

An Examination of Conscience

As Socrates stated, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Examining your conscience provides an opportunity to recognize sin and seek God’s grace. How do you train your conscience? God’s Word has provided us with the Ten Commandments for examining our consciences, as well as The Sermon on the Mount (see Mt 5-7), The Duties of Christians (Rom 12-15), and St. Paul’s Hymn to Love (1 Cor 13).

Using the Ten Commandments to Examine Your Conscience

1. You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.

You will love and worship God when you realize how much God loves you. “The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). St. Thérèse of Lisieux said that from heaven she would teach us to love Love, which is God. What or who do you love most? Is there a false god in your life?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

You shall respect God’s holy name. Our culture is filled with cursing, vulgar speech and irreverence for the name of God and Jesus. Some even use God’s name to justify violence and anger. How do you speak of God? Listen to and practice Christ’s prayer, “Hallowed [holy] be thy name.”

3. You shall keep holy the Sabbath day.

You shall keep holy the day of the Lord, serving God devotedly. Sunday is a day for adoration of God and a day of rest from the stress and activities of everyday life. How strong is your devotion to the Holy Eucharist? What can you do to reclaim the Sabbath in your life?

4. You shall honor your father and your mother.

You shall respect legitimate authority in society. As authorities of the family, parents are to be not only respected, but also honored. Adults are expected to see to the care for their elderly parents. Children should learn from the virtues, prayerful life, education, and faith their parents have taught them. Parents, in turn, honor their children by caring for them and teaching

them the ways of the faith. How do you live up to your family responsibilities?

5. You shall not kill.

You shall shun murder, scandal, hatred, and vindictive anger. Jesus asks you to be for life. Vindictive anger, hatred, and scandal tempt us to be against life. Abortion, murder, and other forms of violence require us to respond by affirming life. What has been your attitude to the sanctity of life?

6. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall observe fidelity to your spouse. The Church teaches that sex outside of marriage undermines God’s purpose of marriage, which is the union of husband and wife and the begetting of children (CCC 2378, 2380). Staying faithful today is a great challenge. Christ calls us to holiness and fidelity to God, spouses, children, friends, Church, the community, and society. How faithful have you been to these teachings?

7. You shall not steal.

You shall seek justice and peace in all your relationships with others. The Church teaches that the goods of the earth are meant for the benefit of everyone. Justice and peace are means to that goal. What does your conscience tell you about sharing resources? How do you treat people who are struggling financially, spiritually, or physically?

8. You shall not bear false witness to another.

You shall be committed to truth in dealing with others. Trust is the glue that makes society work. Lies hurt and cause damage. How truthful are you? Can others place their trust in you?

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

You shall have hearts that are pure and minds that are free of lust. Jesus says, "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). The same applies to a woman who looks at a man with lust. Jesus teaches, "Blessed are the clean of heart" (Mt 5:8). Our culture is saturated with images that invite the opposite. How are you handling this challenge?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

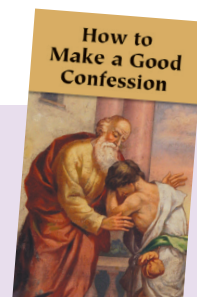
You shall be dedicated to generosity, especially to the poor. In matters of money, property, power, and success, people are motivated by greed and envy. This wrecks families, careers, and the wholesomeness of society. What role do material goods take in your life?

Steps in the Rite of Reconciliation

The penitent may confess face to face with the priest or privately behind a screen.

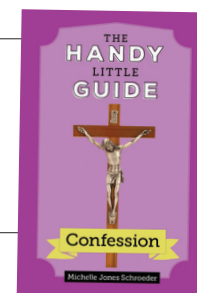
- 1 The priest will welcome you and invite you to make the Sign of the Cross. It will be helpful for the priest to know a little about you if he doesn't already, and the time of your last confession. You may choose to begin with the traditional opening, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been (weeks, months, years) since my last confession." Relax. Be at ease. The priest is there to help you experience God's mercy.
- 2 Confess your sins in your own words to the priest. An appropriate way to conclude is by saying, "I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life." The priest will help you from there.
- 3 After you have confessed your sins to the priest, he will give you encouragement for your moral and spiritual growth. The priest then gives you a penance — which may include a brief prayer — and asks you to make an act of contrition. Then the priest absolves you from your sins. After this you may leave the confessional.
- 4 Complete the penance the priest gives you. Thank God for his mercy. Promise yourself and God that you will try to avoid these sins in the future. Talk to God and ask for his help especially in avoiding temptations — those near occasions of sin.

From the pamphlet **How to Make a Good Confession**
by Rev. Alfred McBride, O.Praem.
(P1359, available in packages of 50 starting at \$17.95.)



Recommended Reading:

The Handy Little Guide to Confession (T2206, \$4.95)
A Pocket Guide to Confession (T430, \$7.95)



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