving home? Before you start any work? In any trouble you face? Do you pray while you are on the way? While you are with people?
3. Do you have long private prayers where you have a private conversation with God? Are you regular in these prayers? Are these prayers growing or diminishing?
4. Do you pray with the psalms? Do you pray all the prayers of Agbeya or some of them? Which ones do you pray? If you do not pray with the psalms, why?
5. Do you memorize the psalms and litanies from the Agbeya? Is this memorization growing or diminishing?
6. Do you pray with a fervent heart? Do you pray with tears at times? Do you feel the presence of God while praying? Are your prayers lukewarm or sometimes hot and sometimes lukewarm? Why?
7. Does your mind wander during praying? During which kinds of prayer does your mind wander? In which kinds of topics does your mind wander? Does this continue for any length of time? What have you done to remedy this problem?

8. What is the position of your body during prayer? Do you stand and lift up your hands to God? Do you kneel? Do you bow? Do you have any other position? Do you stand respectfully in front of God? Do you bend your feet or lean your body against the wall? Do you move your hands or do your eyes look at other things?

9. Are there any special topics that occupy your mind during praying? Do you pray for your sins and your spiritual life? Do you pray for others? Do you pray for those who bother you? Do you have material requests?

10. Do you give God your best time while you are fully active? Do you pray while you are physically and mentally exhausted?

Fasting:

1. Do you fast all the fasting days of the church or just some of them? Which fasting days do you practice regularly? Do you fast Wednesdays and Fridays of every week? Are there any obstacles which hinder your fasting? What are they?

2. Do you abstain from food during fasting? For how long?

3. Do you desire special kinds of food? Do you fulfill that desire? Do you ask that special kinds of food be prepared for you?

4. Do you spend much on food, in general and on its luxuries, specifically?

5. Do you eat between meals?

Giving Alms:

1. Are you faithful in giving your tithes to God?

2. Do you only give your tithes or do you give with generosity?

3. What is your feeling when you give? Is it a feeling of pride or a feeling of love toward Jesus' brothers?

4. Do you get annoyed sometimes by those who ask you for alms? Or do you give cheerfully?

Communion and Confession:

1. Are you regular in receiving communion? When was the last time you received communion?
2. Are you regular in confession? When was the last time you confessed?
3. If you are negligent, what is the reason?
4. Do you feel that there is something you want to hide from your priest?
5. Do you prepare and examine yourself thoroughly before confession?
6. Are there repeated sins in your confessions? What have you done to overcome them?

Reading:

1. Do you read the Bible regularly? Do you read in sequence?
2. Do you meditate in your readings? Do you write these meditations or just think about them?
3. Do you study the Bible? Do you read any commentaries?
4. Do you read other religious books? What kind do you read (spiritual, lives of saints, dogma, etc.)? Do you read regularly?
5. Do you read inappropriate books or magazines? Do you sometimes read topics that make you stumble?
6. What is the average time you devote to spiritual reading every day or every week?
7. Do you try to apply what you read to your life or do you train yourself with spiritual exercises?

Matanias:

1. Do you do matanias, that is, **bowing before God while asking for forgiveness**? How many do you do? Are they accompanied by short prayers?

Going to Church:

1. Do you go to church and attend the Divine liturgy regularly? If there are obstacles in your way, what are they?
2. Do you attend the Divine liturgy while fasting?
3. Do you come early to the Divine liturgy? Do you attend all of the prayers?
4. Do you attend other meetings besides the Divine liturgy, like the vesper service, sermons, youth meetings, Sunday school, etc.? Do you attend them regularly?
5. Do you serve in the church? Are you faithful in your service? Are there any problems that bother you?

Spiritual Exercises:

1. Do you have spiritual exercises? What are they? Are you successful in applying them? If not, what are the reasons for your failure?
2. Are there any virtues in which you would like to train yourself?

B. Your Relationship with People:

1. Do you have good relations with people, whether old or young, whether from your family or your colleagues, or others? If anything has happened, what is it?
2. Have you been angry with someone? For what reason?
3. What was your condition when you were angry? Was your anger suppressed or apparent? Did you raise your voice? Did you say any words that hurt others? Did you insult them or fight with them or what?
4. Did your anger go away fast or did it remain for a long time? For how long? Did you have bad thoughts because of your anger? Did your anger leave any bad feelings toward any person? Did this anger change to hatred for a period of time? Did this anger remain in your heart as enmity with someone?
5. If you were angry with someone, have you reconciled with him? Did you initiate this reconciliation or did the other person or someone else interfere? How long did this enmity last? Is everything alright now?

6. Is there anyone who makes you angry or sins against you? What is your reaction toward him outwardly? Inwardly?

7. To what extent do you have these virtues: perseverance, long-suffering, forgiving, and loving your enemies?

8. Do you sometimes hurt others even by joking or ignorance or by being forgetful? What have you done to overcome this matter? Have you apologized to those whom you hurt?

9. Do you hurt others with the excuse of defending the truth? How did you hurt them?

10. What are the obstacles toward the virtue of meekness in your behavior?

11. Do you abuse the rights of anyone? Do you perform all your duties toward everyone faithfully, whether in the family or work or church or your social relations?

12. Do you keep bad company? With whom? What sins have you committed because of this bad company? Do you have friends who drive you away from the church and God's love?

13. Are your financial relations with people good? Were you unjust with anyone? Did you cheat anybody?

14. Did you perform your financial obligations toward God? Where is the virtue of giving alms in your life? What is your reaction toward the tithes, first fruits and participating in all the needs of the church?

15. Are you humble in treating other people or do you treat anyone with pride?

16. Do you behave violently toward others or treat them unkindly? Or are you calm, merciful and moderate? Are you passive? What kinds of sin do you commit due to your passive nature?

17. Do you love to have people praise you? Do you seek that? How? What is your feeling if someone rebukes you or ignores you or rejects you or does not treat you appropriately?

18. Do you try sometimes to pretend before people to be the opposite of what you are?

19. Is your behavior a stumbling block for others?

20. Do you serve others and tire yourself for others' comfort?
Is this virtue in your life?

C. Some Kinds of Sin:

Sins of the Tongue:

1. What are the sins that you commit with your tongue? Do you lie, judge others, blaspheme, swear, insult, humiliate someone, bad humor, silly discussions, or any inappropriate talk, etc.?

2. With whom have you sinned? And to whom? How many times (if possible) and for what reason? Did this matter become a habit?

3. Have you thought of overcoming those sins? How? What was the result?

4. Are you very talkative? Do you talk about subjects that you do not understand? Do you feel that you waste your time in useless talking and you could have used that time for something more useful?

5. Do you sing worldly songs? Do you sometimes use words that are inappropriate for God's children to use?

6. Is the way you talk wrong? Is your voice loud or harsh? Do you think before you talk? Do you interrupt during discussions? Do you make mistakes while discussing something?

7. Do you interfere in other people's business? Do you give your opinion even if you are not asked? Do you like to be always critical of others, rebuke and advise others, even those who are older than you, those who are strangers or who do not accept your advice?

8. Have you trained yourself to be silent? What are the results?

Sins of Thought:

1. What kinds of sins do you fall into by your thoughts? Is it adultery or any other lust or thoughts of wrath, hatred, revenge, judging others, thinking evil, pride, envy, blasphemy, doubt or daydreaming?

2. Does this thought stay with you for a long period of time? For how long?
3. Does the thought tempt you from outside and you do not like it but try to cast it away or do you welcome the thought and enjoy it and try to build on it other thoughts?
4. Does the thought change into lust and tempt you to actually sin? Everytime you sin by thought, do you also sin by deed?
5. Is your mind occupied with cares of this world and its many problems and worries?

Sins by Senses:

What are the sins that you fall into by your senses: either by sight, hearing or touch? Do you fall in adultery by your senses? Do you desire what others have? Do you spy on others? Do you listen to dirty jokes and words?

Sins of the Heart:

1. Are there any desires and feelings of your heart that do not please God? Is there in your heart any envy, jealousy, hatred, desire to be rich, desire for high positions, love of authority, pride of life, love of the vain glory of the world, love of the flesh, or love of revenge?
2. Is there in your heart any wrath, complaint, provoking, despair, or sadness?
3. Do these feelings and desires appear in your daily life, in your thoughts and your dreams?

Sins of Deed:

1. What are the actual sins you have committed? What commandments have you disobeyed: adultery, stealing, killing, fighting, drinking, rebellion, negligence, bad habits, etc.?
2. How many times have you repeated sin? With whom have you sinned and to whom?
3. What are the bad consequences of your sin? Have you treated them or are they still existing?

4. Are there constant causes that lead you to sin? What are they? Are there occasional causes or have they become a habit? What have you done to avoid these causes?

5. Have you tried to repent and forsake these sins? Have you succeeded or failed in repenting?

Note:

These questions are meant to help the beginners in their spiritual lives to examine themselves accurately so their confession may reveal what is inside them.

However, those who are advanced in their spiritual lives should examine themselves from the positive aspects, which are the virtues they neglect to possess.

We are all required to be perfect and holy and we all have to grow in the grace and virtue as St. Paul said, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 PETER 3:18)

Therefore, those who are spiritually growing should examine themselves from both aspects: the negative and positive in such a way that these may be an incentive for their continued growth in the holy life with God.

A PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

O Holy Father, Who awaits the return of sinners, You gave Your promise that You are ready to accept those who repent. Look now to a soul that was lost in the valleys of disobedience. For a long time I have tasted the bitterness of misery, being away from the stream of salvation. Now I come back to You to be purified, accept and not reject me, for when You look at me with mercy and compassion, I will be cleansed and saved. If You turn away, I shall perish. Grant me, O Lord, Your blessing to strengthen my will to come closer to You in faith and hope, to confess my sins, and detest returning to them. May Your Holy Spirit remind me not to stray. May You enlighten my heart so I can see the graveness of my sins and negligence and have the will to obey your commandments and live for the glory of Your Holy Name. Amen.

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