

An Adult Confession Book

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"Peace be to you!" These are the words of Christ Himself when He was instituting the Sacrament of Confession, on the first Easter Sunday. Knowing human nature, He realised that a person cannot be at peace, and therefore cannot be happy, if there is a barrier between his soul and God. And so, Christ, who came on earth to bring "peace to men of good-will," devised a means of removing that barrier. The barrier, of course, is sin; the means of removing it, is Confession.

Our Lord said: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they shall be forgiven them." Naturally, an apostle of those days, or a priest of today, would find it impossible to know the sins of another person unless that person confessed them himself.

Confessing sins to a priest is the way Christ established to forgive sins; to make a good confession then, is of supreme importance. All that you have to do is to follow this booklet, and you will make a good confession.

Confession —

gateway to peace on earth;

gateway to happiness in heaven.

1.) Your First Confession.

For most converts, though by no means all, the first Confession is a difficult one. That is quite understandable, because probably it is the first time in your life that you have laid bare your soul to another person. After the Confession however, you will realise that you have imagined that this Sacrament is more difficult than it actually is, and that your sense of relief is great. The simple rule to follow is: be guided by the priest who instructed you.

When you are selecting your first confessor, you have a choice. You may either confess to the priest who instructed you, or you may choose a priest, who would not know you at all. This is purely a matter of your personal preference. Some find it easier to go to a priest they know, others to one they do not know.

.When you are making your first Confession, if you feel it an ordeal, you may commence with this, "Father, I am a convert. I am making my first Confession. Will you help me?" The priest, with real sympathy for you, and appreciation of your good-will, will ask a series of questions that will cover all the sins that you might have committed; usually all you have to do is answer a direct "Yes, Father," or "No, Father" to his questions.

Without doubt, such a Confession would be a good one, and anyone finding his first Confession arduous may safely follow this method.

A better method is to prepare all the recital yourself by reading carefully through these pages. Then your Confession would be; "Father, I am a convert. I am making my first Confession, and these are my sins, etc., etc."

Because the priest wants to hear the names of the sins, rather than a detailed description of them, the penitent uses a sentence beginning with "I" and finishing with "times." For example, "I told a lie, three times." "I struck my brother in anger, four times." There are two requirements in confessing a sin (1) the name (2) the number of times.

And now a word about each of the requirements. The name of the sin will suggest itself to you when you read through the list of sins given in this booklet under the heading of "Examination of Conscience," at point number 5.

In determining your sins, you need not include things which, though really sinful, were not recognised as sinful at the time. For instance, God would not hold the cannibals guilty of murder, providing they did not know that this was evil. It is an important point to make because converts generally find out more sins through the course of instructions, than they were aware of previously.

Nor are you obliged to confess anything that you are not certain you committed. God did not devise Confession to be a harrowing experience, but a healthy and a helpful relief from the burden of sin. If it would make you feel better, you may say, "I am not certain of this, but I wish to confess in as far as I was guilty..."

In preparing for Confession (whether it be his first Confession or a later one), a person of good-will could easily forget some of his sins. But if he has made an honest effort, he need not disturb himself at all. People do forget things at one time or another in life. If the forgotten sin was a mortal sin, it must be confessed at the next ordinary Confession — say in a month's time. You would then say "Father, in my last Confession I forgot to mention..." This forgotten sin is forgiven at the same moment as the Confessed sins are forgiven.

Regarding the number of times that you have committed the sin, you realize that you will not remember all the small wrong things that you have done since infancy. God does not expect the impossible from you in recalling the exact number of times. Again, all God wants is an honest effort on your part. Serious sins, ones that are called "mortal sins," often stand out so clearly in a person's mind, that you can give the precise number of times that he committed them. The number of less serious sins or "venial sins," he will not recall as readily.

The common-sense approach to the "number" is where you remember the actual number confess, for example, "four times"; where you are more vague, say "about"; where you often sin, say "four times daily," or "twice each week" or "six times a month."

Despite all this introduction to the Sacrament, the first Confession could well be hard for you. If you make your honest effort, you can be assured that all the work you put into the preparation is very pleasing to God, and a sure sign of your sincerity. Later, Confessions will be easier, but if you are unsure of yourself, use the formula. "Father, I am a convert. Would you mind helping me?" Such a beginning may be necessary for some time to come.

When you have read through the above, you will have clear ideas about your sins, and their number. That is good because God wants you to use this means as a motive for genuine sorrow, as a method of repairing the past, and a support for the future, in other words, as an essential part of your religious life.

2.) The Fallen-Away Catholic.

A Catholic who has lapsed from the practice of the faith for a long time can regard himself almost as a convert in the preparation for the first Confession after his return to God. It is a good thing for him to realize the precise reason that kept him away from God for so long; for example, carelessness, continual drinking, being married out of the Church, a certain type of impurity, etc.

His Confession could commence with "Father, I have not been to Confession for a long time. It is because I was divorced and remarried, or I have been at sea, or I have been taking too much drink for years now." These reasons would indicate to the priest a course to follow in helping you with your Confession.

3.) Making a Good Confession.

Briefly, there are three stages in the Confession itself:

1. Before Confession;
2. At Confession;
3. After Confession.

A.

4) Before Confession.

The reason we go to Confession is either to establish, re-establish or confirm our friendship with God, so it is obvious that we need God's help. Ask for it in words like these:

"Dear Jesus, I wish to make a genuine Confession. Help me to remember my sins and to be truly sorry for them."

"Mary, my mother, you actually saw what it cost your Son to win forgiveness of my sins. Help me to make the kind of Confession you would approve of."

"Holy Spirit of God, Spirit of Truth and Wisdom and Strength, help me to know all my sins; to be sorry for them; to confess them properly; to resolve not to commit these same sins again; to say the penance well."

Then we need to know our sins, and in this regard, there are a few hints that are helpful.

Every sin has a Name.

You have to confess the name, and, if it is a mortal sin, how many times it was committed. A mortal sin requires all three conditions set out below. If any one of these conditions is missing, it is definitely no mortal sin.

1. It must have been serious, for example murder.
2. You must have been aware at the time you sinned that it was serious.
3. You must have really wanted to commit this thing which you considered to be seriously sinful.

5.) An Examination of Conscience.

To find out the sins you ought to confess all you need to do is ask yourself the following questions, and answer them truthfully to yourself. When your conscience tells you that you have committed one of these things, then you have to ask yourself, how many times. The final verdict of your conscience would then be "I gambled excessively twice," this examination of conscience is exhaustive. It is too full for ordinary use, but it covers all that is needed by a convert or a fallen-away Catholic. The ordinary practical Catholic will find briefer examinations of conscience later in the pamphlet.

In this examination of conscience, there is a variety of styles of type to indicate which type of sin.

“venial sins” (in lower case,)

“MORTAL SINS” (in UPPER CASE.)

First Commandment.

Did I miss my prayers for a long time through laziness or carelessness?

Did I have deliberate distractions in my prayers?

Did I DENY THAT I WAS A CATHOLIC? or THAT I BELIEVED IN GOD?

Did I ridicule religion? or fail to stand up for it?

Did I, as a Catholic, TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN NON-CATHOLIC SERVICES (without permission)? or ATTEND THEM WITHOUT PERMISSION?

Did I take seriously, the advice of Astrologers, superstitious practices? or fortune telling?

Second Commandment.

Did I use God's Name or the Holy Names, "Jesus", or "Christ" without due respect?

Did I lack respect for God's House, talking in the Church, etc.?

Did I speak disrespectfully to, or of, priests, brothers or nuns?

Did I TELL A LIE UNDER OATH?

Third Commandment.

Did I MISS MASS ON SUNDAYS OR DAYS OF OBLIGATION THROUGH MY OWN FAULT?

Did I ARRIVE AFTER THE OFFERTORY OF THE MASS? or LEAVE BEFORE THE COMMUNION WITHOUT A PROPER EXCUSE?

Did I come late or go early from Mass?

Did I DO UNNECESSARY PHYSICAL (‘SERVILE’) WORK FOR A LONG TIME ON SUNDAYS? HOW LONG?

Fourth Commandment.

For Fathers.

Did I PROVIDE FOR THE MATERIAL NECESSITIES OF MY WIFE AND FAMILY?

Did I waste money that should have been used on the family?

Did I take due care of the health of my wife and family?

Did I put my wife in the first place in my life? pray for her?

Did I speak sharply to her, especially in the presence of the children or others?

Did I take an interest in the children, and watch over their leisure and companionship?

Did I fail to correct them?

Did I give bad example to them through neglect of my religion?

Was I domineering or intolerant, or impatient?

Have I given sensible sex instruction to my sons when it was needed?

Did I make my children respect and obey their mother?

Have I warned my family of the dangers and difficulties of mixed marriages?

For Mothers.

Did I provide for the material needs of my husband and family?

Did I put my husband first in my life? above the children? pray for him?

Did I DENY HIM HIS MARRIAGE RIGHTS (without reason)?

Did I belittle him before the children or others? was I disagreeable to him?

Were my children BAPTISED SOON ENOUGH AFTER BIRTH?

Did I treat each child fairly? love each one? correct each one?

Did I see to it that they said their prayers regularly? went to Mass, Confession and Holy Communion?

Have I taught my children the essential elements of religion to the extent of their need?

Did I prepare my daughters for their normal physical development?

Did I sensibly forewarn my daughters of the dangers of company-keeping by pointing out the difficulties young men usually experience in courting, due to their normal masculine temperament?

Are my daughters able to confide in me?

Did I take adequate care of the health of my husband and children?

Did I spoil my children? correct them in anger?

Did I give bad example by missing Mass, neglecting the Sacraments?

Is my home clean? are my children neatly clad?

Did I waste money, or get into needless debt, or contract excessive hire-purchase debts?

Did I make my home a difficult place to live in by complaining or nagging?

For Young People.

Did I disobey my parents?

Did I fail to show love to my parents, both in word and deed? confide in them?

Have I made home miserable? failed to pay my board? gone out without informing my parents where I was going?

Was I selfish with the T.V.? radio? bathroom? Other family facilities?

Is home a better place for my presence or for my absence?

Did I borrow things from home without permission? a car?

For All.

Did I make fun of old people?

Did I fulfil reasonable wishes of my Parish Priest and my employers?

Did I respect all lawful authority?

Am I a good citizen? did I vote thoughtfully?

Fifth Commandment.

Did I KILL OR TRY TO KILL ANOTHER? TRY TO COMMIT SUICIDE?

Did anyone under my charge SUFFER SERIOUSLY THROUGH MY NEGLIGENCE? OR BAD ADVICE? OR INTERFERENCE?

Did I ATTEMPT, SUGGEST, PARTICIPATE IN ABORTION? IF SO, WAS I AWARE THAT THERE IS AN EXCOMMUNICATION ATTACHED TO THIS?

Did I DO ANYTHING TO BRING ON A WILFUL MISCARRIAGE?

Did I allow myself to get unreasonably angry, or hurt others in anger, was I stubborn?

Did I look down on others?

Did I wish evil to others, hate them, try to get even with them?

Did I fight or quarrel, or make others fight or quarrel? Did I forgive readily enough?

Did I knowingly give bad example? did I knowingly lead others into any sin?

Did I drink to excess? drive under the influence of drink? Did an accident happen through my fault?

The Sixth and Ninth Commandments.

Did I DELIBERATELY TAKE PLEASURE IN USING BAD WORDS? TELLING OR LISTENING TO BAD STORIES? SINGING IMPURE SONGS?

Did I REALLY WANT TO LOOK AT IMPURE THINGS OR PICTURES?

Did I WANT IMPURE THOUGHTS?

Did I TAKE PLEASURE IN TOUCHING MYSELF IMPURELY?

Did I DELIBERATELY COMMIT AN IMPURE ACT BY MYSELF?

Did I KISS PASSIONATELY AND IMPURELY?

Did I ENCOURAGE OR ALLOW ANOTHER TO TOUCH ME IMPURELY?

Did I FAIL TO STOP THEM FROM DOING SO?

Did I, AS A SINGLE PERSON HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH ANOTHER SINGLE PERSON (FORNICATION)?

Did I, AS A MARRIED PERSON, HAVE INTERCOURSE WITH AN UNMARRIED PERSON (ADULTERY)?

or WITH ANOTHER MARRIED PERSON (DOUBLE ADULTERY)?

Did I USE ANY FORM OF CONTRACEPTION? DID I IMPURELY FAIL TO COMPLETE THE MARRIAGE ACT?

Did I DO AN IMPURE ACT WITH ANOTHER PERSON OF MY OWN SEX?

Did I TEACH OTHERS TO COMMIT SINS OF IMPURITY?

Did I go to bad places? bad picture shows? read bad books? associate with bad companions? attend bad dances? bad parties?

Did I go to drive-ins or remain parked in a car, when my conscience told me that I should not?

Did I dress immodestly, so as to arouse sinful desire in others by attracting too much attention to my body?

The Seventh and Tenth Commandments.

Did I steal, or help others to steal? how much? what was its value?

Did I cheat? accept or offer bribes?

Did I accept, or keep afterwards, or sell, goods known to be stolen?

Did I spoil another's property? did I injure public property?

Did I use another person's property without their spoken or unspoken consent?

Did I gamble more than I could afford?

Did I fail to return valuable goods when found? or when borrowed?

Did I neglect to do the work I was paid for? or do shoddy work?

Did I NEGLECT TO PAY MY EMPLOYEES A JUST WAGE?

(In some of these cases, restitution will have to be made. The priest will advise you after you have finished confessing.)

Did I really want to steal something from another? Was I envious or jealous?

The Eighth Commandment.

Did I deliberately say spiteful or petty things about another in his absence? (backbiting).

Did I tell lies?

Did the lies injure others? seriously? (Calumny).

Did I talk about the sins of another without necessity? (Detraction.)

Did I gossip?

(If you are a convert, and you are making your first Confession immediately after your reception into the Church, you need go no further in the examination of your conscience. For later Confessions, or for a first Confession made some time after your reception into the Church, you must examine your conscience also on the Commandments of the Church as set out below.)

The Commandments of the Church.

[Our Lord gave the Church authority to 'bind on earth' and it would be considered 'bound in heaven'. (See Matthew 16:19 and 18:18.) Thus, these commandments were binding on Catholics in 1962. Since then, several changes have been promulgated by Church authority, but these are reproduced here as they appeared in the original pamphlet. Some notation is given concerning some of questions where changes have been made.]

Did I EAT MEAT ON FRIDAY OR ASH WEDNESDAY REALIZING THAT I OUGHT NOT?

[Catholics are now obliged to do penance on these days, but the abstinence from meat obligation has been rescinded.]

If over 21 and under 60, DID I FAST WHEN I WAS BOUND TO DURING LENT AND ON EMBER DAYS?

(Ember Days are announced from the pulpit. If you were not aware of them, you did not sin.)

[Fasting on Ember days is no longer compulsory, but all Catholics are bound to do some penance during the season of Lent.]

Did I FAIL TO GO TO CONFESSION AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR WHEN IN MORTAL SIN?

Did I MAKE A BAD CONFESSION BY DELIBERATELY CONCEALING A MORTAL SIN FROM THE PRIEST?

IF SO, HAVE I BEEN TO CONFESSION AND HOLY COMMUNION SINCE? HOW MANY TIMES?

Did I FAIL TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION EACH YEAR ABOUT THE TIME OF EASTER? (i.e. from Ash Wednesday until Trinity Sunday).

Did I RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION, AWARE THAT I WAS IN THE STATE OF MORTAL SIN?

Did I RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION AWARE THAT I WAS NOT FASTING LONG ENOUGH?

(3 hours for solid food and alcoholic liquids; 1 hour for other liquids. No time limit on the use of drinking water. Medicines for the sick do not break the fast. Time to be calculated from the time of eating to the time of receiving Holy Communion, not to the beginning of the Mass.) [Only one hour's fasting is now imposed on the faithful, and there are even more generous provisions for the sick and their carers.]

Did I fail to contribute my reasonable share to the support of the Church? Christmas and Easter offerings?

Did I send my children to a Catholic school, where possible?

If married, did my MARRIAGE TAKE PLACE IN THE PRESENCE OF A CATHOLIC PRIEST?

Finally ask yourself...

Is there any other sin that I have committed?

Is there anything definite that worries me?

Do I want to ask the priest anything?

Sorrow.

Now that you are aware of your sins, you should be sincerely sorry for them. After all, if you happen to bump into somebody on the footpath in the City, you do not find it hard to turn to that person and to say sincerely, "I'm sorry."

Now, what is sorrow? Sorrow is a spiritual realization whereby we now regret that we have committed the sins in the past, we detest them now, and we are resolved not to sin again in the future. (Of course, from past experience we know that we are likely to sin again but at the moment when we are sorry, we do not want to sin again.)

The convert, the fallen-away Catholic and even the good Catholic must avoid one treacherous pitfall in sorrow. Many people are ashamed of their sins for natural reasons only, such as shame, the danger of being detected, the meanness of, say, a petty lie, etc. These natural motives by themselves are insufficient. We must be sorry for God's sake, not merely for our own sake. Our sin is an offence against God and His goodness.

With sincerity, then, express your sorrow for your sins, by reading these prayers with your heart.

"Dear Jesus, now that I am conscious of my sins I wish to tell you that I am sorry for them. One mortal sin is enough to keep my soul out of heaven forever; one mortal sin is enough to plunge my soul into hell forever. I am sorry, and I ask forgiveness.

"There is a deeper reason why I am sorry, dear Jesus. I know that you could see all my sins during your sufferings, and my sins actually added to your sufferings. I am sorry for the suffering I have caused you, and I ask forgiveness."

"O my God, the all powerful, mighty Creator, my wretched sins are an insult to Your Goodness. Be merciful to me, a sinner. Help me to be good and avoid sin in future."

Some people find David's great prayer of sorrow helpful.

Psalm 50. (Psalm 51 in the Hebrew.)

Have mercy on me, O God, in Your goodness.

In the greatness of Your compassion, wipe out my guilt.

Wash away all my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sins.

For my guilt, I confess, and my sin is ever before me.

Against You only have I sinned, and I have done evil in Your sight.

So is Your sentence seen just, and vindicated in Your condemnation.

Indeed in guilt was I born, and in sin, my mother did conceive me.

See, You do love a true heart; in my heart's depths teach me wisdom.

Cleanse me with a hyssop that I may be made pure;
wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.
Let me hear sounds of joy and gladness,
and the bones You have broken shall rejoice.
Turn away Your face from my sins, blotting out all stain of guilt.
Create a clean heart for me, O God, and renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Cast me not out of Your sight, and Your holy spirit take not from me.
Give me back the joy of Your salvation, and in me sustain a noble spirit.
I will teach the wicked Your ways, and the sinful shall return to You.
O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall tell Your praise.
For sacrifices do not please You;
should I offer a holocaust, You would not accept.
My sacrifice, O God, is a truly contrite heart;
and a contrite and humbled heart You will not scorn.
Be bountiful to Sion, O God, in Your kindness,
by rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.
Then with due sacrifices, burnt offerings, and holocausts You shall be pleased;
then with bullocks upon Your altar shall they make oblations.

When I say that I am sorry for my sins, I imply that I do not want to commit them again. I firmly resolve therefore, not to commit these same sins in the future. Now work out a plan to avoid the sins, especially the major ones, from this confession onwards.

If you have worked through all this, you can be quite certain that you shall make a good, sincere Confession. It means that there is no need for any sort of anxiety at all, or doubt the worth of your Confession.

B.

6.) At Confession.

In reality, it is relatively simple to do the confessing. The easy formula below is logical. Before entering the confessional, see whether it is a single-sided confessional or a double-sided confessional. If it is a single, you start confessing as soon as you have knelt down; if a double, you wait until the priest has heard the other person. You speak in a low voice. [Since Vatican II, several other options are available, but what is printed below will be sufficient to cover most situations. Many Confessionals now provide the opportunity of confessing either from a kneeler or from a chair, and they provide the opportunity of confessing either 'face to face', or anonymously.]

There are only five parts to confessing:

1. Blessing:

making the Sign of the Cross on yourself, you ask, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."

[‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.]

1. Time:

"This is my first Confession Father. I am a convert," or "It is a month (week or year, etc.) since my last Confession...."

1. Sins:

"and these are my sins.

"I (committed this sin.....)..... times."

"I times."

1. Penance:

when you have told all your sins, you bring to the notice of the priest this fact by concluding with, "These are all I can remember, Father, and I am very sorry for all the sins of my life." To help you make up for your sins, the priest gives you a "penance," for example, five Our Fathers, three Hail Marys.

1. Act of Contrition:

and, thus, you renew your sorrow with words like these below.

"O my God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins; and detest them above all things, because they deserve dreadful punishments; because they have crucified my loving Saviour, Jesus Christ; and most of all, because they offend Your Infinite goodness. And I firmly resolve by the help of Your Grace, never to offend You again, and carefully to avoid the occasions of sin. Amen."

Or if you prefer the short Act of Contrition:

"Oh my God, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you because you are so good, and I will not sin again."

While you are saying this "Act of Contrition," the priest is saying words in Latin as wonderful as these: "I absolve you from your sins in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." And his final prayer for you really puts a new value into your life. "May the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of all the saints, and also whatever good you have done or evil you have endured be the cause for the remission of your sins, the increase of grace, and the reward of everlasting life." [The words are slightly different in the new rite of Pope Paul VI, but the Absolution and meaning are the same. You can hear them being said in English or your own language as well!]

When the priest has stopped speaking, you show your appreciation by saying either "thank you, Father," or "God bless you, Father," You return then, to the Church.

(It is worth pointing out that some confessionals are rather darkened, and in them, it is impossible to read. It is therefore, necessary to know the Act of Contrition off by heart.)

C.

7.) After Confession.

Now, of course, is the time for gratitude. It is much easier to express that gratitude if you are looking at some representation of the Crucifixion. Say,

“Dear Jesus, I thank You with all the powers of my soul for taking away my sins. I do not wish to offend You again. Mary, you stood by the Cross; you saw what it cost your Son to win forgiveness of my sins. Help me to avoid my sins in the future.”

Say the penance given to you by the priest, remembering that the better you say the penance, the less time you shall spend in purgatory.

Before you leave the Church, recall the mortal sins or the more serious venial sins that you have just confessed, and make this promise to Our Lord: “In love and gratitude towards you, I want to avoid (name the sin), in the future. To keep me from this sin again I will (mention the step you are taking).”

You may now leave the Church, because you cannot but have made a good sincere Confession.

Frequent Confession.

How often should I return to Confession?

If you have followed the outline given in this pamphlet, you will realize from your own personal experience, that Confession is not difficult. The next question that naturally presents itself to you is, "how often should I return?" Your strict obligation is to confess your sins once a year about Easter time if you have any mortal sins. However, if a Catholic kept only to this minimum, he would not be able to claim that he was a devout Catholic. A far better practice is a monthly Confession. The late Holy Father, Pius XII, summing up the feelings of many Popes, was most enthusiastic about it. "We wish the pious practice of frequent Confession to be earnestly advocated. Not without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was this practice introduced into the Church. The advantages of this are numerous: we get to know ourselves better; our humility grows; we will eliminate our bad habits; (without doubt), our love for God increases; we become stronger characters, and our peace of mind develops.

We therefore are restored to the state of grace. Grace is the quality in our souls which enables us to do actions that make us holy, children of God, and thus merit an eternal reward. Even if a person has no mortal sins to confess he receives on the occasion of his Confession, an increase of grace in his soul and consequently his soul is more pleasing to God with every Confession.

8.) Examination of Conscience for the Practising Catholic

If you have adopted this practice of frequent Confession, you do not have to make an exhaustive examination of conscience as has already been indicated above. You may ask yourself these simple questions:

Did I sin with my...

mind (thinking or desiring)?

eyes (seeing or reading)

ears (hearing)?

mouth (saying, eating or drinking)?

hands (doing or neglecting)?

feet (going or not going)?

body (impurity)?

Better still, and much more of a positive approach for the practical Catholic is a form of examination of conscience, based on the fact that the whole of good Christian conduct revolves around the great twofold Commandment of Charity, namely "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and mind... and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

Did I fail in love of God?

Mass?

Prayers?

Duties at home and at work?

Did I fail in love of my neighbour?

husband or wife?

children?

others associated with me at work or elsewhere?

impatience?

impurity in speech or deed?

injustice?

lies?

uncharitable thoughts or speech?

jealousy?

If you have committed no serious sin since your last Confession, say, "Father, I have nothing serious to confess since my last Confession. I renew my sorrow for all the sins of my life especially for... (name some serious sin already confessed)."

Perhaps Psalm 129 (Psalm 130 in the Hebrew) would help you to be sorry for your sins, not for any natural motive but for God's sake.

Psalm 129.

Out of the depths, O Lord, I cry to You; O Lord, hear my calling.

Let Your ears give heed to me, to the sound of my pleading.

If You, O Lord, were to note our sinfulness,

O Lord, who could endure it?

But forgiveness is Yours, that with love men serve You,

I trust in the Lord God; in His word does my soul trust.

My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for sunrise,

let Israel wait for the Lord.

For the Lord is kindness and abundant redemption.

He will redeem Israel, from all their sinfulness.

Some recurring difficulties about Confession.

Most people who use Confession come to the big question, "Am I really and genuinely sorry for my sins? Sometimes I do not feel sorrow." The kind of sorrow that is needed is such that at the moment of my Confession I can say to myself, "Whatever of the future, at this moment, I do not wish to commit the sins again." The words of the Act of Contrition, "I will not sin again" certainly do not mean "I shall not sin again" — not even the saint could affirm this, but rather "I will not sin again" simply says, "It is my firm intention not to sin again."

The Motives for Sorrow.

The motive of sorrow must have the characteristic of being supernatural, that is, connected with God. For instance,

"Oh my God I am sorry for my sins because each of them is an insult to your Divine Majesty; they are offensive to your Justice; they show my ingratitude to your Infinite Goodness; they are an ungracious rebellion against your authority; they are an offence to my Creator; they caused the Passion and Death of Jesus; they deserve your punishments."

In practice we find that one or all of these motives appeals to us, and when our souls have been stirred by their force, we can easily make our purpose of amendment,

"O my God, I will do my best not to offend You again."

But to show sincerity requires this approach. Take the sin that you have committed most often since your last Confession and ask yourself — how many times did I fall into this sin? Say, perhaps six times. If you have only four lapses into this sin at your next Confession, you have improved. Some penitents have a pessimistic outlook on the prospect of their falling into mortal sin and this outlook causes great harm to their souls. They think that once they have sinned mortally, it does not really matter how often they commit the sin again. "I have lost grace and further sins will not worsen my position." These people do not know enough about the formation of habits. A habit is formed by repeating an act. With the repetition of the sinful act, grace is certainly not lost again, but the habit becomes so strengthened by the acts that it makes it so much easier to sin again, and lose grace in the future. The more often we repeat the sinful act, the longer it will plague us.

A Great Support.

It is a wonderful help to know that no sin is so great as to defy eradication. All sins, and even habits, can be removed. And when it appears that a sin is persisting even after repeated attack is made directly on it, it is good to try an indirect onslaught. By that method, a penitent tries to build up his strength of character by performing one serious act of self-denial for each time he falls into the sin. The particular act of self-denial must be costly enough to be felt, such as forgoing a drink at the hotel, television for the evening, etc.

Many Catholics find that there are times when they want to ask a priest a question that has been disturbing them. For example, someone asks a poser about the Faith at work, and the Catholic is not sure of the answer. Or there is some problem that is causing anxiety to the penitent. If then, there is

something that you want to ask the priest, at the end of your Confession, frame your question briefly like this, "Father, I would like to hear the reason for Catholics being against cremation." If, however, the question is involved, your natural courtesy will prevent you from asking then, and you will have to see the priest when there are not so many waiting on his ministrations.

A Final Thought.

It is good to reflect that Our Lord knew the evils and ills that would disturb the twentieth century [and the twenty-first]; he knew all the advances that would be made in the psychiatric field. Yet to forgive sin, to heal the breach between mortals and their Creator, he instituted Confession of sin. And while with deep admiration of the value of modern knowledge as expounded so well and practised so painstakingly by doctors and psychologists, we cannot afford to overlook Our Lord's own remedy, Confession.
