

## Going Deeper in Prayer

### ***Act of Contrition***

**O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee,  
and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments,  
but most of all because they offend Thee, my God,  
who are all good and deserving of all my love.  
I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more  
and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.**

(From the Compendium of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*)

Note: The standard version of the Act of Contrition includes the words Thee and Thy, referring to God. You may replace these words with You and Your.

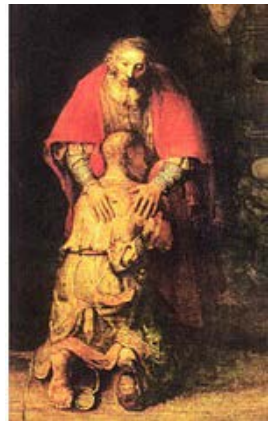
Praying and focusing on the Examination of Conscience and the *Act of Contrition* throughout the entire year will allow you to deepen your friendship with Jesus and to know and experience His love and healing forgiveness. The following resources are meant to foster this process. As you pray the *Act of Contrition*, feel free to look over one aspect from the resources below to help you grow in your understanding of this prayer while making it more personal and a place of encounter with the Lord.

#### God's love for you

God gave Moses His Laws of Love so that you, and all people, would know how to remain close to Him and love your neighbor and yourself. Due to the effects of Original Sin, you, and every single person, still deal with the frailty and weakness of human nature and the inclination to sin, even after receiving the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, hereafter CCC paragraph 1426) Guilt, shame and sadness may be felt in breaking God's Laws of Love because when you sin, you harm others and yourself and thereby you offend God. He will always forgive you as you acknowledge that what you have done is wrong. There is nothing that you can do that is so terrible that God won't forgive if you are truly sorry. It shows God that you really love Him when you tell Him you are sorry for having offended Him and want to be forgiven.

God will strengthen you as you cooperate with His grace to be truly sorry for your sins and seek to break habits of sin. He desires to forgive you, strengthen your friendship with Him and restore your peace and serenity of conscience.

Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) to show how God loves and forgives. Our Heavenly Father is just like the father in the story. Sometimes you sin and "run away" from God like the younger son. Although God hates sin because of the effects that it has on you, He loves you very much. He is always ready to forgive you when you are sorry for your sins.



#### Why pray the Examination of Conscience and the *Act of Contrition* every day? In order to:

- 1) Live a more reflective life and recognize God's presence with you throughout the day
- 2) Acknowledge that you have sinned but come to a realization that Jesus died on the Cross for

- your sins. God loves you very much and is always ready to forgive you.
- 3) Understand that Jesus wants to forgive you and will do so with great love
  - 4) Become more aware of how your sins offend Jesus, others and yourself
  - 5) Be truly sorry with all of your heart for your sins and truly want, with the help of God's grace, not to sin again
  - 6) Not be afraid and to understand that you can tell Jesus anything

### Meaning of the Words

#### ▪ **The Act of Contrition**

Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again." (CCC 1451) To be contrite for personal sin is only possible with the help of God's grace.

#### ▪ **O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee**

In praying the *Act of Contrition*, you tell God that you are sorry for your sins with all your heart and that you will seek to do better, with the help of His grace. Actual grace is God's

interventions and is received during prayer and acts of charity. Actual grace will help during difficult moments. Sanctifying grace is a share in God's life. Sanctifying grace is received in the Sacraments and is habitual. Sanctifying grace – union with God – can be lost through serious sin. When a person commits a serious sin, it is necessary to confess this sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be re-united with God. Confessing a serious sin, also referred to as a mortal sin, is necessary before receiving the Holy Eucharist. Sanctifying grace received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation will help you to become stronger in avoiding sin.

#### ▪ **I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments**

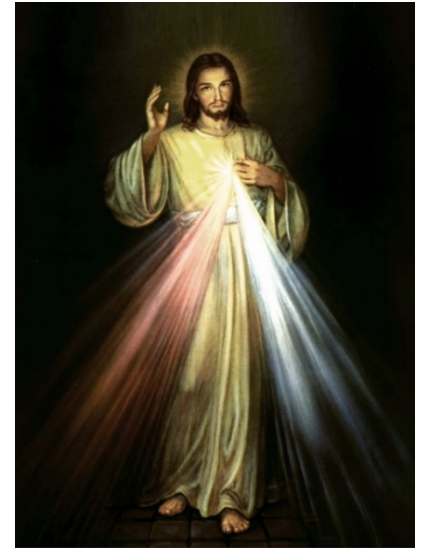
You want to detest your sins because you were created to choose the good. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, which is called sin, you hurt yourself and others. The words of this phrase express that you are sorry because of sins consequences: the consideration of sin's ugliness, the harmful effects that sins have upon you, the penalties threatening the sinner and the fear of eternal separation from God forever if you choose to commit very serious sins. This is a contrition primarily of fear and therefore referred to as "imperfect contrition" – this is not the ideal but God accepts you where you are. (See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1453)

#### ▪ **but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who are all good and deserving of all my love.**

You express in the words of the prayer that you greatly dislike your sins and desire true sorrow because you are upset that you have offended God, Who loves you completely and because He deserves your love. Your desire is to love Him wholeheartedly. This is referred to as "perfect contrition." Your life will be a journey from imperfect to perfect contrition as you come to recognize more clearly how much God loves you and gives you everything, even dying on the Cross for you. You want to return His love by never offending Jesus.

#### ▪ **I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin.**

You make a firm decision – a sincere resolution and commitment – with the help of



Jesus I trust in You

God's grace not to sin again by avoiding situations and people that might lead you to sin.

- **Amen** means "So be it." This means that you believe the words that you just prayed and you will strive to live it. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, hereafter CCC, paragraph 2856)

### Learning the Principles

- God is your loving Father and He always hears your prayers. "Prayer is a vital necessity.... Prayer and the Christian life are inseparable." (CCC 2744-2745) In other words, when you pray with your heart, you will come to know Jesus Christ personally and deeply. As this friendship with Him grows, you will recognize more and more how much He loves you and how much you love Him. From this love, received and given, you will respond from a natural desire to be one with Him in all things, and live your life in a way that is reflective of His own. This brings much peace and happiness (joy) to yourself and those around you.
- In praying the Act of Contrition, you are speaking with Jesus. When you sin, you turn away from God. You choose to harm others and yourself and thereby offend God because He loves you and each person completely. But God never stops loving you and is always ready to forgive you.
- It is good to examine your conscience each night to acknowledge what you have done that shows your love for God by being kind, good and selfless toward others. You also want to recognize what you did that was unkind and selfish toward others, or especially if you committed grave sins toward others or yourself. Pray the *Act of Contrition* before you go to bed so that you can be sorry for your sins, seek to do better the next day with the help of God's grace and to sleep peacefully. Note: You will want to take the serious sins to the Lord in the Sacrament of Confession right away.
- Only God forgives sins. (CCC, paragraphs 1441-1442)
- The *Act of Contrition* is also prayed during the Sacrament of Reconciliation after confessing your sins. You turn back to our Heavenly Father, acknowledging your need for His healing power in your life. His mercy is there for you as long as you approach Him with humility and make a sincere effort not to repeat your sins.
- The priest takes the place of Jesus. When you confess your sins, Jesus forgives you through the words and actions of the priest.
- Before you go to confess your sins, you must get ready.
- The five steps to make a good confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation also referred to as Penance and Confession
  - Know your sins: ask the Holy Spirit to help you to know your sins. Allow some time for silence and He will help you to remember your sins, in a very gentle way.
  - Be sorry for your sins: Ask Mary to help you to be sorry for all of your sins.
  - Make up your mind not to sin again, again, asking for the help of God's grace
  - Tell your sins to the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation / Confession
  - Do the penance the priest gives you, which usually includes praying some specific prayers or doing an act of charity. (CCC 1451, 1454, 1456, 1459-1460)
- The priest prays the Prayer of Absolution: "God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of His Son has reconciled the world to Himself and sent the Holy Spirit



among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace, and I **absolve** you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You respond “Amen” which means “I believe”.

- In the Sacrament of Confession, Jesus takes your sins away and gives you grace. Sanctifying grace gives you a share in God’s life, and helps you to be stronger against sin. You will feel peace and joy when God takes away your sin in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The priest will never tell your sins to anyone. He only wants to bring you God’s forgiveness. He wants to help you to be good and stay close to Our Lord.
- The new life of God’s grace received by a child or adult in Baptism can be weakened and even lost by serious sin. Praying the *Act of Contrition* will remind you to avoid sin.

### Activities for Learning the Deeper Meaning of the Words



- Kneel down before you go to bed every night and examine your conscience by thinking back over the day. Then pray the *Act of Contrition*.
- Read a Scripture passage that portrays God’s forgiveness and healing, providing more significant meaning to the Sacrament of Confession:
  - the healing of the paralytic, both his body and soul - Mark 2:1-12
  - the prodigal son – Luke 15: 11-24 (See the process of conversion and repentance in the *Catechism*, paragraph 1439) This parable will help you to understand God’s profound love and forgiveness.
    - Commit the *Act of Contrition* to memory - learn the verses by heart! In order for this to happen, you will need to be “taken in” with the meaning of the words, letting yourself be deeply touched in a personal way. This familiarity with the *Act of Contrition* will help you to recognize God’s incredible love for you and His desire for you to become who He created you to be through His healing grace, gradually freeing you from the slavery to sinful habits.
- Relate and discuss the teaching on the *Act of Contrition* with a good Christian friend.
- God our Father loves you perfectly. He kept His promise to Adam and Eve, our first parents, when they committed the first sin. He promised to send a Savior. Our Heavenly Father sent Jesus to die on the Cross so that your sins can be forgiven through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Look at Sacred Art that portray these truths.
- Focus on praying with your heart; not just rattling words. “Prayer is internalized to the extent that you become aware of Him ‘to whom we speak.’ (CCC paragraphs 2700, 2704) You want to think about what you are saying to the Person of our Heavenly Father and Jesus, in the same way that you speak with someone you love.
- Think about the meaning of the word contrition, which means sorrow for sin and a desire leading to even a commitment to cooperate with God’s grace to break the habit of sin.

### Spiritual Comprehension

- Ask questions of Christian friends or a priest or consult the Catechism if there are aspects of the Act of Contrition, the daily Examination of Conscience and the Examination before receiving the Sacrament of Confession that you do not understand.
- The *Act of Contrition* is the prayer that you will want to know by heart and with good

- understanding before you decide to go deeper with another prayer. Plan to spend an entire year praying the *Act of Contrition* every day.

### Encountering God in Prayer

- Pray the *Act of Contrition* aloud. Take notice of a word or phrase that stood out for you. Spend some time in silence to think about why the word or phrase stood out for you.
- Take some time to quiet down interiorly. Slowly pray the *Act of Contrition*. Pick out a word, a few words or phrase from the prayer. For example: “O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee.” Repeat these words over and over again slowly. Think about how these words relate to Jesus and His love and care for you. Have a heart-to-Heart conversation with Jesus about something that is weighing on your heart. This takes prayer to the next level of a deep personal encounter. Another helpful step is to write down some notes about the prayer experience to keep for future reference.

### Scriptural Foundation

- Having been raised from the dead, our Lord commissioned His Apostles to carry on with His work just before He was to ascend to Heaven. Jesus said to the Apostles, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I send you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20: 21-23)
- Jesus said, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as *I have loved you*. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you...I call you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:9- 14, 15b)
- This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. We know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commands. Whoever says, “I know Him,” but does not do what He commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys His word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did. (1John 1: 5-10 and 2:1-6)
- The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy. Psalm 103:8



**The TEN COMMANDMENTS (Exodus 20: 2-17; Deuteronomy 5: 6-21; CCC 2052 – 2557)****Questions regarding my relationship with God:****I. “I am the Lord your God, you shall not have any strange gods before Me.”**

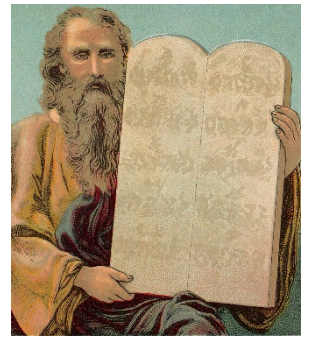
The first commandment summons me to believe in God, to hope in Him and to love Him above all else. (CCC 2134) Have I set aside time each day for personal pray to God? Have I thanked God for His gifts to me? Is God second to anything else in my life: such as work, family, sports, possessions, money, human ambitions, technology or even persons? Have I denied the Lord through my actions and words; in the entertainment I chose to listen to, watch or read? Did I engage in superstitious practices such as palm-reading or astrology?

**II. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”** The second commandment enjoins respect for the Lord’s name, which is holy. (CCC 2161) Have I used the name of God in cursing or when angry? Have I spoken about the Church, the saints or sacred things with irreverence, hatred or defiance? Have I watched television, movies or listened to music that treated God, the Church, the saints or sacred things irreverently? Am I aware that the way in which I speak using God’s name will teach others to respect His name?

**III. “Remember to keep holy the Lord’s day.”** Sunday...is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church. On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass. (CCC 2192) Have I failed to attend Mass on Sundays or Holy Days of Obligation unless sick? Is it habit for me to be late or leave early? Have I participated in Mass with attention and devotion? Have I fasted an hour before receiving Holy Communion? Have I received a Sacrament while in the state of mortal sin? Do I do unnecessary labor, shopping and business on Sundays? Do I do penance every Friday, such as abstaining from meat or other form, since it is the day Jesus gave His life for me on the Cross?

**Questions regarding my relationship with others:**

**IV. “Honor your father and your mother.”** ...God has willed that, after Him, we should honor our parents and those whom He has vested with authority for our good. Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the Faith, prayer, and all the virtues... Parents should respect and encourage their children’s vocation. They should remember and teach that the first calling of the Christian is to follow Jesus. (CCC 2248; 2252; 2253) Do I live in humble obedience and give due respect to those who legitimately exercise authority over me? In family life, have I contributed to the well-being and happiness of others by patience and genuine love? Have I been faithful to my husband / wife in my heart and in my relations with others? Have I failed to help and pray for my parents?



**V. “You shall not kill.”** Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God. (CCC 2319) Have I failed to forgive others from injuries or hurts? Have I used speech to belittle others or afflicted another person with emotional abuse? Have I harbored hatred, anger or resentment, or unjustly afflicted bodily harm on another person? Am I estranged from others through quarrels, enmity, insults, anger? Do I endanger my health by not eating right or not exercising? Did I, by my actions, recklessly endanger my

life or health, or that of another person? Have I gotten drunk or abused other drugs? Have I encouraged others to sin through my bad example? Have I procured, performed, cooperated or advised another in the intentional killing of an unborn child through abortion? Have I seriously considered or attempted suicide?

**VI. “You shall not commit adultery.”** By creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept their sexual identity. The covenant which spouses have freely entered into entails faithful love. It imposes on them the obligation to keep their marriage indissoluble. (CCC 2393, 2397) Was I unfaithful to my spouse? Did I engage in sexual activity before or outside of marriage? Have I purposely dressed immodestly by not guarding the privacy and dignity of my body? Did I use artificial means to prevent conception? Have I committed masturbation using my sexual organs for my own sexual pleasure? Did I get married outside the Catholic Church?

**VII. “You shall not steal.”** The seventh commandment enjoins the practice of justice and charity in the administration of earthly goods and fruits of men’s labor. The goods of creation are destined for the entire human race... (CCC 2451, 2452) Did I steal or damage another person’s property? Do I steal time at work by being paid to do one thing but instead doing something else I was not being paid to do? Have I failed to do sufficient work for the wages I received at work? Am I ignoring relationships and neglecting adequate time spent with family due to time on devices? Have I borrowed something without returning it? Did I cheat on my taxes or in business? Have I squandered money in compulsive gambling? Am I stingy or lazy or neglect to pay my debts promptly? Do I live a holy detachment from possessions?



**VIII. “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”** Truthfulness is the virtue which consists in showing oneself true in deeds and truthful in words, guarding against duplicity, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. Respect for the reputation and honor of persons forbids all detraction and calumny in word or attitude. (CCC 2505, 2507) Have I been truthful and fair, or have I injured others by deceit, calumny (lies), detraction (unnecessary telling of truths that injure), rash judgment, or violation of a secret? Have I gossiped or talked about another person behind their back? Am I critical, negative or uncharitable in my talk? Have I rashly misjudged others, or falsely suspected them?

**IX. “You shall not covet you neighbor’s wife.”** “Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). The struggle against carnal lust involves purifying the heart and practicing temperance. (CCC 2528, 2530) When I experience tempting thoughts of using another person for sexual pleasure, do I entertain those thoughts or do I turn to the Lord in prayer and ask for the grace to dismiss them? Have I watched movies and television that involve using other people as objects for sexual pleasure, that degrade the institution of marriage between one man and one woman, and/or that portray nudity? Did I willfully look at pornographic images, entertain impure thoughts or engage in impure conversations? Have I listened to music or jokes that are harmful to purity? Have I given scandal by living with a member of the opposite sex without

the benefit of marriage? Have I kept my senses and whole body pure and chaste as a temple of the Holy Spirit?

- X. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.”** Envy is sadness at the sight of another’s goods and the immoderate desire to have them for oneself. It is a capital sin. (See Mt 6:21). The baptized person combats envy through wanting good for others, humility, and abandonment to the providence of God. (CCC 2551, 2553) Do I recognize my dignity as a child of God or is my self-worth derived from possessions, looks, intellect, talents, relationships, weight, power? Am I envious of others on account of their possessions? Have I been honest and just in my business relations? Is my heart greedy? Am I moody or gloomy? Have I been responsive to the needs of the poor and respected the dignity of others? Do I contribute my time, talents and money to support the poor and my parish church? Is my heart set on earthly possessions rather than the true treasure of Heaven – being in relationship with Jesus Christ?

### **Temptation**

- All human beings are faced with temptations to do evil. However, as long as I refuse to give into the temptation, there is no sin. It is only when I say “yes” to the temptation and commit the evil that I sin. Temptations are never from God.
- The reality of temptation highlights an extremely important aspect to life on planet earth – I am in the midst of a spiritual battle. There are basically three sources of temptation. They come from what Scripture calls “the flesh” – referring to our fallen human nature; the world – referring to everything about human life and society that is in any way opposed to God; and the devil – a “liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44) who is a fallen angel and is the leader of all the fallen angels who rejected God and became completely evil. They lure and entice me to give in to evil and disobey God, if I allow it.
- The steps of how one goes from being tempted to actually committing sin can be listed as follows:
  - 1) Sin is suggested to the soul by the flesh, the devil or the world.
  - 2) I listen to the suggestion and “toy” with it instead of immediately rejecting it.
  - 3) I delight in the suggestion or yield to sin’s attraction.
  - 4) I fall into sin and commit the sin in thought, word or deed.
- God has given us every help we need to be victorious:
  - Prayer
  - Study and fill our minds with the Word of God
  - Avoid the near occasion of sin by choosing to stay away from those thoughts, words or places/situations in which you find yourself vulnerable to make a bad choice. Ex: a person addicted to sweets should stay away from the candy aisle. A person being a poor steward of their time by spending an inordinate amount of time with technology should acknowledge it and set boundaries. A person that easily gets pulled into gossip should change the subject when the topic of conversation is anything that is not positive or helpful.
  - Seek out Christian fellowship for support and encouragement
  - Frequent the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist to remain united with Jesus Christ and strengthened through His grace.

