

THE SANCTUM EXAMINATION COMPANION

For the daily Examen, the Sacrament of Confession, and the long road home.



Prepare for confession the way a man prepares for battle — honestly, briefly, without flinching. A soldier does not romanticize the enemy or talk himself out of the fight; he counts what is real, names it plainly, and moves. Do the same here. This is not a place to grind yourself down with scruples, nor to flatter yourself with vague generalities. It is a reckoning made in the light of the Word of God: "The reception of this sacrament ought to be prepared for by an examination of conscience made in the light of the Word of God" (CCC 1454). Carry this in the missal, the truck, the rucksack, the desk drawer. Use it nightly. Bring it to confession. Hand it to the brother who needs it. If it has been years — start anyway. The line is open, and the One who waits at the end of it has been waiting the whole time.

I. THE DAILY EXAMEN

I. Gratitude. Begin by naming three specific gifts of the day — not 'I am grateful for everything,' but three particulars. The big one: an answered prayer, a clear providence, a grace that broke through. The medium one: a kindness given or received, a moment of beauty you almost missed. The small one: the bread you ate, the breath you have, the wife still beside you, the children under the roof. Gratitude is the doorway; it cannot be skipped. The man who cannot see the gifts cannot examine the failures honestly. 'Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you' (1 Thess 5:18).

II. Light. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to see your day as God sees it — not as your pride sees it, not as your shame sees it. Pray: 'Holy Spirit, give me the light to see this day truly. Strip the self-flattery. Strip the self-condemnation. Show me only what is true.' Then breathe, and proceed. 'Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!' (Ps 139:23-24).

III. Review. Walk the day from waking to this moment. Where did Christ meet you, and how did you respond? Where did anger flare? Where did lust drift? Where did sloth keep you on the couch? Where did cowardice keep you silent when truth needed a voice? And where did love rise — where did charity spend itself rightly, and where did it stay locked in the chest? Notice both the grace and the fall. The Examen is not a self-prosecution; it is a walk with the Lord through the day He gave you. 'Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!' (Lam 3:40).

IV. Repent. Name what was sin — by kind, plainly. Distinguish: was it venial, or did you meet all three conditions of mortal sin together — grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent (CCC 1857)? If even one is missing, the sin is venial. If a sin feels grave, make a note to bring it to the priest this week. Then bring the rest to the Lord now — venial sin is truly forgiven by such contrition and by the Eucharist, while grave sin awaits absolution from the priest (CCC 1452-1453, 1863): 'Christ, I am sorry for this. By Your grace, tomorrow I will refuse it.' Contrition is 'sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again' (CCC 1451).

V. Resolve. Tomorrow, at one specific moment, you will choose Christ over the easier thing. Name the moment now — the morning prayer before the phone; the afternoon temptation at the computer; the dinner-table conversation that has been brewing; the call to your father you have been avoiding; the rosary before bed. One moment. One specific choice. Sleep on it. The Daily Examen is the man who keeps the watch every day, so that nothing ever surprises him in the confessional.

II. HOW TO GO TO CONFESSION

If it has been years — start here. You do not need perfect words, a perfect memory, or a clean record. You need only to come. Tell the priest at the very start: 'Father, it has been a long time — I'm not sure I remember how.' That single honest sentence is enough; he will walk you through every step. He is there for exactly this, bound by an absolute seal of secrecy, and he has heard worse than anything you carry. The hardest part is the walk to the door. After that, you are not alone in it.

- 1. Examine your conscience first.** Before you go in, review your life since your last confession — prayerfully, in the light of God's Word (CCC 1454). Use the examination by the Ten Commandments below. Name your sins to yourself by kind, and where they are mortal, by number (how many times, as best you can recall). 'All mortal sins of which penitents after a diligent self-examination are conscious must be recounted by them in confession' (CCC 1456). Do not rehearse a speech; just know what you need to say.
- 2. Begin the rite.** You may go behind the screen or face the priest — your choice. Make the Sign of the Cross with him: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.' Then say: 'Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been ___ since my last confession.' (If you genuinely don't know, say roughly — 'about ten years,' 'I'm not sure, a long time'.)
- 3. Confess your sins.** Then say, 'These are my sins...' and name them — briefly and clearly, by kind, and where mortal, by number. Do not explain, justify, or tell the whole story; just name the sin. The hidden sin is the sin that keeps its power; the named sin loses its power in the absolution. When you have finished, close with: 'For these, and for all the sins of my past life, and for the sins I have forgotten, I am truly sorry.'
- 4. Receive counsel and your penance.** The priest may offer a few words of counsel — encouragement, a question, direction. Then he assigns a penance: usually a short prayer or two, sometimes a concrete act of charity or amendment. Listen, and remember it; you will perform it after you leave. This is the satisfaction — the small repair, accepting the discipline God provides through His priest.
- 5. Pray the Act of Contrition.** When he prompts you (or after the penance), pray the Act of Contrition aloud — the prayer is printed below. If you do not know it by heart, tell him, and he will help you, or you may read it. Sorrow out of love of God is best (perfect contrition); but sorrow out of fear of God's just punishment is enough for the sacrament (imperfect contrition). Either is sufficient. Bring what you have.
- 6. Receive absolution.** The priest extends his hand and pronounces absolution, ending: 'I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' At those words it is Christ Himself who forgives — really, completely — acting through the priest, who speaks in His person (Jn 20:23; CCC 1461). Answer: 'Amen.' He will dismiss you, often with 'Go in peace.' Respond: 'Thanks be to God.'

7. **Walk out and do your penance.** Find a quiet pew, perform the penance you were given, and give thanks. Do not re-examine, re-litigate, or re-confess what was just absolved — to doubt the absolution is to doubt Christ's word. The guilt is washed away; what remains is only the penance to be done in thanksgiving. 'Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament,' usually followed by 'peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation' (CCC 1468). You walk out armed for the fight.

III. EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE — BY THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

I. I am the LORD your God; you shall have no strange gods before me.

- † Did prayer get pushed to 'after' until 'after' never came? Did you pick up the phone before you said the morning Offering? Did the Rosary, the Examen, any of it get only the leftovers of your day? (CCC 2733)
- † Did you keep the faith of the Church this week, or soften it for company? When the conversation turned to a teaching that is now culturally controversial, did you nod along, smile vaguely, change the subject — or did you privately disbelieve a defined doctrine you were too lazy to study? (CCC 2088)
- † Was Christ mocked in your hearing — by a friend's joke, a coworker's contempt, your own family's casual blasphemy — and did you stay silent to keep the peace? 'For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words... of him will the Son of man be ashamed' (Lk 9:26).
- † Did despair tell you this week, 'I am too far gone, Christ cannot save me'? Or did presumption whisper the lie that God's mercy is automatic and the next fall does not matter? That lie, like despair, is a sin against hope, and both rob you of the fight. (CCC 2091, 2092)
- † Did you consult astrology, tarot, mediums, manifestation, or 'energy work' — or treat the saints as good-luck charms instead of intercessors? Did you trust superstitions over Providence? (CCC 2111)
- † Did you study the Faith at all — the Catechism, a Father, a saint, a magisterial document? Or did you remain proud of your own ignorance, unwilling to be challenged by the depth of what the Church actually teaches? (CCC 2087)

II. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

- † Did the Holy Name leave your mouth this week as anything other than a prayer — Jesus Christ as exasperation, God as exclamation, Christ as an expletive? (CCC 2146)
- † Did you laugh at someone else's blasphemy when silence would have testified, or when a word would have defended Him? (CCC 2148)
- † Was the name of the Lord's Mother, or the name of a saint, dragged into your profanity or your contempt? (CCC 2146)
- † Did you make a promise or an oath in God's name that you did not keep, or swear casually by Him without reverence? 'Let what you say be simply Yes or No' (Mt 5:37; CCC 2149).

III. Remember to keep holy the LORD's Day.

- † Did you miss Mass on a Sunday or Holy Day of Obligation without grave reason? Did you treat the obligation as optional rather than as the duty Christ commands of every Catholic? (CCC 2181)
- † Did you arrive so deliberately late that you missed the Gospel and the homily — and then call it 'still attended'? (CCC 2181)
- † Were you actually present at Mass — attentive, engaged — or was your body in the pew while your mind ran the week ahead? (CCC 2185)
- † Did you guard the Lord's Day from the pull of needless work, errands, and the noise that drowns out God — making it a day of rest, family, and presence? Or did you treat Sunday as Saturday's overflow? 'The sabbath was made for man' (Mk 2:27).
- † Did you lead your household into the rest and worship of the day, or leave Sunday to drift like any other?

IV. Honor your father and your mother.

- † Did you speak to your own parents with the honor due them — even the aging parent, even the one you have grievances against, even the one who is no longer easy? Did you visit, call, write? If they have died, did you pray for their souls? (CCC 2197)
- † This week, did you lead family prayer — or let it default to your wife, or to no one? (CCC 2685)
- † Did you teach your children the Faith — not as background noise, but as the father charged with their souls? Did you read Scripture with them, name a saint, answer a question, correct an error? 'You shall teach them diligently to your children' (Deut 6:6-9).
- † When your child needed correction, did you correct in love — or in your own anger and reputation-protection? Or did you fail to correct at all because you were tired and distracted? (CCC 2223)
- † Did you give your children your time — the engaged hour of fatherhood, not the exhausted leftover of a workday — or did the screen take what should have been theirs? (CCC 2228)
- † When did your children last see you praying alone, without performance? When did they last hear you speak of Christ at the table, unprompted? The example outlives the lecture. (CCC 2226)
- † Did you obey and respect legitimate authority — at work, in the parish, in the country — where obedience was owed in good conscience? (CCC 2238)

V. You shall not kill.

- † Did your anger this week have a face — your wife's, your child's, a coworker's, your own in the mirror? When did it land, and what did you do with it: speak, withdraw, ruminate, plan the cutting reply? (CCC 2302)
- † Did anger harden into hatred — wishing harm on the man who wronged you, refusing even to pray for him because you wanted him punished? 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Mt 5:44).
- † Did you indulge where you should have mastered yourself — the third drink, the second helping, the screen until 1 AM? Did the body command you when you were called to command the body? 'I pommel my body and subdue it' (1 Cor 9:27).
- † Did you cross the line into drunkenness — not the social glass, but the line where your judgment, your tongue, and your dignity were no longer yours to govern? (CCC 2290)
- † Did your example lead another into sin — your child, your subordinate, the stranger who watched you? 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck' (Mt 18:6; CCC 2284).
- † Did you neglect your own health, rest, or sanity to the point of harming the body God entrusted to you — or endanger others through recklessness, speed, or carelessness? (CCC 2290)

VI. You shall not commit adultery.

- † Did you use pornography this week — by phone, by laptop, by memory, by deliberately replaying an old image? Pornography is always grave matter (CCC 2354) and adultery in the heart: 'every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (Mt 5:28).
- † Did you, with deliberate consent, dwell on a woman who is not yours — in image, in fantasy, in the second look that became a fifth? Did you mistake dwelling for 'just looking'? (CCC 2520)
- † Were you faithful to your wife — not only in body, but in the eyes, the mind, the heart? Or did you store up resentments and grievances you have not brought to her in love? 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Eph 5:25).
- † Did you compare your wife — to another woman, to who she was ten years ago, to who you imagined she'd become — and let that comparison harden your heart toward her? (CCC 2364)
- † Have you and your wife violated the dignity of the marital act — through contraception, through fantasy or pornography brought into the act, or through using the marriage bed as a reward or a weapon? (CCC 2370)
- † If you are single: did you live chastity as the active virtue that makes marriage possible — guarded eyes, mastered desire, refusing the casual encounter that dishonors both the woman and yourself? Or did you treat your singleness as a license? (CCC 2349)

VII. You shall not steal.

- † In every transaction this week — wages paid, hours billed, expenses claimed, work assigned — were you scrupulously fair? Did you pay every man what was owed, without delay, without subtraction? 'Behold, the wages of the laborers... which you kept back by fraud, cry out' (Jas 5:4; CCC 2434).
- † Did you take credit for work that wasn't yours — or withhold credit due to someone under you? (CCC 2409)
- † Did you give an honest day's work for your pay, or steal time, effort, and attention from the one who employs you? (CCC 2409)
- † Did money rule your peace this week? Did the bank balance govern your prayer? Did you reach for an unnecessary purchase to soothe a wound only the sacraments can heal? 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Mt 6:24; CCC 2424).
- † Did you give — to the Church, to the poor, to those who asked of you in genuine need — or did you hoard, calculate, and withhold? Did you tithe? (CCC 2447)
- † Did you damage, waste, or fail to return what belonged to another, or fail to make restitution for a past theft you have never repaired? (CCC 2412)

VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- † Did your tongue cut someone this week without authority and without cause? Detraction is revealing a real fault to those who don't need to know it; calumny is revealing a false one. Both wound justice and charity. Whose name did you damage in conversation? (CCC 2477)
- † Did your tongue tell the truth this week, or the polite lie — to the boss, to the wife, the half-truth to the friend, the 'I'm fine' when you weren't? Did the man your words described match the man your actions revealed? (CCC 2483)
- † Did you present a life online or in conversation that isn't yours — the social-media version of a man you are not? (CCC 2482)
- † Did you assume the worst of another's motives without sufficient foundation — rash judgment — and let that verdict stand in your heart? (CCC 2477)
- † When the truth needed defending and silence would have been a lie, did you speak it? Or did cowardice pass for tact? (CCC 2484)

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

- † Did you guard your heart this week — at the gym, on the screen, in traffic, at the office — or cultivate the slow drift of desire toward a woman who is not yours? Christ said the lust of the heart is already the act (Mt 5:28; CCC 2520).
- † Did you fantasize about another woman, or entertain the imagined 'other woman who would understand you better' as an escape from your marriage? (CCC 2528)
- † Did you feed disordered desire through what you read, watched, and scrolled — and then call the indulgence 'harmless'? (CCC 2520)
- † Did you do the work of purity — custody of the eyes, discipline of the imagination, refusing the first complicity in impure thoughts — or did you leave the gate unguarded? 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Mt 5:8; CCC 2517).

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

- † Did you covet what belonged to another this week — his work, his marriage, his children, his health, his reputation, his ease? Did the success of another diminish you? (CCC 2538)
- † Did the gratitude you owed God for your own portion get crowded out by resentment of someone else's? Did the comparing eye rob you of the peace of your own house? (CCC 2540)
- † Did you covet a position above you, or maneuver in conversation to undercut a peer through implication, omission, or selective truth? (CCC 2539)
- † Did you trust in the bank balance, the possessions, or the security more than in Providence — finding God's gift to you somehow ungenerous? (CCC 2547)
- † Did envy curdle into bitterness or sadness at another's good — the disordered sorrow that the saints called a sin against the Holy Spirit's gift of charity? (CCC 2539)

IV. THE PRAYERS

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (BEFORE EXAMINING)

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and kindle in them the fire of Thy love. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

O God, who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The traditional Catholic Prayer to the Holy Spirit — the Pentecost antiphon and collect (versicle and response, *Veni, Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium*); not the 13th-c. Pentecost Sequence.

THE ACT OF CONTRITION (IN THE RITE, AFTER CONFESSING)

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.

Traditional Act of Contrition (the received English form; cf. Roman Ritual / Handbook of Indulgences / EWTN).

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (AFTER ABSOLUTION)

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

Thanks be to God, who through His priest has absolved me in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Psalms 103:1-4 (RSV-CE), followed by a Sanctum act of thanksgiving for mercy received.

This companion prepares you for the Sacrament of Penance; it is not the Sacrament. Only a priest, in the confessional, absolves in the name of Christ — for it is Christ Himself who said to His apostles, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). Bishops and priests, by the sacrament of Holy Orders, are given by Christ the power to "forgive all sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1461). Bring what you remember here to your confessor; he acts in persona Christi, and what he absolves, Christ absolves. Your sins marked or noted here are never stored, synced, or saved.

ALTAR. ARMS. ALLEGIANCE.