

The Sacrament of Penance

Commonly Called Confession and Absolution

Adapted from "Saint Augustine's Prayer Book"

Think of yourself as God's child, and of the offensiveness of following your lower nature rather than your loving Father. Do not be in a hurry, and do not anger yourself because you cannot remember everything. Be honest with God and with yourself; this is all God asks of you. Write down briefly what you remember of your character defects. Don't try to depend on your memory. If there is any description you do not understand, let it alone, and go on to the next one. Do not worry about your shortcomings. Remember, you are trying to recall them in order that you may become aware and ask God to help you with these things, not that you may be condemned.

Pride - is putting self in the place of God as the center and objective of our life, or of some department thereof. It is the refusal to recognize our status as creatures, dependent on God for our existence, and placed by Him in a specific relationship to the rest of his creation.

Irreverence - Disregard of opportunities for giving God honor. Failure to thank God or to express our gratitude adequately. Disrespect for God or God's gifts by deliberately treating them, in thought, word or deed, in a profane, contemptuous or over-familiar manner. The attempt to bribe or placate God by righteous practices or promises.

Sentimentality - Being satisfied with pious feelings and beautiful ceremonies without striving to obey God's will.

Presumption - Dependence on self rather than on God, with the consequent neglect of doing God's will, praying and meditating. Dispensation of ourselves from ordinary duties on the grounds that we are superior persons. Satisfaction of complacency over our spiritual achievements. Refusal to avoid, when possible, immediate occasions of temptation. Preference for our own ideas, customs, schemes or techniques. Foolish optimism. Failure to recognize our job as a divine vocation, or to offer our work to God. Unwillingness to surrender to and abide in God, to let Him act in and through us. Failure to offer to God regularly in intercession the persons or causes that have, or should enlist our interest and support.

Distrust - Refusal to recognize God's wisdom, providence and love. Worry, anxiety, misgivings, scrupulosity, or perfectionism. Attempts to discern or control the future by spiritualism or superstition. Over-sensitiveness. Expectation that others will dislike, reject or mistreat us; over-readiness so to interpret their attitude, or quickness to take offense. Unfounded suspicions. Timidity in accepting responsibility, or cowardice in facing difficulty of suffering. Surrender to feelings of depression, gloom, pessimism, discouragement, self-pity, or fear of death, instead of fighting to be brave, cheerful and hopeful.

Disobedience - Rejection of God's known will in favor of our own interests or pleasures. Disobedience of the legitimate laws, regulations or authority of the state, spouse, parents, teachers, etc.; or slow and reluctant obedience. Failure when in authority to fulfill responsibilities or to consider the best interests of those under us. Refusal to learn God's nature or will as revealed in inspired literature, expounded in instructions or expert advice, or discernible through prayer, meditation or the reading of spiritual books. Absorption in our own affairs, leaving little time, energy or interest for the things of God. Violation of confidence. Breaking of legitimate promises or contracts. Irresponsibility. Treachery. Unnecessary disappointment of another, or the causing of shame or anxiety to those who love us.

Impenitence - Refusal to search out and face up to our shortcomings, or to confess and admit them before God and another human being. Disregard of our defects or pretense that we are better than we are. Self-justification or discounting our flaws as insignificant, natural or inevitable. Self-righteous comparison of ourselves with others. Refusal to accept just punishment or to make escape the consequences of our mistakes, or allowing another to suffer the blame for our faults. Overcompensation or attempts at self-reform or self-vengeance, to avoid surrender to God in humble penitence. Shame (hurt pride), sorrow for ourselves because our character defects make us less respectable than we like to think we are, or because we fear punishment or injury to our reputation, rather than sorrow for what falling short is in the eyes of God. Refusal to admit we were in the wrong or to apologize. Refusal to accept forgiveness from God or others. Doubt that God can forgive our wrong doings or failure to use the means of getting assurance of His forgiveness when we need it. Unwillingness to forgive ourselves.

Vanity - Crediting to ourselves rather than to God our talents, abilities, insights, accomplishments, good works. Refusal to admit indebtedness to others, or adequately to express gratitude for their help. Hypocrisy. Pretense to virtues we do not possess. False humility. Harsh judgments on others for faults we excuse in ourselves. Boasting, exaggeration, drawing attention to ourselves by talking too much, by claiming ability, wisdom, experience or influence we do not have, or by eccentric or ostentatious behavior. Undue concern over, or expenditure of time, money or energy on looks, dress, surroundings, etc., in order to impress others; or deliberate lack of neatness for the same purpose. Seeking, desiring, or relishing flattery or compliments.

Arrogance - Insisting that others conform to our wishes, recognize our leadership, accept our own estimate of our worth. Being overbearing, argumentative, opinionated, obstinate.

Snobbery - Pride over race, family, position, personality, education, skill, achievements, or possessions.

Anger - is open rebellion against God or our fellow creatures. Its purpose and desire is to eliminate any obstacle to our self-seeking, to retaliate against any threat to our security, to avenge any insult or injury to our person.

Resentment - Refusal to discern, accept or fulfill God's vocation. Dissatisfaction with the talents, abilities or opportunities He has given us. Unwillingness to face up to difficulties or sacrifices. Unjustified rebellion or complaint at the circumstances of our lives. Escape from reality or the attempt to force our will upon it. Transference to God, to our parents, to society, or to other individuals of the blame for our maladjustments; hatred of God, or antisocial behavior. Cynicism. Annoyance at the contrariness of things; profanity or grumbling.

Pugnacity - Attach upon another in anger. Murder in deed or desire. Combativeness or nursing of grudges. Injury to another by striking, cursing, or insulting him; or by damaging his reputation or property. Quarrelsomeness, bickering, contradiction, nagging, rudeness, or snubbing.

Retaliation - Vengeance for wrongs real or imagined, or the plotting thereof. Harsh or excessive punishment. Hostility, sullenness or rash judgment. Refusal to forgive, or to offer or accept reconciliation. Unwillingness to love, to do good to, or to pray for enemies. Boycotting or ostracizing another for selfish reasons. Spoiling others' pleasure by uncooperativeness or disdain, because we have not got our way, or because we feel out of sorts or superior.

Envy - is dissatisfaction with our place in God's order of creation, manifested in begrudging His gifts and vocation to others.

Jealousy - Offense at the talents, success or good fortune of others. Selfish or unnecessary rivalry or competition. Pleasure at others' difficulties or distress. Belittling others.

Malice - Ill-will, false accusations, slander, backbiting. Reading false motives into others' behavior. Initiation, collection or retailing of gossip. Arousing, fostering or organizing antagonism against others. Unnecessary criticism, even when true. Deliberate annoyance of others, teasing or bullying.

Contempt - Scorn of another's virtue, ability, shortcomings, or failings. Prejudice against those we consider inferior, or who consider us inferior, or who seem to threaten our security or position. Ridicule of persons, institutions or ideals.

Greed (Covetousness) - is the refusal to respect the integrity of other creatures, expressed in the inordinate accumulation of material things; in the use of other persons for our personal advantage; or in the quest for status, power or security at their expense.

Inordinate Ambition - Pursuit of status, power, influence, reputation, or possessions at the expense of the moral law, of other obligations, or of the rights of others. Ruthless or unfair competition. Putting self or family first. Conformity to standards we recognize as wrong or inadequate in order to get ahead. Intrigue or conspiracy for self-advancement.

Domination - Seeking to use or possess others. Over-protection of children; refusal to correct or punish lest we lose their affection; insistence that they conform to our ideal for them contrary to their own vocation. Imposing our will on others by force, guile, whining, or refusal to cooperate. Over-readiness to advise or command; abuse of authority. Patronizing, pauperizing, putting others under a debt of gratitude, or considering ourselves ill-used when others' affection or compliance is not for sale. Respect of persons, favoritism, partiality, flattery, fawning, or bribery to win support or affection. Refusal to uphold the truth to fulfill duties, to perform good acts, or to defend those wrongfully attacked, because we fear criticism or ridicule, or because we seek to gain the favor or approval of others. Leading, tempting or encouraging another to do wrong.

Avarice - Inordinate pursuit of wealth or material things. Theft, dishonesty, misrepresentation, or sharing in stolen goods. Cheating in business, taxes, school or games. Making worldly success the goal of our life or the standard for judging others.

Prodigality - Waste of natural resources or personal possessions. Extravagance or living beyond our income, to impress others or to maintain status. Failure to pay debts. Gambling more than we can afford to lose, or to win unearned profits. Unnecessary borrowing or carelessness with others' money. Expenditure on self of what is needed for the welfare of others.

Penuriousness - Undue protection of wealth or security. Selfish insistence on vested interest or on claimed rights. Refusal to support or help those who have claim on us. Sponging on others. Stinginess. Failure to give reasonable proportion of our income to those in need, or of our time and energy to good works. Failure to pay pledges promised to charities, when able to do so.

Gluttony - is the overindulgence of natural appetites for food or drink, and by extension the inordinate quest for pleasure or comfort.

Intemperance - Overindulgence in foods, drink, smoking, or other physical pleasures. Fussiness or demanding excessively high standards. Condemnation of some material things or pleasures as evil in themselves, attempting to prohibit their use rather than their abuse.

Lack of Discipline - Negligence or failure to use needed means of self-discipline. Neglect of bodily health - not getting sufficient rest, recreation, exercise, or wholesome nourishment. Failure to use or to cooperate with available medical care when ill. Use of sickness as a means of escape from responsibilities.

Lust - is the misuse of sex for personal gratification, lowering it in value from the holy purpose for which God has given it to us.

Unchastity - Violation of the marriage agreement. Lack of consideration for one's partner in the use of the marital relationship. Refusal to fulfill the purpose of Holy Matrimony in the bringing forth and giving adequate care to children, or to take our full share in the responsibilities or work involved. Unfaithfulness to one's spouse. Sexual indulgence outside of matrimony, in thought or act, alone or with others.

Immodesty - Stimulation of sexual desire in others by word, dress or actions; or in oneself by reading, pictures, or fantasies. Collecting or recounting dirty stories.

Prudery - Fear of sex or condemnation of it as evil in itself. Refusal to seek adequate sexual instruction or the attempting to prevent others from obtaining it. Stimulation of excessive and harmful curiosity by undue secrecy. Repression of sex.

Cruelty - Deliberate infliction of pain, mental or physical. Tormenting of animals.

Sloth - is the refusal to respond to our opportunities for growth, service or sacrifice.

Laziness - Procrastinate in performing spiritual, mental or physical duties, or neglect of family, business or social obligations or courtesies. Putting off disliked tasks. Busyness or triviality to avoid more important commitments. Devotion of excessive time to rest, recreation, amusement, television, light reading or the like. Waste of employer's time, or shoddy or inadequate work.

Indifference - Unconcern over injustice to others, especially that caused by currently accepted social standards; or unmindfulness of the suffering of the world. Failure to become adequately informed on both sides of contemporary issues or on the Godly principles involved. Neglect of duties to state or community. Failure to provide adequately for, or to treat justly those in our employ. Ignoring of needy, lonely or unpopular persons in our own family or those around us; or unwillingness to minister to them. Insufficient attention to the spiritual and other needs of our family. Failure to fulfill our obligation as children of God to take a full and informed part in the effort to make this world a better place.