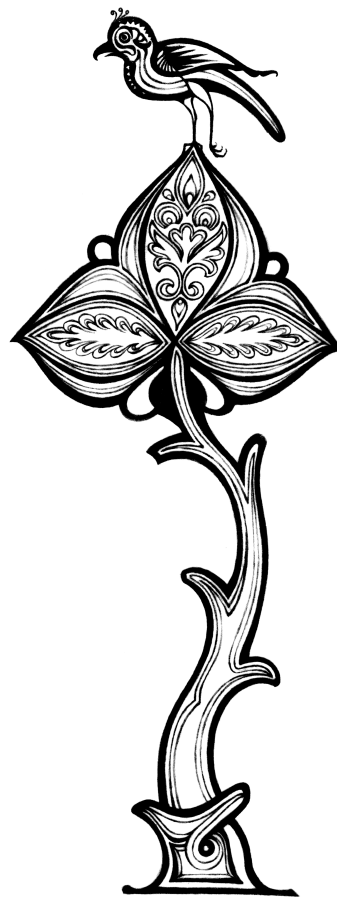


HOW TO BEST PREPARE FOR HOLY CONFESSION



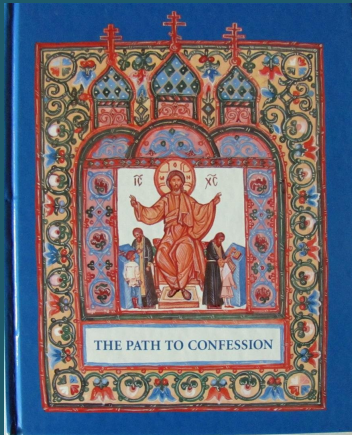
MYSTAGOGY SERIES
CULTIVATING THE INNER LIFE



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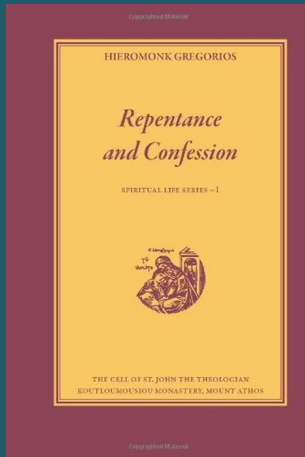
GREAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



FOR CHILDREN:

PATH TO CONFESSION

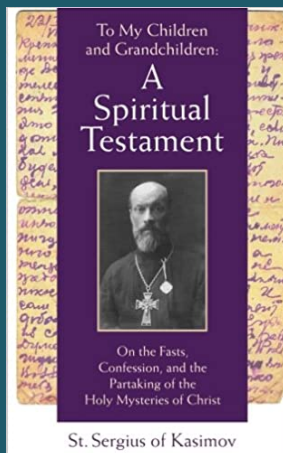
“A WONDERFUL BOOK FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS A LIKE.”



FOR ADULTS:

REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

BY HIEROMONK GREGORIOS
FROM NEWROME PRESS



FOR PREPARING FOR
CONFESSION DURING A FAST:

A SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT

ON THE FASTS, CONFESSION, AND THE PARTAKING
OF THE HOLY MYSTERIES OF CHRIST

BY ST. SERGIUS OF KASIMOV

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. The day before confession, take at least 30 minutes or more and **begin to properly examine your conscience.**

2. You can begin by asking God: **“God, show me where I have sinned against love and I will repent!”**

You can also ask yourself:
“Soul, have you kept Christ’s commandments?”

3. **Choose one of the provided guides to help allow God to show you where you have sinned against loving Him and your neighbor.**

4. Then come to the **Spiritual Hospital of Holy Confession with contrition of heart, ready to turn from all of your sins, and fervently desiring to unite your heart and soul again to Christ.**

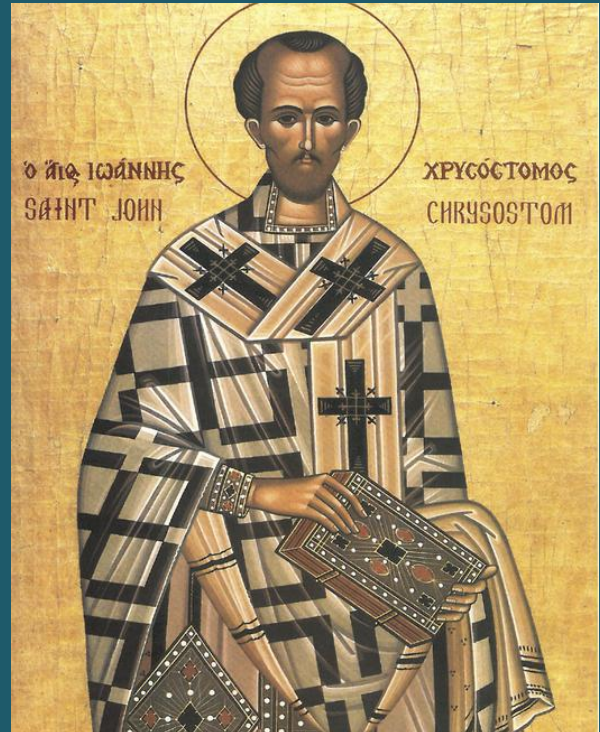
THE FIRST MEANS TO REPENTANCE IS CONFESSION

BY OUR HOLY FATHER JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Why is it that we do not come every day to church to kiss repentance? if you are a sinner, come to church to confess your sins; if you are righteous, come in order not to lose your righteousness. The Church is for both the one and the other a refuge. Are you a sinner? Do not despair, but enter, bearing your repentance before yourself. You have sinned? Say to your God, "I have sinned." What labor is there in this? Is it far to go? What tedium is there here? What difficulty is there in saying the words, "I have sinned"? If you do not yourself confess that you are a sinner, do you not have the devil as your accuser, actually? Forestall him, and take away his merit, for his merit is to accuse. Why not forestall him, accuse yourself of sin, why not make amends for your transgression, when you have an accuser who cannot keep silent?

You have sinned? Come to church, say to God, "I have sinned." I require nothing more of you, only this alone; for the Holy Scripture says, "Declare thou thy transgressions before, that thou mayest be justified" (Isaiah 43:26). Tell your sin, in order to be delivered from the sin; there is no difficulty in this, no need for roundabout words nor expenditures of money or any other such thing. Say the word, acknowledge sin, confess, "I have sinned."

You ask, "How do I know that if I first confess my sin, then by this I will be delivered from the sin?" I have in Scripture both the person who confessed his sin and was forgiven, and the one who did not confess and was condemned. Cain, possessed by envy, killed his brother Abel. What does God say to him? "Where is Abel thy brother?" (Gen. 4:9). The All-knowing One asks not because He does not know, but in order to draw the murderer of his brother to repentance. Cain answered, "I do not know; am I my



brother's keeper?" Let it be thus - you are not his - but why his murderer? You did not watch over him, but why did you kill him? But what does God say to him? "The voice of thy brother's blood cries to Me from the earth." Instantly He unmasked the murderer and then appointed the punishment - not so much for the murder as much as for a shameless person with no conscience.

Thus, even when Cain subsequently comes to Him with repentance, God does not accept him, because of his not having confessed his sin first himself. For what does he say? "My guilt is greater than I can bear," - this means, I have sinned very much, I am not worthy to live. What does God answer him? "Thou shalt groan and tremble upon the earth." He laid a terrible and sever punishment on him. I do not destroy thee, He says, lest truth be committed to oblivion; I make thee into a law, which



all men will read, so that thy misfortune may become for all men the mother of the pious life. And Cain went everywhere like a living law, like a moving pillar, silent but meanwhile

producing a voice more resounding than a trumpet of war. “Let no one do this, “ he said, “lest he suffer the same.”

He was punished for shamelessness, condemned for his sin because he did not tell it before, but was clearly shown guilt of it. If he had confessed it himself first, voluntarily he would have made amends for his sin.

That you may be assured that this is actually so, look at how another person was absolved of a sin because he acknowledged it first himself. David sinned, and Prophet Nathan came to him and said, “Thou O King art he who committed this.” What did the King say? “I have sinned against the Lord.” He did not say to Nathan, “Who are you, my denounced? Who sent you to talk to me so impudently? What insolence you have committed!” He said nothing of the kind; on the contrary, he acknowledged his sin, and what does he say? “I have sinned against the Lord.” What does Nathan say to him? “And the Lord took away thy sin;” [in other words], “thou accusest thyself - and I forgive thee thy guilt; thou has voluntarily confessed - and absolved thyself - I obliterate the sentence.” Do you see how the word of Scripture has now been fulfilled: “Declare they sins before, that thou mayest be justified”? What kind of hardship is it to confess one’s sin before God?

And thus let us turn to repentance, O beloved; let us accept the medicine for our salvation; let us accept the medicine which cancels our

transgression. But, while confessing our sins in words, we must confirm our repentance by our very deeds; for true repentance consists in forcing the defilement of impiety out of the heart itself. “Wash ye,” God says, “be clean cleanse the evil from your souls from before Mine eyes” (Isaiah 1:16).

What does this bounty of expressions here mean? To explain that is necessary, would it not have been sufficient to say, “Wash the evil from your hearts”? Why has “from before Mine eyes” been added? Because human eyes see differently than the eye of God sees: a man looks at the face, God sees into the heart. Do not pretend, He says, to be repenting before Me only in appearance: rather, present the fruits of your repentance before Mine eyes, Who search out all secrets.

On the other hand, when we have been cleansed of sins, we should also have these very sins constantly before our eyes. Let God, in His love for men, forgive thee thy transgression, but do thou, for the safety of thine own soul, keep thy sin before thine eyes, for a keen memory of previous transgressions is

an impediment to future ones; he whose conscience pangs him over his first vices will have more care concerning the second ones. You see, this is why David says of himself, “My sin is ever before

me” (Psalm 50:5); he had before his eyes his previous sins, so not to fall into subsequent ones. That God requires of us exactly such a disposition, listen to what He Himself says: “I am, I am He that blots out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and thy sins I will not remember. But do thou remember, and let us plead together: declare thou thy transgressions before, that thou mayest be justified” (Isaiah 43:25-26).

“AND THUS LET US TURN TO REPENTANCE, O BELOVED; LET US ACCEPT THE MEDICINE FOR OUR SALVATION; LET US ACCEPT THE MEDICINE WHICH CANCELS OUR TRANSGRESSION.”

MAKING A GOOD CONFESSION

ST. THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE



Repentance is a simple matter - just a sigh and a few words, "I have sinned, and shall not sin again." But this sigh must have passed through the heavens in order to become an intercession at

the throne of Truth, and these words must erase from the book of life all the marks representing our sins. Where can they obtain such power? From pitiless self-judgement and in fervent contrition. This is the path of our repentance: make your heart softer and more humble, and then, at Confession, don't be ashamed to reveal all that shamed you in the eyes of the Lord and of the people.

In this matter of preparing to go to Communion, the hardest thing for us is to go to Confession and reveal ourselves to our spiritual father. Actually, this should be the most gratifying experience! Is it not a comfort for someone concerned with wounds to be healed? For someone covered with soul to be cleaned up? Or for him who is tied up to be made free? This is precisely the spiritual power of priestly absolution at Confession. We arrive wounded, and leave healed; we arrive dirty, and leave cleaned up; we arrive in bonds, and leave free. This is God's promise: tell your transgressions first, and then you will be forgiven.

And there's no doubt you will be forgiven, but first you have to confess your transgressions openly. Know that only an open wound can be treated, only exposed dirt can be washed off, only those bonds that are shown to be untied. Beware, lest you leave not healed, not cleansed and not freed!

The Lord is the active factor here. The spiritual father represents Him personally and utters

His words. The Lord knows your sin and mentally you can't escape acknowledging it before the Lord; but the Lord wants to know whether you are prepared to confess your sins in His presence, if He Himself were standing before you, or whether you would try to hide them as did your forebears Adam and Eve in Paradise. That is why He has decided to show His face via your spiritual father, the one confessing you, whom He has commanded to speak for Him personally the absolving word, which, in spite of having been pronounced on earth by a feeble created being, is printed out in the heavens by God's power.

There's something else your spiritual father represents - all mankind. Whoever is ashamed to indict himself at Confession should attack his shame with the thought that shame here is minor shame compared to a great shame; saving shame compared to joyless and hopeless shame. One day, at the Lord's second coming, all our evil deeds will be revealed before all of mankind, and then the shame we will feel will be such that we would agree to be buried under mountains rather than experience it. That's why the Lord instituted this experience of shame in the presence of one person, in order to spare us from having to experience it in the presence of all mankind.

There is one most ruinous evil in our hearts: at times we are quite ready to reveal all sins saving only our main one, the one that shames us the most, covers us with shame. Most often this is carnal sin, but any other sin can equal it. He who is burdened with such a weakness is ready to accomplish any feat one could wish and do every good deed as long as this beloved sickness would remain untouched. But the Lord has this kind of law: give me no alms, if you are in haste, don't bother fasting, if you suffer from greed, don't bother praying, if you're going to hunger for vainglory. Expose your wound in order to be healed and to become adorned with good deeds. Let every soul be inspired to overcome inside precisely that which most resists being overcome.

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF TRUTH

A PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

BY SAINT NICOLAS VARZHANSKY

During Great Lent, and the other fasts of the Church Year, it is customary for all Orthodox Christians to go to confession to their priest. Properly this should be done several times a year, the exact frequency depending upon how often one is blessed to receive the Holy Mysteries and on the counsel and blessing of one's spiritual father. As a preparation for this sacramental confession and to help one examine one's conscience before coming to confession, the following questions are sometimes distributed in parishes and, although of course the list is not exhaustive, it may be a help to those of our readers who are Orthodox Christians.

SINS AGAINST GOD

1. Do you pray to God in the morning and evening, before and after meals?
2. During prayer have you allowed your thoughts to wander?
3. Have you rushed or gabbled your prayers? or when reading in church?
4. Do you read the Scriptures daily? Do you read other spiritual writings regularly?
5. Have you read books whose content is not Orthodox or even anti-Orthodox, or is spiritually damaging?
6. Have you pronounced the name of God without reverence, joking? Have you asked God's help before starting every activity?
7. Have you made the sign of the Cross carelessly, thoughtlessly? Have you sworn? Have you murmured against God?
8. Have you sinned by forgetting God?
9. Have you been slack in attending church?
10. Have you consecrated even part of the feast days, particularly Sundays and the Twelve Great Feasts, to God?
11. Have you tried your best to attend church on these days? or have you spent them more sinfully than ordinary days?
12. If unable to attend church for some reason, have you nonetheless tried to devote some part of these days to prayer and spiritual reading?
13. Have you joined with people not of the Faith in prayer, or attended their worship services?
14. Have you kept the fasts?
15. Have you behaved irreverently in church, or before the clergy and monastics?
16. Have you laughed or talked in church, or moved about unnecessarily, thus also distracting other people from prayer?
17. Have dressed modestly and in a becoming manner when in church?
18. Have you tried to pay reverent attention to the readings, hymns, and prayers in church?
19. Have you striven to pray with the service, crossing yourself, etc., or have you rather simply stood and day-dreamed?
20. Have you prepared for the services beforehand, looking up the Scriptural readings, making sure you have the texts to follow the service etc., especially if the service will be in a language you do not readily understand?
21. Have you ever left church after the Divine Services, and particularly after receiving the Holy Mysteries and immediately engaged in light talk and thus forgotten the blessings and graces you have received?



22. Have you been ashamed of your Faith or the sign of the Cross in the presence of others?
23. Have you made a show of your piety?
24. Have you used your Orthodox Faith or its teachings merely to browbeat others or belittle them?
25. Have you used it as a shield or excuse for your own inadequacies rather than humbling yourself?
26. Have you believed in dreams, fortune telling, astrology, signs and other superstitions?
27. Do you give thanks to the Lord for all things?
28. Have you ever doubted God's providence concerning yourself?
29. Do you at least try to perceive His purpose in all the things that come upon you?

SINS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBORS

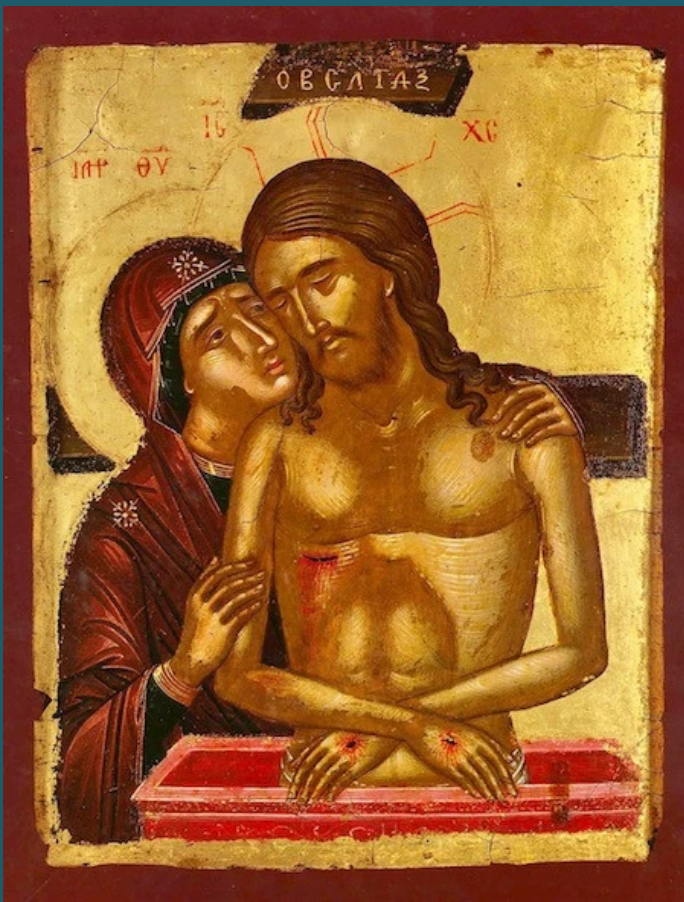
1. Do you respect and obey your parents?
2. Have you offended them by rudeness or contradiction? (These first two apply also to priests, superiors, teachers and elders.)
3. Have you insulted anyone?
4. Have you quarreled or fought with anyone? Have you hit anyone?
5. Are you always respectful to old people?
6. Are you ever angry, bad tempered or irritable?
7. Have you called anyone names? Do you use foul language?
8. Have you derided any that are disabled, poor, old or in some way disadvantaged?
9. Have you entertained bad feelings, ill will or hatred against anyone?
10. Have you forgiven those who have offended you?
11. Have you asked forgiveness from those whom you have offended?
12. Are you at peace with everyone?
13. Have you left the needy without help when you could have helped?
14. Have you attended the sick or elderly when they have asked you to do so?
15. Have you shown kindness and attention to all, remembering that God is expecting just such an attitude from you?
16. Have you hit animals without a cause or been cruel to them, or neglectful of those in your care?
17. Have you stolen anything?
18. Have you taken or used other people's things without asking?



19. Have you kept money or things that were lent you without returning them?
20. Have you wasted your employers' time or resources? Have you taken things from work for your own use, used the firm's phone or other facilities for your own purposes without permission or repayment?
21. Are you obstinate, and do you always try to have your own way?
22. Have you been inconsiderate of other people's feelings?
23. Have you tried to have your revenge against those who have offended you?
24. Have you harbored resentment? Have you deceived people?
25. Have you gossiped?
26. Have you told untruths?
27. Have you judged and condemned others?
28. Have you taken pains before approaching for confession to be reconciled with all?

SINS AGAINST YOURSELF

1. Have you been proud? Do you boast of your abilities, achievements, family, connections or riches?
2. Do you consider yourself worthy before God?
3. Are you vain, ambitious? Do you try to win praise and glory?



4. Do you bear it easily when you are blamed, scolded or treated unjustly? Do you think too much about your looks, outward appearance and the impression you make?
5. Have you sinned in thought, word or deed, by a look or glance, or in any other way against the seventh commandment? (Adultery, fornication, all extra-marital sexual relationships with others, masturbation, engaging in unnatural sexual acts, fantasizing, pornography, etc.)
6. Have you envied anyone anything? Have you been over-sensitive?
7. Have you been lazy? Have you done your duties heartily?
8. Have you wasted your time, energy or abilities in things that do not profit the soul?
9. Have you become obsessive about anything? Have you been despondent or listless?
10. Have you had thoughts of committing suicide?
11. Have you brought a curse on yourself or others or ill-wished them, being impatient?
12. Have you a weakness for alcohol? Have you drunk too much, or become dependent on drink?
13. Have you taken drugs, other than necessary medicines? Have you smoked?

14. Have you watched television too much or indiscriminately? Have you given yourself up to any other similar pastime which wastes your time and energy and might have harmed you?
15. Have you been greedy, either with regard to food or to possessions?
16. Have you indulged in comfort-eating? Have you become accustomed to eating between meals?
17. Have you been picky about your food, or wasteful of foods, forgetting that so many people are without proper nourishment? Have you been extravagant? Have you been wasteful?
18. Do you care for and seek first the salvation of your soul, the spiritual life and the kingdom of God, or have you put earthly considerations in the first place?
19. Is there any other sin, which burdens your conscience, or which you are ashamed to tell?

Anyone preparing for confession must ask God to help his resolve to tell all his sins. A penitent should prepare for confession and collect his thoughts regarding his sins at least a day before confession. The most valuable thing in the eyes of God is the confession of the sin which weighs most on the conscience.

A BRIEF CONFESSION BEFORE ONE'S SPIRITUAL FATHER

FROM THE FULL CONFESSION OF ST. DEMETRIUS OF ROSTOV



I confess to the Lord my God and before thee, venerable father, all my countless sins, committed by me unto this very day and hour, in deed, word and thought. I sin daily and hourly by mine ingratitude toward God for His great and countless blessings and benevolent providence over me, a sinner.

I have sinned through: idle talking, judging others, stubbornness, pride, hard-heartedness, envy, anger, slander, inattention, negligence concerning my salvation, carelessness, indifference, impertinence, irritability, complaining, self-justification, contradicting others, self-will, being reproachful, gossiping, lying, light-mindedness, tempting others, self-love, ambition, gourmandizing, eating and drinking to excess, vanity, laziness, entertaining unclean thoughts, acquisitiveness, impure glances, absence from divine services because of laziness and carelessness, absent-mindedness at prayer both in church and at home; I have sinned in deed, word thought; in sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and the rest of my mental and physical senses; of all my sins I repent and beg forgiveness.

(Here one should mention specifically any other sins which may be burdening the soul).

I also repent and ask forgiveness for all those sins that I have not confessed because of their multitude and my forgetfulness.

Forgive and absolve me, venerable father, and bless me to commune of the holy and life-creating Mysteries of Christ unto the remission of sins and life everlasting.

A SINCERE CONFESSION OF AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

TRANSLATED BY SERAPHIM F. ENGLEHARDT FROM A
LEAFLET PUBLISHED ON MOUNT ATHOS



Bless me, O Lord and Savior, to confess to Thee not only with words, but also with bitter tears. And there is much to weep over ...

My faith in Thee vacillates, O Lord!

Thoughts of skepticism and disbelief push themselves in to my soul much more often than they ever have. Why? Of course, the spirit of the times is to blame, and people that I meet are to blame, but even more to blame am I myself, because I do not struggle with disbelief, because I do not pray Thee for aid. I am still more to blame if I am a temptation for someone else, by deed or word or just by cold silence when people speak of the faith. I have sinned in this, O Lord: forgive and have mercy, and grant me faith.

My love for other people, even my relatives, is diminishing. Their continual requests for help and their forgetfulness of how much I have already done for them causes mutual hard feelings. But I am more guilty than they are: guilty because although I have the means to help them, I help them only grudgingly; guilty because I help them not for pure, Christian motivations, but out of pride and a desire for gratitude and praise.

Forgive me, Oh Lord, soften my heart and teach me to look not at how people treat me, but at how I treat other people. And if they treat in a hostile way, inspire me, O Lord, to pay them back with love and goodness and pray for them.

I have also sinned in that I think very, very little about my sins. Not only at ordinary times of the year, but even when I am preparing for Communion I do not remember them, I do not try to call them to mind for confession. General phrases come to mind: "Nothing special, I am sinful like everyone." O Lord, it is as if I did not know that in Thy eyes both every "idle word" and even the sinful desire in my heart is a sin. And how many of these words and desires pile up within me in just one day, not to mention in a whole year! Thou alone, Lord, knowest

them; grant me to see my transgressions, have mercy on me, and save me.

Further: I acknowledge as my constant sin the lack of almost any struggle with evil. As soon as any occasion or provocation appears I plunge headlong into the pit of sin, and then, just as I have fallen, I ask myself: what have I done? A fruitless question, because it does not help me to become better. And if at this point I feel sorrow, it proceeds from my self-esteem having suffered, and not from the realization that I have offended Thee, O Lord. I neglect struggling not only with gross evil, but even with the most frivolous and harmful habit. I do not know how to master myself and I do not even try. I have sinned; forgive me!

Furthermore, the sin of irritability, which predominates in me, is not withdrawing from me in the least. When I hear a sharp word, I do not reply with good-natured silence but behave like a heathen: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. And hostility flares up for trifles and lasts for days and weeks. I do not think of conciliation, but try to get revenge when an opportunity presents itself. I have sinned without number, Oh Lord. Have mercy, forgive me, and calm my heart!

Besides these most terrible sins, my whole life is a chain of sins: I do not value the time that You have given for gaining eternal salvation. I very often stand irreverently, pray mechanically, judge others while they are praying, but do not look after myself. At home I sometimes pray with great reluctance and absent-mindedness, so that often I do not hear my own prayer, and sometimes I simply omit it. Such are my attitudes towards Thee, O Lord, and I can say nothing else but "forgive and have mercy!"

In my relations with people I sin with all my senses; I sin with my tongue by pronouncing false, foul, reproachful, or suggestive words; I sin with my eyes; I sin with my mind and heart by judging others and I am contentious often and for long periods of time; I sin not

only against my soul, but against my body as well, by immoderately consuming food and drink. Accept, O Lover of Mankind, my repentance, that I might reproach Thy holy and life-giving Mysteries in peace, for the remission of sins, for the correction of this temporary life, and for the inheritance of eternal life. Amen.

“I am not worthy to ask forgiveness, O Lord!” So the great teacher of penitence, Saint Ephraim the Syrian, once exclaimed of himself. “How can we resist the attack of sin? How can we deny entry to the passions?”, Saint Basil the Great asked Saint Ephraim, who answered only by shedding tears. What can I, the consummate and incorrigible sinner, say to thee now, O Lord? Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Ephraim and Basil, grant me, O Lord, repentance, and words, and tears. Help me to spew out of myself, like deadly poison, my evil deeds, idle words, and wicked thoughts.

If I have forgotten to tell anything, “tell your iniquities before thou seekest justification.” But I say: “My sins are multiplied, O Lord, and they multiply incessantly. They have no limit.” I know and I remember that even an impure thought is an abomination in Thy sight, but I not only think, but also do, things that grieves Thee. I know that I am doing evil, but I do not refrain from it...

Thus, my repentance has not yet even begun, and the end is not in sight for my evil carelessness about sin. There is truly no limit to my foul thoughts, bursts of self-esteem, vainglory, pride, gossip, resentment, and vengefulness. I quarrel often, and I become angry, cruel, envious, lazy, and blindly stubborn.

Although I am of no importance, I think very highly of myself. I do not want to honor those worthy of honor, but at the same time I demand undeserved deference for myself.

I lie ceaselessly, but I get angry at liars. I judge those who speak evil or who are thieves, but I myself am a thief and an evil-sayer. I defile myself by lustful thoughts and stimuli, but sternly judge others for immodesty. I cannot bear being joked about, but I myself love to taunt others, respecting neither persons nor places, even doing it in church. I consider as an enemy anyone who tells the truth about me. I do not want to put myself out by doing a good turn, but I get angry if someone does not do me a good turn.

I coldly refuse a neighbor in need, but when I myself am in need, I tiresomely appeal to him. I do not like to visit the sick, but if I am sick, I expect everyone to care for me without my asking. Lord, send down in to the depths of my soul a ray of heavenly light, that I might see my sins.

My confession is almost entirely limited to only a superficial naming of some sins. Oh my God, my conscience gave You a promise to start a better life, but I broke the promise and live as before. Unless I have turned over a new leaf, I am ashamed to appear before a mere human with whom I have often not been true to my word. How could I stand before Thee, my God, without shame and self-reproach, when so many times before Thy Throne, before the angels and saints, I have given promises and have not fulfilled them. How base I am! How criminal! To Thee, Oh Lord, is truth, and to me are shameful faces. Only your boundless goodness can endure me. Thou does not destroy the sinner; do not destroy the penitent.

Teach me how to bring to mind and count my sins of my past life, the sins of an empty-headed youth, the sins of proud manhood, the sins of day and of night, sins against Thee, my Lord and Savior.

How can I count them in the few minutes in which I stand in this Holy Place? I remember, Lord, that thou didn't heed the few words of the publican and the thief. I know that thou mercifully grantest even a readiness to repent, and I pray to Thee with all my soul, “My Lord, accept as my repentance the daily confession of sins that the sacred book contains.” I have many more sins that it lists, and I have no way to make amends for them. I offer now only a striving for thee and a desire for the good, but I have no strength to reform.

O Lord and Lover of mankind! Thou dost not drive away the sinner who comes to Thee, beseeching Thee for forgiveness. Before he even comes to the door of Thy mercy, thou hast already opened it for him; before falls down before Thee, thou has already stretched out Thy hand to him; before he confesses his sins, thou hast granted him forgiveness. Grant it to me who repents, grant it according to Thy great mercy; forgive all the bad things that I have done, said, and thought.

And while granting forgiveness, send me also, Oh Lord, the strength, so that I might be able henceforth to live according to Thy will and not to offend Thee.

Help me, and I will be saved; help me by granting me to receive Thy holy Mysteries. And that I may receive them worthily, declare to me by the lips of Thy priest, declare by Thy Holy Spirit, the grace of pardon and forgiveness, which can not be heard by the ear, but are heard in a deeply-moved heart and in peace of conscience. Amen.

GUIDE TO CONFESSION

TRANSLATED BY SERAPHIM F. ENGLEHARDT
FROM A LEAFLET PUBLISHED ON MOUNT ATHOS

So that we can examine better the depths of our conscience, it would be ideal to first read several books on the mystery and Sacrament of Confession. Also discuss any uncertainties you may have with your spiritual father - Confessor. The greatest science or knowledge is to get to know ourselves. Also we must not deny ourselves the greatest thing that every human soul thirsts for; a peaceful conscience and eternity with God.

This joy is only granted by the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. He himself instituted the single path to salvation for the sinner within his Church, the Holy Sacrament of Repentance and Confession.

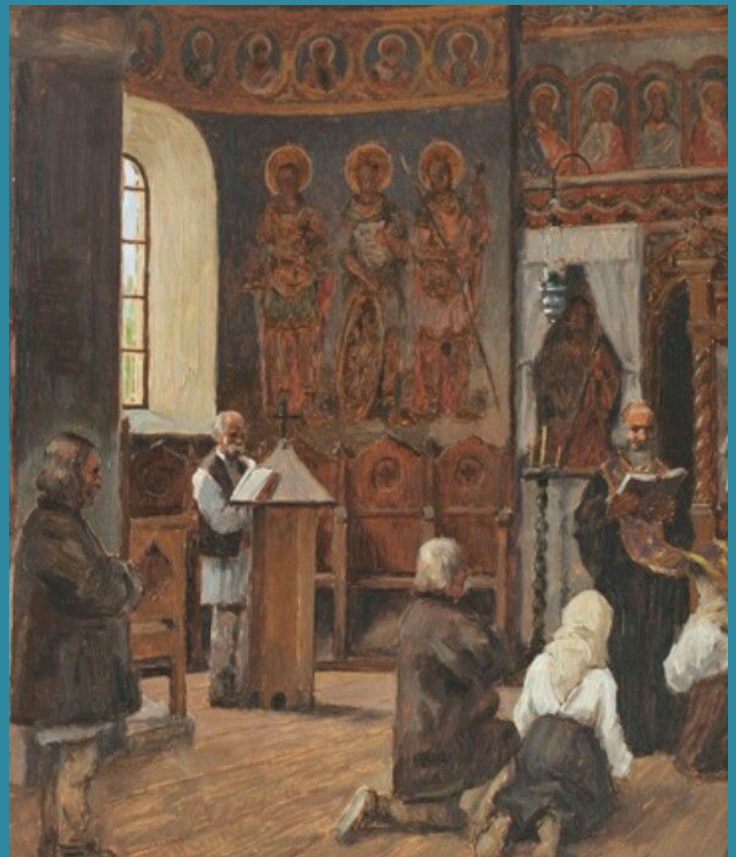
This is why friend, you must overcome any obstacle whatsoever that blocks the roads towards Holy-Confession. Here awaits you with genuine Christian love, the representative of Christ, the good Confessor, who like a human can understand and have compassion on his brethren, who too is sinful.

Throw far away brethren any thought of embarrassment or fright. Why be cared or frightened when your soul frets and pains from the deadly consequences of multi-faceted sin? If one or more sicknesses tortured your body, would you avoid the hospital or doctor because of embarrassment? But at the same time, don't be led astray by certain people, such who have read on them the "prayer of absolution" without having been previously confessed. However and whenever this happens, from ignorance or neglect, it is a terrible sin and an insult to God. With faith then and honesty proceed to Holy Confession. Be certain also that the infinite love of the Crucified and Resurrected Lord will welcome you and transform you removing the weight that burdens YOU!

He himself said "Come to me all you fatigued and heavily laden, and I will grant you comfort."

YOU AND GOD

1. Do you believe in God, the Holy Trinity, in the Divinity of Christ and the Holy Trinity? Do you respect the Holy Virgin Mary, the Saints and the Angels? Do you believe



in the Church and its mysteries (sacraments)? Do you believe that Heaven and Hell exist?

2. Do you entrust yourself always and especially in the difficult times of your life, in the care of God? Or do you despair and show a lack of faith?
3. Perhaps in your problems, afflictions, sicknesses, and trials of your life you whine or moan against God and lose your faith and confidence?
4. Do you believe in mediums, card fortune telling, astrologies, magicians, palmistry, fortune-telling, and coffee-cup reading? Did you tell others to believe and go to these people?
5. Do you believe in superstition?
6. Do you believe in luck?
7. Do you do your prayer morning and night and at the table? Are you embarrassed to do your cross in front of others, e.g. in a restaurant or outside a Holy Church when you are passing? Do you do your cross properly?
8. Do you read the Holy Bible and also other Orthodox Spiritual books daily?
9. Do you go to Church on Sundays and on the big feast days of the Saints?
10. Do you follow the Divine Liturgy carefully from the start till the end or do you go late and leave before the end? Do you let your mind wander in church?

YOURSELF

1. Are you a slave to materialism and worldly belongings?
2. Are you stingy or a lover of money?
3. Are you greedy?
4. Are you wasteful? Whatever you have that is left over belongs to the poor. Do you have too much love towards pets and waste money on them, while people die of starvation?
5. Do you have conceit and arrogance? Do you talk back to your elders and superiors?
6. Do you like to show off with your clothes, your wealth, your fortunes, and the academic achievements of your children or yourself?
7. Do you seek attention and glory from people? Do you wear perfume and makeup and change the look your creator gave you?
8. Do you accept compliments and praise from others gladly and like to be told that no one exists as good as you?
9. Do you get upset when others show up your faults, and do you get offended when others examine you and when your seniors make comments about you? Do you get angry?
10. Are you perhaps stubborn, high-minded, egotistical, proud or cowardly? Careful of these sins as the diagnosis and solution to these are difficult!
11. Do you gamble or play cards, even without money, with people at home or relatives “to kill time” as some say.
12. Have sexual sins polluted your body, mind or soul? E.g. fornication (sex before marriage), or masturbation, prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc.
13. Do you watch dirty shows on television or at the cinema?
14. Do you read pornographic, immoral books or magazines?
15. Have you ever considered suicide?
16. Are you a slave of your belly (gluttony)?
17. Are you lazy, careless, and negligent? Do you not help when you can?
18. Do you say words improper, immoral and dirty, or swear, for the sake of humor to insult or humiliate others?
19. Do you have a spirit self-denial?
20. Do you expel from your mind bad or sly thoughts that come to pollute your heart?

21. Your eyes, do you take care that your eyes don't gaze or stare at provocative pictures or persons? Do you go to the cinema or theaters?
22. Are you careful what your ears hear? Do you like to hear sinful music or talk?
23. Do you dress immorally, or if you are a woman do you dress with male clothing, i.e. trousers or short skirts, open shirts, see-through shirts and scandalize others with your appearance? And on top of that, then appear at holy places? If you are male, do you have provocative appearance?
24. Have you appeared naked or semi-naked in a swimsuit or bikini publicly?
25. Do you dance provocative and sinful dances? Sing or listen to sinful immoral songs? Do you frequent parties, nightclubs and discos? Do you celebrate sinful worldly festivals, such as the gay and lesbian Mardi Gras, etc?
26. Are you a drunkard?
27. Do you smoke? Smoking destroys your valuable health and is also wasteful of money and hence a sin.
28. Do you talk excessively and about meaningless things?

SPOUSES AND CHILDREN

1. Do you remain faithful? It is tragic when one of the two is unfaithful to the other!
2. Did one of you embarrass or fault the other publicly or privately?
3. Do you not endure the apparent weaknesses of the other? Do you show harshness?
4. Do you or your spouse permit the other to follow the latest fashion and everything that is against or opposite to the law of God? Do you perhaps drag along the other to parties and revelries, on the condition that you will provide the other the means to follow fashion and a worldly life?
5. Do you consider the struggle that the other has outside and inside the home; do you help the other bodily and spiritually?
6. As a spouse, have you had excessive marital (physical) demands and degraded your relationship? Do you abstain on Wednesdays, Fridays, on Sundays, Feast Days and fasting days (including the night before)?
7. Do you perhaps prevent your spouse from going to church, spiritual gatherings, or talks?
8. Your children, do you bring them up “in the instruction and counsel of Christ?” Do you perhaps only concern yourself with their intellectual growth and not with the nature of their character?



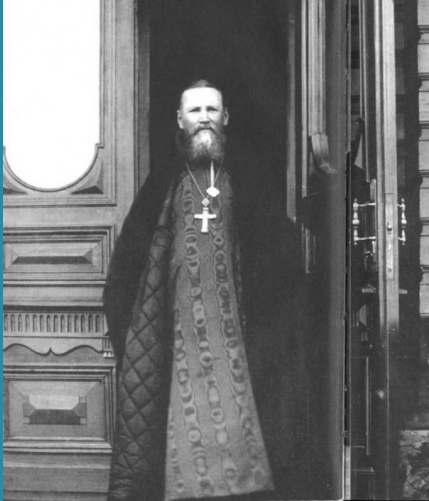
9. Do you direct them to church, to Confession, to regular Holy Communion, (properly prepared) and to Sunday school? Do you teach them with word and example the Holy virtues? Have you taught them to pray morning and evening and at mealtime also exhorting them with respect?
10. Are you careful of the things they read? Do you buy books and periodicals of (Orthodox) spiritual subjects for them to read and learn?
11. Do you watch whom they keep company with and who are their friends?
12. Do you lead them to sinful shows and entertainment, or allow them to watch television unsupervised?
13. Do you teach them humility and meekness, and are you careful to ensure they dress in a dignified way?
14. Do you curse them when they upset you? Do you "send them to hell or the devil"?
15. Have you committed abortions or do you prevent yourself from having children (i.e. contraception)?
16. Have you been unjust to your child in the division of your estate?
17. Do you as a parent believe that the responsibility of raising and educating your children rests only on your spouse? You too have an obligation to educate them, to occupy them, to read to them so that you can relax your spouse. Also so that they too can feel your presence so that they are restrained and aren't pulled towards evil.
18. Do you scorn them by giving them insulting gestures (with your hands spread open) and reprimand them with improper language?
19. Does each of you love and respect the parents of the other? Do the parents and relatives get too involved in the family and cause disagreements and disputes?
20. Do you interfere in your children's families?
21. Is your spouse a blasphemer? Have patience and try hard to cut cursed blasphemy!
22. Have you ever considered divorcing your spouse?
23. Do you allow your children to become fanatical about sports and even to miss church in order to play (e.g. on Sunday mornings)?
24. Are you fair and just with your family, considering and respecting their views and wishes or do you behave like a dictator?

The questions listed are intended to help the Orthodox Christian examine himself and identify the symptoms of his spiritual ills; they should not be taken as some kind of test to ascertain how well we are doing as if there was a certain "pass-mark." Before God's perfections, we shall always fail. It is for that reason that, as believing Christians, we throw ourselves on the mercy of the Lord and do not trust in our own righteousness.

Remember that our sins can never outweigh God's love towards us. Even if we should seem to have failed with regard to all the points mentioned above and more, we should not lose heart but confess our sins unashamedly, we should regret the wrongs we have done, be resolved to make amends, and receive whatever remedy our confessor should be guided to lay upon us. Most of all, one should be assured of the blessing of God which these endeavors will bring upon you.

A PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

BY ST. JOHN KRONSTADT



I, a sinful soul, confess to our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, all of my evil acts which I have done, said or thought from baptism even unto this present day. I have not kept the vows of my baptism, but have turned my back on the face of God.

I turn my back by lack of faith and by doubts concerning the Orthodox Faith and the Holy Church; by ungratefulness for all of God's great and unceasing gifts; His long-suffering and His providence for me, a sinner; by lack of love for the Lord, as well as fear, through not fulfilling the Holy Commandments of God and the canons and rules of the Church.

I have not preserved a love for God and for my neighbor, nor have I made enough efforts, because of laziness and lack of care, to learn the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Holy Fathers. I turn away from God by not praying in the morning and in the evening and in the course of the day; by not attending the services or by coming to church only half-heartedly, lazily and carelessly; by conversing during the services, by not paying attention, letting my mind wander and by departure from the church before the dismissal and blessing.

I miss the mark by judging members of the clergy. I have missed the mark by not respecting the Feasts, breaking the Fasts, and by immoderation in food and drink. I have missed the mark by self-importance, disobedience, willfulness, self-righteousness, and the seeking of approval and praise.

I have missed the mark by unbelief, lack of faith, doubts, despair, despondency, abusive thoughts, blasphemy and swearing.

I have missed the mark by pride, a high opinion of myself, narcissism, vanity, conceit, envy, love of praise, love of honors, and by putting on airs.

I have missed the mark by judging, malicious gossip, anger, remembering of offenses done to me, hatred and returning evil for evil; by slander, reproaches, lies, slyness, deception and hypocrisy; by prejudices, arguments, stubbornness, and an unwillingness to give way to my neighbor; by gloating, spitefulness, taunting, insults and mocking; by gossip, by speaking too much and by empty speech.

I have missed the mark by unnecessary and excessive laughter, by reliving and dwelling upon my previous sins, by arrogant behavior, insolence and lack of respect.

I have missed the mark by not keeping my physical and spiritual passions in check, by my enjoyment of impure thoughts, licentiousness and unchastity in thoughts, words and deeds.

I have missed the mark by lack of endurance towards my illnesses and sorrows, a devotion to the comforts of life and by being too attached to my parents, children, relatives and friends.

I have missed the mark by hardening my heart, having a weak will and by not forcing myself to do good. I have missed the mark by miserliness, a love of money, the acquisition of unnecessary things and immoderate attachment to things. I have missed the mark by self-justification, a disregard for the admonitions of my conscience and failing to confess my sins through negligence or false pride. I have missed the mark many times by my Confession: belittling, justifying and keeping silent about sins. I have sinned against the Most-holy and Life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Lord by coming to Holy Communion without humility or the fear of God.

I have missed the mark in deed, word and thought, knowingly and unknowingly, willingly and unwillingly, thoughtfully and thoughtlessly, and it is impossible to enumerate all of my sins because of their multitude. But I truly repent of these and all others not mentioned by me because of my forgetfulness and I ask that they be forgiven through the abundance of the Mercy of God.

**“BUT, WHILE CONFESSING OUR
SINS IN WORDS, WE MUST
CONFIRM OUR REPENTANCE BY
OUR VERY DEEDS; FOR TRUE
REPENTANCE CONSISTS IN
FORCING THE DEFILEMENT OF
IMPIETY OUT OF THE HEART
ITSELF. “WASH YE,” GOD SAYS,
“BE CLEAN, CLEANSE THE EVIL
FROM YOUR SOULS FROM
BEFORE MINE EYES” (ISAIAH
1:16).**

- ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM