

Making a Good Confession

Examination of Conscience

Before you go to confession, spend five minutes or so making an *examination of conscience*. This means going over the time since your last confession to see if there are any sins you have committed.

These can be sins of *commission*, ie things you did that you shouldn't have.

Or they can be sins of *omission*, ie things you didn't do that you should've.

Is it okay to make a list?

As you make your examination of conscience, be sorry to God for the sins.

You can jot them down on a piece of paper as they occur to you if this helps.

I don't know what to do when I get into the confessional

There's now an A4 card on the website and a copy in the confessional called Rite of Reconciliation for Individual Penitent. This tells you everything you need to say and do during the celebration of this sacrament.

What happens if I can't remember my sins?

You need to confess to the priest all the sins you can remember. If you made a list during your examination of conscience there's nothing to stop you using the list now to help you not forget anything.

Any sins that you can't remember will be forgiven, but you should at least try to remember all the sins you have committed.

Is it okay to make up sins if I can't remember any I've committed?

It seems that some people were taught when they were children to make up a standard list of sins and take these into confession whether they had actually committed any of these or not. This is an abuse of the sacrament, and to be avoided. Only confess sins that you are conscious of having committed.

This is the importance of making a good examination of conscience (see above)

You might find it helpful to get hold of an aid to examination of conscience. Ask your parish priest.

Pitfalls to be avoided

Priests sometimes hear penitents saying in confession:

"I feel guilty about (such and such a sin)" or "What really bothers me father is (such and such a sin)"

It's okay to tell the priest you feel guilty or you are bothered about such and such a sin, but remember that the real reason for coming to confession is to have your sins forgiven, not to have your feelings of guilt relieved, though hopefully this will happen as well. It's important to confess all sins that you know to be against the teaching of the Church, even if some of them you don't feel particularly guilty about or bothered about.

What happens if I really don't think I've got anything to confess?

Remember that it's sins of *omission* as well as sins of *commission* that we bring to confession. I.e. things that we should have done but didn't.

But there's something else:

Pope John Paul II frequently reminded us that we are all called to be saints. So it's helpful to look at the saints and see if there's any way in which we fall short of that sanctity.

See how tirelessly they worked for the building up of God's Church. See how tirelessly they worked for the building up of the Kingdom of God. We're all called to do this and most of us fail every day to live up to this high calling.

Have I used every moment of my time well, for the building up of God's Church? If not I can bring this to confession. It's something I would guess every one of us can bring to confession every time.

Are my heart and my mind constantly fixed on God every moment of the day, in whatever I do, like it was for the great saints? For most of us, probably not, and we can bring this to confession too. It's the ideal "to pray constantly" that we're called to as Christians, an ideal we all fall short of. It's something I would guess every one of us can bring to confession every time.

How often should I go to confession?

If you don't go to confession for a long time you can become a bit desensitized to sin. Not a good thing.

Going regularly to confession helps to keep alive your sensitivity to sin and keep alive an awareness of your need for forgiveness. I would suggest that once a month is a good regularity for going to confession.