

**Before the 9 AM Mass on Sunday at St. Andrew's you may take advantage of the Sacramento of Reconciliation from 8:15 - 8:45, or at other times by appointment. Call (209) 754-3815, or after hours (209) 754-1250**

### **What is Confession / Reconciliation?**

The purpose of confession is to acknowledge before God in the presence of the priest (empowered by Christ to forgive or retain sins) those failings that have kept us separated from God, our fellow man, and even caused us internal pain. We must be like the prodigal son who realized the effects of sin and turned back to his father, pleading for mercy. Confession consists of an acknowledgment of our sins, being sincerely sorry for our sins (contrition), and resolving not to commit those same sins again.

Before the actual confession of our sins (acts that we have done to separate us from God) we must first look inward and examine our conscience - that barometer that measures our relationship to God. Below (under Examination of Conscience) you will see some hints for taking a moral inventory. We must have a sincere resolve to bring ourselves back into unity with Him and have a resolve not to repeat those things that divide us from God.

At the time of confession we begin with the Sign of the Cross, calling upon the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to witness our repentance. It is helpful to let the priest know how long it has been since our last confession as it might help him to better grasp where we are in our Christian journey. You then confess your sins, as best that you can recall, beginning with the most difficult to mention. If we are not open and candid in the confessional we jeopardize the outcome of that Sacrament. We must be honest, open, and willing to turn back to God. The church has provided us a formal prayer, sort of a "cheat sheet," to aid us in expressing our sorrow and resolve -- the keys to a "good" confession:

Act of Contrition

"O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell, but most of all because I have offended you, my God, who are all good and deserving of my love. I firmly resolve with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen."

A sincere confession means that we are sorry for all our past sins, whether we recall them or not, so it is common to acknowledge all past sins by adding that "we are sorry for these [the mentioned sins] and all past sins." The priest will assign a penance, some amending action that we must make up for our transgressions. The penance time is a powerful opportunity to continue to ask for healing and to resolve not to put us ourselves in the occasion of sin again. This constant awareness of our resolve will solidify that closeness to Christ that confession brings. We can use this time to thank Christ for dying on the cross for us and making his grace available to us. The assigned penance should be completed as soon as practicable.

### **The Examination of Conscience**

The examination of conscience should take place before confession or any Reconciliation Rite, but the examination can also be a part of our daily life - a very strong recommendation. It is a constant assessment on where we are in relationship to Christ. We ask ourselves many critical questions. What is drawing me toward God? What is separating me from Him? How closely am I following the prescriptions and the guidelines that He has dictated or modeled for us in His life and in the scriptures? We need to see both God's commandments and the Beatitudes, the "should not's" and "the should's."

When we think of the commandments, we usually see the "big" sins, but within the umbrella of each commandment there are subtle sins that we have ignored, rationalized or denied. Often we forget those actions that we should be doing, but which we omit, such as failure to have a prayer life, failure to attend Mass other than obligatory times, failure

to be thankful, failure to look for opportunities to be kind to a neighbor, failure to support those in need, including our parish community, etc. What we fail to do can sometimes be as hurtful as intentional violations of God's law.

I. I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods besides me.

Where in my life have I made gods out of things? Where have I put other values before God? Have I placed my job, my hobbies, my recreation, my education, my status, my sex life, ahead of God? That can be form of idolatry. Am I too busy in my life to pay attention to God? Have I played God myself by setting myself up as the judge and jury of others' actions? Have I placed the values of our society over the values that Christ has set for us? For instance, have I gone along with abortion? Have I succumbed to other mores of our society, such as "okaying" homosexual behaviors, or discriminations? Have I made gods out of things we own or have, and they have become more powerful than the call to humbleness and giving? Where have I placed God in second place?

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

This applies not only to using God's name disrespectfully, but times when we act ashamed about outwardly expressing our beliefs in God or when we fail to stand up for our faith. We need to acknowledge His Holy Name.

III. Remember to keep Holy the Sabbath Day. This means more than just attending at Mass on Sundays or Holy Days. It means that on Sunday we must put Christ first: not football; not shopping; not TV, not the Sunday paper etc. Is God foremost on my mind on Sunday, or does He just get that hour at church -- sometimes when it's convenient? In the Jewish tradition, the Sabbath has always been a day when the Jews avoided all those things that took their focus off God. Do we avoid those activities that do not allow God in? Do we make God an active part of our Sunday activities? Maybe by incorporating Him into our family activities? At meal times? Do I take a "stewardship" role in my parish community?

IV. Honor your father and your mother. We often think of "honor" as just avoiding being unkind to a parent. To "honor" is to show respect, a positive act. We "honor" people in positions of power; we "honor" heroes. When we "honor" someone we stop and pay attention and acknowledge who they are. Do we stop and pay attention to our parents or grandparents -- or the parents or grandparents of others whom we know? Do we see how we can help them? A phone call? A kind word? Do a simple task they might appreciate? Do we show them the common courtesies? Maybe interpreting for a hard-of-hearing person? Helping the disabled? Or do we just let someone else take care of them? Do we make them part of our lives? Have I ever visited someone (even if I don't know them) in a convalescent hospital? Even if it's not the Christmas season?

V. Thou shall not kill. We obviously know we are not to take someone's life except in self-defense, but there are numerous other ways that we go about "killing" others. We can kill their spirit by criticizing them, putting them down, discriminating, or not taking advantages of opportunities to let another enjoy life. Do we abandon others to government care? Do we overlook helping the poor and homeless? Do we "kill" someone by the very fact that we ignore them? Do I take responsibility for keeping others alive, both physically and emotionally? Do I participate in the "Right to Life" movement, or do I just leave that to "do-gooders?"

VI. You shall not commit adultery. We clearly understand adultery, but here again there are subtle ways that someone can be unfaithful to a spouse: by not "loving and cherishing them" (obligation of the husband), or not "respecting them" (obligation of the wife) as set out for us in the words of St. Paul. Any act that draws us away from our spouse is an act of infidelity. So what do I do that destroys that unity in marriage that Christ calls for?

VII. Thou shall not steal. Stealing is taking property that belongs to another. That can be physical property, but it can also be other property rights that have been given to them by God: the right to be themselves; the right to have their own opinions; the right to experience their own emotions without criticism or judgment; their reputation; the freedom to enjoy life; the right to the means of a livelihood (social justice); the right not to be discriminated against based on race, color, sexual orientation, educational status, mental capacity; the right to pursue their own happiness or march to their own drummer. Those rights are the property of another person and we should not "steal" them.

VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Every one is our neighbor. Do I spread lies, participate in gossip, take pleasure in seeing someone we dislike being put down? Do I protect those who have been falsely portrayed on the public scene? Do I take subtle pleasure in savoring negativity in the news or in tabloids? Such as by repeating it?

IX. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife. The word "covet" is often ignored here. To covet is to seek after something, almost to the degree that a thought can be obsessive or the action compulsive. A person may not actually pursue someone else's wife, but they can become absorbed in sexual fantasies, be it magazines, pornography in materials or on the web. These are "lustful" acts that are insidious and disguised acts of adultery.

X. Thou shall not covet thy neighbors goods. This too deals with an obsession or compulsion. Are we constantly jealous of what others have? Does that jealousy cause me to perform other non-Christian acts, e.g. gossip, undermining someone's success etc.? Where do material things play such a powerful role in my life that I forget about God? Do I want more things so badly that I fail to contribute to my neighbor or my church community? Do I wish to have what some one else has because I think I am entitled? Am I greedy? Do I cause my family financial harm by wanting things over and beyond my means?

The above thoughts and reflections are not exhaustive since there are so many subtle ways that we act in such a way that we become separated from God -- and that is sin. When we violate God's law we are choosing our ways over God's ways -- and that is sin. The above thoughts are provided with the hope and expectation that we might truly examine how we are living out Christ's life that was given to us in Baptism.

So what then can we do to re-unify, to reconcile ourselves, to God? What positive things have I failed to do to bring me closer to Christ?