

Ten Tips for a Better Confession

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In the context of an Ignatian retreat it is always beneficial to prepare oneself to make an excellent Confession. To make a good confession demands prior preparation. The better the prior preparation, the more abundant the graces and the more overflowing the river of peace in your soul!

Following are ten short helps to make the best confession in your life.

1. Improving Your Reception. As Catholics two of the most important actions we can accomplish are to go to Confession and to receive Holy Communion. In these Sacraments we have a direct contact with Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This being the case, we should make a concerted effort to improve our encounters with Jesus in these Sacraments.

In other words we should never take these Sacraments for granted. Also be keenly aware of the concept of *dispositive grace*. The abundance of graces are received in direct proportion to the disposition of the recipient. On the walls in the sacristies of the Missionaries of Charity is written: “*Say this Mass as if it were your first Mass, last Mass and only Mass.*” We can apply the same principle: “*Confess as if it were your first, last and only time.*”

2. Pray Beforehand. All is grace! A source of abundant grace is the Communion of saints. Why not pray to the holy Confessors to help you to make a good confession? The following are a few: The Cure of Ars (Saint John Marie Vianney), St. John Bosco, St. Leonard of Port Maurice, Saint Leopold Mandic, Saint Padre Pio, Saint Francis Regis, Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Saint Anthony Claret, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Pray to them to help you to confess well—that each concession you make is better than your prior confession.

3. Prepare even the night before. Have a good examination of conscience booklet and then find a quiet and contemplative place to examine your conscience. Utilize the crucifix and Divine Mercy image to elicit sorrow and trust. You can try to write down the sins so that you will not forget them once in the confessional. Also, pray for your confessor—to his guardian angel—before you enter the confessional.

4. Self-knowledge. One of the classical steps to make a good confession is contrition but also firm purpose of amendment. This entails rewinding the film of your life and seeing the various falls into sin. But also to capture what were the preceding causes that led to the sin. Maybe it is a person that jeopardizes your spiritual life. Who knows maybe it is a recurring situation at work or family? Maybe it is your physical state of weariness? Still more, maybe it is some improper use of the electronics media and lack of prudence? You will notice often a pattern that is established that leads to the slippery path and collapse. For this reason the faithful observance of one’s *daily examen* can prove a valuable tool to know oneself and even supply for the necessary knowledge to avoid the near occasion of sin.

5. *Biblical Passages to Prepare Yourself.* The Church highly recommends the use of Sacred Scripture as a means to prepare us for a better reception of the Sacraments. Two excellent passages I would recommend: Luke 15 and Psalm 51. Lk. 15 presents the Parables of God's Mercy, and the greatest is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. By praying Psalm 51 you have one of the best "*Act of Contritions*" ever composed, by none other than King David after having committed adultery with Bathsheba and killing an innocent man. Praying with the Word of God adds extra power to one's prayer!

6. *Frequent Confession.* The saints highly recommend frequent confession as a most efficacious means of growing in sanctifying grace. Confession either restores sanctifying grace or it augments it. Of course this presupposes a thorough preparation.

7. *Sacramental Grace.* Each sacrament communicates grace. However every sacrament communicates a specific grace pertinent to that specific sacrament. For example, the specific sacramental grace communicated in the Eucharist or Holy Communion is that of nourishment. It is the Bread of life for the journey on the way to eternal life. The Sacramental grace of Confession is different. It is healing! Jesus came to feed us with His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Furthermore, He came as Divine Physician. Time and time again in the Gospels we see Jesus healing. The blind, deaf, deaf-mute, lepers, paralytics, even the dead, were healed and brought back to life by Jesus. Even now within the context of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, Jesus heals us. The Sacraments of healing are the Sacraments of Confession and the Anointing of the Sick.

8. *Qualities of a Good Confession.* In the Diary of Saint Faustina, the most important qualities of a good confession are highlighted in # 113: 1) complete sincerity and openness; 2) humility; 3) obedience. Adhering to these qualities one cannot go wrong. Remember, we want to strive to make better Communion and Confessions until the end of our lives.

9. *Avoid Discouragement.* Even though one might fall frequently, never give in to discouragement. Some bad habits have possibly

clung to us for decades. Many have a "Micro-wave" spirituality—namely instant holiness! It does not work that way. Change is often tedious, laborious and painful. The key is to keep praying, working, fighting as a true soldier of Christ to be liberated from the shackles of sin. Of course a key message from the Diary is that the worse thing possible is to fail to trust in God's infinite mercy. As St. Paul reminds us, "*Where sin abounds God's mercy abounds all the more.*"

10. *Mary and Mercy.* Never forget to invite Mary to be present in your remote preparation for Confession, your immediate preparation for Confession. Even ask Mary to enter with you into the Confessional so that you make the best confession in your life. Blessed Pope John Paul II called the Marian sanctuaries— Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe—"*Spiritual clinics*". How true! Lines of penitents await to meet the merciful Jesus in the confessional in these Marian Sanctuaries. Among the many beautiful titles of Mary are the following: "*Mother of Mercy, Mother of Good Counsel, Health of the sick.*" Behind many powerful conversions is of course the grace of God but also the maternal intercession of Mary!

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