



FORGIVEN™

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF CONFESSION



SESSION 3

The Rite Explained



Study Guide

FORGIVEN™

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF CONFESSION

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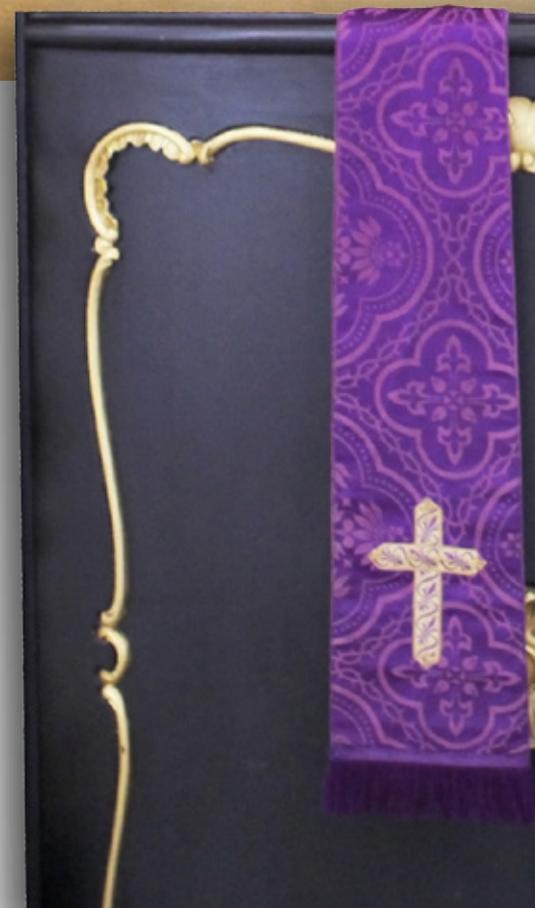
OPENING PRAYER

Blessed is he whose transgression
is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man to whom the LORD
imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
When I declared not my sin,
my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”;
then you forgave the guilt of my sin.
Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress, in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.
You are a hiding place for me,
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with deliverance.

—Psalm 32:1–7

INTRODUCTION

It’s not easy to admit when we’ve done something wrong—or failed to do something right. But when we learn to trust in God’s mercy, we don’t have to be afraid to face our sins. That mercy is present to us in a very real way in the confessional through the ministry of the priest. God’s merciful love shapes every word and action of the sacrament, and when we prepare for it honestly and prayerfully, we will be open to receiving the fullness of his grace.



Some wounds are deeper than others. Because mortal sin destroys the life of grace in the soul and ruptures our relationship to God and his Church, we need God's minister (the priest) to absolve us formally when we've committed mortal sin. Confession is the ordinary means of forgiveness in the Church, and one of the precepts of the Church requires us to confess mortal sins at least once a year.

Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin should not receive the Eucharist, even if he thinks he has perfect contrition, without first receiving absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. **(see CCC 1856–1859, 1452–1453, 1457)**

CONNECT

Can you describe a time when you had to take a risk and trust?

What would you like the courage to do?

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

—Proverbs 28:13

VIDEO

Watch the teaching on video.

The following is a brief outline of topics covered.

I. Priests' Perspective on Confession

- A. It's a joy and privilege to welcome people back to God in the sacrament
- B. Nothing new under the sun—you aren't going to shock the priest with your sin
- C. Absolutely confidential (Seal of Confession)
- D. Admiration for the courage of the penitent
- E. Many priests forget everything they hear in the confessional
- F. Sin is forgiven to make us free to love

II. The Sacrament

- A. Examination of Conscience
 - 1. We prepare for the Sacrament because we take the encounter with Christ seriously
 - 2. Consider what sins we have committed
 - 3. Keep in mind that we are approaching our loving Father
 - 4. "In my thoughts"—our words and actions have their root in our thoughts
 - 5. "In my words"—we can sin through our speech
 - 6. "In what I have done"—sins of commission; what we most commonly consider as sin
 - 7. "In what I have failed to do"—sins of omission
- B. Sign of the Cross
- C. "Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been . . . since my last confession"—gives the priest context

D. State our sins

1. Simple, straightforward, honest
2. Humbling but not humiliating
3. List the most serious first, and if you forget a small sin don't worry about it

E. Penance

1. Act of love and thanksgiving in response to God's forgiveness
2. Addresses some of the practical consequences of sin

F. Act of Contrition

1. Like a formal apology
2. Can use a memorized prayer or make up your own

G. Absolution

1. Priest raises his hand over penitent—invokes God's presence
2. Recites the prayer of Absolution—this is the moment of forgiveness
 - a. Father of mercies
 - b. Pardon and peace
 - c. Ministry of the Church

Whenever we make an examination of conscience, we can also look at other aspects of sin to see what we should bring to Confession. The *Catechism* tells us that we can distinguish between sins: (1) according to their object, the virtues they oppose, or the commandments they violate; (2) whether they concern God, neighbor, or self; (3) whether they are spiritual or carnal sins; and (4) whether they relate to thought, word, deed, or omission (**see CCC 1853**).

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DISCUSS

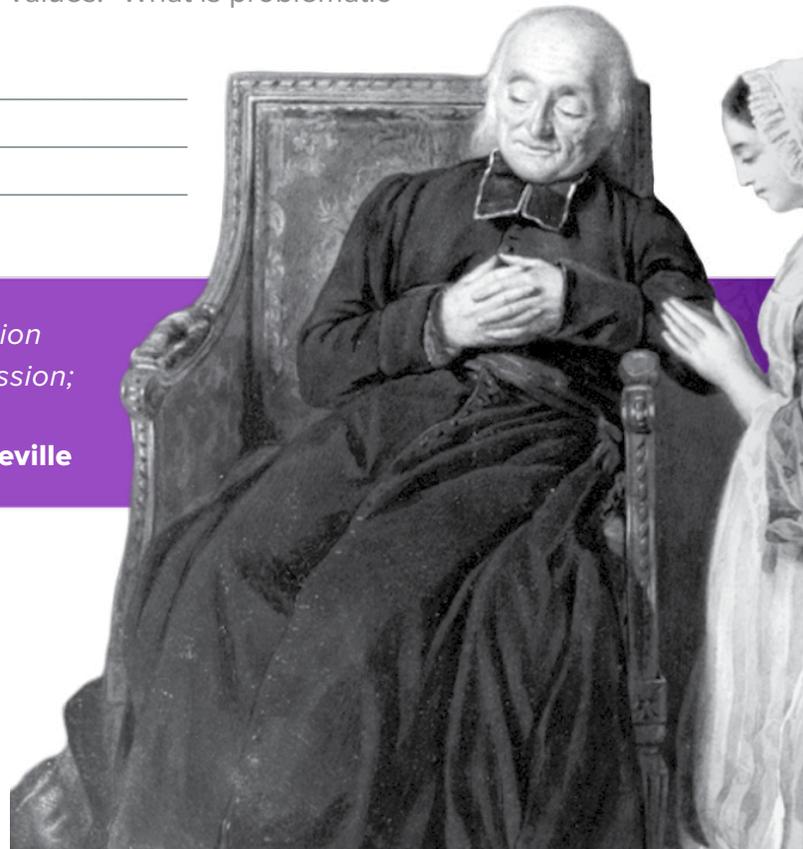
1. In the video we heard that God forgives our sin in order to clear the way for love. Grace increases in our souls similar to the way a fire increases in brightness and heat with the addition of more fuel. Since sanctifying grace is God's very life, how are we to understand an increase of God's life within us when he is already omnipresent and infinite?

2. God's will for our lives is to grow in self-awareness, self-possession, and self-donation. In other words, it is difficult to give ourselves away in love if we are not free to love. And, it is difficult to grow in the freedom necessary to love if we are not aware of what restrains us. How does understanding the purpose of our lives emphasize the importance of a good examination of conscience?

3. A presidential candidate was asked the question: "How do you define sin?" His answer was: "Being out of alignment with my values." What is problematic with this answer?

"Confession heals, confession justifies, confession grants pardon of sin, all hope consists in confession; in confession there is a chance for mercy."

—St. Isidore of Seville



COMMIT—ENCOUNTERING GOD’S MERCY

An examination of conscience is a prayerful reflection on our life, looking for sins that we might have committed in our thoughts, words, actions, or inaction. There are many different kinds of examinations of conscience—some are structured around the Ten Commandments; some are based on the seven capital (or deadly) sins. A simple way to begin looking for sin is to look at our thoughts, words, actions, and inaction through the lens of the two greatest commandments: **“The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”** (Mark 12:29–31). Take some time in quiet prayer to reflect on these verses. Begin by asking the Holy Spirit to help you make this examination of conscience:

Spirit of truth, guide me as I examine my life. Give me the wisdom to see all my thoughts, words, actions, and inaction as you do. Give me the courage to acknowledge my sins. Give me the humility and strength to confess my sins. And give me the grace to trust wholeheartedly in your mercy and forgiveness. Amen.

Prayerfully consider, **“In what ways have I not loved God with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength? In what ways have I failed to love my neighbor as myself?”** Write your reflections in the space below. You can use these private reflections to help you make your next confession.

How did you feel before starting the examination of conscience? How did you feel after you finished it? What do you think it means to see our sins the way God sees them?

“Go to your confessor; open your heart to him; display to him all the recesses of your soul; take the advice that he will give you with the utmost humility and simplicity. For God, who has an infinite love for obedience, frequently renders profitable the counsels we take from others, but especially from those who are the guides of our souls.”

—St. Francis de Sales



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CLOSING PRAYER

The Confiteor

I confess to almighty God,
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I have failed to do,
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

Amen.

—*Roman Missal*, 4

Outdoor confessionals in Krakow, Poland, prepared for the World Youth Day 2016 © Nahlik / shutterstock.com

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1480–1484, 1846–1869

Christopher Walsh, *The Untapped Power of the Sacrament of Penance: A Priest's View* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2005)

Go to USCCB.org to find several examinations of conscience in the Prayer and Worship/ Sacraments section

John A. Kane, *How to Make a Good Confession: A Pocket Guide to Reconciliation with God* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2001)

Augustine Institute: *How to Make a Good Confession* Booklet

Lighthouse Talks: *7 Secrets of Confession* by Vinny Flynn

Examination of Conscience Based on the Ten Commandments

1. I am the LORD your God. You shall have no false gods before me. Do I put God before my spouse? My children? My work? Do I believe that God loves me? Do I have any “false gods” in my life like money, fame, power, possessions? Have I been involved in fortune-telling, astrology, palm-reading, or witchcraft? Do I pray daily?

2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain. Do I use curse words? Have I made oaths or sworn promises to God that I haven't kept? Have I allowed others to swear in my presence?

3. Remember to keep holy the LORD's Day. Do I attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation? Do I avoid unnecessary work on Sundays? Do I avoid unnecessary shopping on Sundays?

4. Honor your father and mother. Do I show love to my parents, regardless of their age? Do I help them when I can? Do I respect my employer and others in authority? If I am a parent, have I given a bad example in word or deed to my children? Am I raising my children in the Catholic Faith?

5. You shall not kill. Have I killed or seriously injured anyone? Do I gossip? Have I had an abortion or helped someone get an abortion? Have I lost my temper, given in to anger, or harbored resentment against my neighbor? Do I bear grudges? Have I ever harmed anyone physically, mentally, or emotionally? Do I take care of the environment?

6. You shall not commit adultery. Have I used pornography? Have I watched movies that are overly violent or sexual? Have I consented to lustful thoughts? Have I masturbated? Have I had premarital sex? Have I treated anyone as an object, rather than a person? Do I eat or drink in excess? Have I lost sobriety through drunkenness or drug use?

7. You shall not steal. Have I stolen anything? Do I always give a full day's work for a full day's pay? Do I cheat in school or business? Am I fair in paying my employees? Am I honest in paying my taxes? Have I wasted time? Have I been generous in serving the poor?

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Have I told a lie, even a white lie? Have I told lies to avoid getting in trouble? Have I revealed other people's secrets? Have I failed to mind my own business? Have I accused someone falsely? Have I judged others harshly? Have I been prejudiced or discriminated against anyone?

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. Have I been unfaithful to my spouse in either my actions or my thoughts? Have I used my wife or husband merely to satisfy my sexual urges? Have I acted inappropriately with those of the opposite sex?

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's property. Have I envied anyone else's possessions, money, fame, or success? Have I used more than my fair share of resources?

