

# Guidance to the Repentant

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## The Tragedy of Sin

**W**hile people complain of their various sorrows, it must be remembered that they are not our main misfortunes. The foremost evil are our Sins! Indeed, while sin destroys a person permanently, sorrows and misfortunes accepted as God's will bring spiritual salvation. Our sins are chains and bonds that enslave and drag us down into the netherworld, and unless we free ourselves from them, we will be unable to inherit life eternal.

Just like physical afflictions, sins are distinguished by the magnitude of their evil and destructiveness.

**Mortal** sins are gross violations of the Laws that impact upon the soul in the most destructive manner, denying it communion with God. These deathly sins include: Godlessness, engage in occult teachings (Hinduism, Theosophy etc.), deviation from the true Faith, mocking sacred things, blasphemy, sorcery, spiritism, murder, adultery, robbery, debauchery, calumny, perjury... Having committed a mortal sin and fallen away from God, the individual succumbs to the influence of evil spirits, who lead him still further into greater sins. Unless that person realises his sorry plight and turns to God for help, his soul will be damned forever.

**Daily** sins, similar to ordinary rubbish, are those that are accumulated on the surface of our souls. These include foolish thoughts, feelings and deeds that a person commits, not because of evil intentions but through spiritual weakness and carelessness toward spiritual life. These daily sins are also damaging to the moral state of the person. While in relatively small numbers they do not deprive the soul of God's grace, they nevertheless weaken its love for God and spawn feelings of indifference toward Christian living. This, in turn, inclines a person toward new and sometimes more serious transgressions. Just as a significant number of grains of sand can outweigh a brick, so can an accumulation of "minor" sins become more damaging than a single mortal sin. Especially destructive sins are those committed through habit, eg: swearing, smoking, over-drinking, indulging in mental, erotic fantasies, viewing pornographic films and photographs, self-defilement, judging your relatives, gossip etc..

Christianity in general and preparation for the Sacraments specifically, release us from degradation of sin and assist us to become righteous and blessed children of God. Confession and Holy Communion serve as very effective modes toward achieving this, especially when the person approaches them with the necessary preparation and zealousness. The whole time (consisting of penance at home, prayer, spiritual thoughts, fasting and confession in church) spent before partaking of the Sacraments is called the Preparatory period.

# Preparatory Period

**P**reparation for the partaking of the Sacraments usually covers a number of days and applies both to the physical as well as the spiritual life of the person. In the Mystery of Holy Communion, through the Consecration of the Gifts in the form of bread and wine, a person partakes of the blessed Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ, and through this Mystery, joins Him as He Himself said: *"He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him"* (John 6:56) Through this mysterious union, the weak and sinful individual in effect subordinates himself to Divine living and as a consequence, is wholly transfigured and renovated internally.

Throughout this period, which usually takes place during the main fasts (Great, Christmas, Apostles and Dormition Fasts), it is necessary to refrain from eating opulent foods, physical pleasures and any other excesses, instead endeavouring to remain in prayerful communion with God. During fast periods, foods that are derived from animal meat, milk, butter, fat, eggs are excluded from the diet — also fish during strict fasts. Bread, vegetables, grains, cereals and fruit should be consumed in moderation. The mind should not be distracted with idle and sinful thoughts. According to prevailing circumstances, one should attempt to attend church Services as often as possible.

When the preparatory period falls outside any of the Church established Lents, the Christian should at least observe the Fast days — Wednesday and Friday — and once again refrain from any excesses and physical pleasures for a few days. The Christian should augment his prayers, read spiritual books, meditate on God and endeavour to remain in communion with Him. Before Holy Communion, it is imperative to repent your sins by going to Confession to your spiritual father so that your soul would be worthy to receive the great Host — your Lord and Saviour.

On the eve of Holy Communion, apart from reading your evening prayers, it is advisable to read the Canon before Holy Communion. The clergy and the more zealous individuals from the laity, additionally read the canons to the Holy Theotokos and the Guardian Angel. After midnight, you are not allowed to eat, drink & of course, smoke. In the morning of the day of Holy Communion, after concluding the morning prayers, it is advisable to read the Canon before Holy Communion. All these prayers can be found in the Prayerbook.

In the main, rules relating to the preparatory period apply to adult and healthy members of the Church. The infirm, aged and children that cannot fast stringently do not lose God's mercy and can still partake of the Sacraments. Children under seven years of age do not have to fast or go to Confession. The elderly, ill, children under 14 years of age and pregnant women are also released from strict fasts.

## How to prepare for the mystery of repentance

**T**his preparation consists in dwelling on the sins you have committed, feeling contrition and a firm determination not to repeat them, at the same time endeavour to make amends through commensurate good deeds.

In the Mystery of Repentance, God's grace forgives the sinful guilt, heals and revitalises the soul and grants the strength to struggle with your weaknesses. Saint Theophan the Recluse advises: "Go into yourself mentally and begin sorting as to what's happening there. The interference of any outside body into this exercise is totally inappropriate....In order to really examine yourself thoroughly, you need to pay attention to three sides of our active life — on deeds, singular actions (thought, word, deed), complete in a specific place under specific circumstances, on your inner disposition and the inclinations of your character, under hidden actions, and on the general essence of your life."

If we wish to receive not only God's forgiveness for the guilt of every single sinful action but also rejuvenation of the soul, we must basically focus our attention on our innermost disposition. Sometimes a person may do a good deed (or abstain from an evil one) not from a pious impulse but rather from false motives, eg. desire to receive praise from others, or from fear of punishment. Consequently, this type of good deed may hide from the person himself the sinful disposition of his heart, making a true confession difficult.

Likewise, an evil deed (or wicked words or thoughts) or abstention from doing a good deed may uncover the true disposition of the heart, making a true confession easier.

A person may be free from any conscious thoughts, condemning any of his specific sins, yet this absence does not necessarily show his revulsion for that sin, but rather his internal Pharisee-like feelings — censoring his conscience so that the sin is not revealed.

In every person, thoughts-feelings and sins are bound among themselves as cause and effect, substance and emergence. Some sinful inclinations — by their very nature — are diametrically opposed to one another (sometimes both are present in a person), such as: laziness toward pleasing God yet being mindlessly zealous, hoarding and proclivity toward lavishness, outward humility and internal pride, etc.. Some sins can attach themselves to good deeds, lust — to love, self-serving — serving others. Other sinful tendencies impede true repentance: these include self-justification, self-evaluation, egoism, false feeling of shame. For a deeper self-understanding, it would be very beneficial to connect these traits to oneself, thereby achieving a more complete atonement.

While we are not guilty of sin by having sinful thoughts, offered to us by the demons (not until we have agreed to them), it is better to refer them to your experienced spiritual father, so as to lighten your struggle with them. Preparing yourself for Confession and the confession itself is a difficult process.

It is very important for every person preparing for Confession to test oneself and experience remorse and shame. While an inattentive and superficial confession will not produce the necessary improvement, an overscrupulous self-examination can lead to fear and despair.

Consequently, in the preparatory process, one has to beseech God's help for enlightenment and protection.

During the preparatory period you need to:

In the first instance, remember all the sinful acts and tendencies that your conscience has been gnawing at you.

It would be good to examine your relationships with everyone close to you. In the absence of any existing obvious sins committed by us (arguments, misunderstandings, insults or hurts, anger) there could be sins that have not been recognised or perceived as such: rejoicing at the misfortune of others, envy, indifference, slyness, falsely — covetously amiable, and other hidden dispositions, which structure a distorted picture of our close one. A confession would reveal this.

It is imperative to elucidate your attitude toward the will of God, as expressed in the Gospel's decrees, as well as your feelings toward Christian acts of benevolence in general, eg: a) Directives of the Holy Scripture, which I love, even though I do not fulfil them as I want to; b) Directives, which I cannot understand their essence; c) Directives, which my heart does not accept. The last assertion is the most dangerous as it reflects an attachment to sin.

In order to determine how your sinful inclinations developed, it is desirable to go back to your early childhood days.

It is beneficial to recall the events of the day, of the week, month and past year. This assists your daily mindful confession to God after saying your prayers before retiring. Recollection of your sins is the basis of Repentance upon which Christian ethics revolve.

You can pay particular attention to your normal responses & internal feelings in times of illness, sorrows, temptations, misfortunes, & conversely, during your fortunate periods of your life.

After a repentant analysis of your individual sinful inclinations, you may ponder over the general spirit of your life. Church experience offers a slate of helpful measures in formulating a disciplinary approach to Confession. Primarily, this involves listing on paper all the sins that you have committed since your last confession. For people not used to going to confession systematically (often) and as a consequence, not having a developed sense of "sin recall," this is a very effective way of preparing yourself for Repentance.

Sometimes during a confession, people cite poor memory as the reason for not recollecting their sins. Indeed, we often and quickly forget our sinful acts. However, does this really occur through a weak memory alone? In instances when someone has hurt our pride, or when we are unjustly offended, or on the contrary, when someone flatters us — we remember these things for many years. Everything that produces a strong impression upon us is remembered clearly and for a long time. Therefore, is it not true to say that we forget our sins because we do not accord them serious significance?

# When and how is a confession performed?

Usually a confession is performed either in the evening during Vespers or before the beginning of Liturgy, during the reading of the Hours. If there are very many faithful that want to confess, it may be practical to have a general confessional. In this instance, the priest reads the sermon on Repentance, naming all the established sins outlined on a list. Those attending, repent their sins mentally before God. Afterwards, any person that has committed a sin(s) outside those mentioned on the list, or one that is sufficiently grave to require an individual confession, approaches the priest and repents before him.

In reconciling the person with God through the prayer of Absolution, the priest performs this not through his personal authority, but through the command of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Mat. 18:18; John 20:23).

During confession, don't await questions from the priest and outline your sins: after all a confession is a great and self-enforcing deed. Speak concisely, avoiding the use of expressions that try to hide the ugliness of the sin (eg. "sinned against the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment"). During a confession it is very difficult to avoid the temptation of self-justification, or refrain from attempting to explain to the spiritual father of the "mitigating circumstances," or blaming third parties for leading us into sin. All this stems from our egoism and false shame.

A sure indication that God had accepted a repentance, is when that person experiences a feeling of weightlessness and joy after confession.

## **The spiritual father and obedience to him.**

A spiritual father is a priest to whom a person regularly comes for confession and spiritual guidance. Just as a person frequents the same doctor for his illnesses, because being familiar with his ailments and physical background, the treatment would be more successful, so should he stay with the one priest for his spiritual therapy. The relationship with him should be built on sincerity, understanding and trust. Repentance should always be undertaken freely and not under duress.

A spiritual father should not offer uncalled for advice or assume the role of a sagacious "starets." The responsibility of the spiritual father is to help individuals realise their deficiencies, remember their sins and show genuine repentance. If the repentant, with prayer and reliance on God, asks his priest for spiritual advice, God (in recognition of the seeker's faith) would implant into the spiritual father as to what to say to that individual.

Although it is desirable to have the same spiritual father on an ongoing basis, it is certainly not essential condition for the act of repentance. In essence, God cures our spiritual sores, while the priest acts as a "guide" to His grace.

# How often to partake of Communion

**I**n Apostolic times, Christians had Holy Communion every Sunday and went to Confession according to their need. In those days, Confession and Holy Communion were not coupled as they are today in the Russian Orthodox Church. But then, Christian living was on a much higher level than it is today.

Some churches have special spiritual fathers that conduct Confessionals outside the church Services. Consequently, a confession should not be regarded as a precursor to partaking of the Sacraments. While during some feast periods it is permissible to have Holy communion for a number of days (after having the initial confession) without going to confession each time, contrary to this ruling, some spiritual fathers insist on a confession each time, alienating the worshipper from the Sacraments during those holy days.

Generally speaking, it is advisable to have Holy Communion as often as possible. It is desirable to partake of the Sacraments 5 times a year: on your namesday and once during the 4 Lents. Some spiritual fathers suggest a greater frequency — on the 12 major feast days, days commemorating great Saints, feast day of the church. Worshippers can have Holy Communion even more often, provided they do so with the guidance and blessing of their spiritual father. In these instances, it is important not to expend our feelings of reverence and fear of God, which we should always have when we approach the Chalice.

## **Private Repentance**

**T**he Mystery of Repentance cleanses and rejuvenates a person. Together with the Mystery of Holy Communion, it joins us tightly with Christ, reconciles us with the Church and God, and reinstates us as worthy sons.

All these gifts are granted to a Christian as a result of his struggles (with God's help and benevolence) against sin. Before retiring for the night and during the evening prayers, it is beneficial to repent your sins so that they do not accumulate in your soul and become a heavy burden. It is necessary to recall your words and deeds during the day that may have left an unpleasant residue on your soul.

During this penitent state, the person should unhurriedly focus on his sins when confessing them to God. One has to plead for help not to transgress. This type of wholehearted repentance between a person and his sins, produces God's grace that strengthens the determination to free oneself from one or another type of sinful habits.

Daily solitary repentances at home (where the only active participants are a person's conscience and God) helps that person to restore within himself the image of God, accustoms him to self-control and timely assists him to delete sinful thoughts and desires. Once a person develops home repentance as a habit, he then knows exactly what to say to his spiritual father-priest during Confession. He is able to open his soul completely to God, even during a general Confession when the priest is not in a position to hear his sins individually. In these

circumstances, standing in the middle of the church with the other repentants, he quietly confesses his sins immediately before God Himself, in the firm belief that he will be heard.

As an aid to repentants for their confession, we offer the following.

## What to confess

### **Sins Against God and Church**

Renouncing God or falling away from the Orthodox faith.

**Scepticism** and doubt regarding the veracity of the Bible's and Church's teachings — her canons, legality and correctness of the clergy, the truth of the Church Services and the Mysteries of the Church, and the authority of the holy fathers' writings.

**Little faith** and **doubt** are products of a spiritually lacking upbringing, or the assimilation of materialistic, "eastern" or heretical teachings, or simply from being overburdened with life's anxieties. "Empty" doubts are distinct from little faith as they are usually brought about through lack of understanding of one truth or another

**Heresy and superstition.** Heresy is a false religious teaching that has been rejected by the Church, yet has pretensions to Christian truth. It often springs from ignorance and pride — extravagant dependence on one's personal intellect and experience. More destructive interests that are alien to the Christian teachings are: occultism, eastern mysticism, theosophy, spiritualism, extrasensory, personal perspicacity, ability to heal through incantations and conjurations etc.

Superstition in its various beliefs emanates from paganism and sorcery (magic, witchcraft, fortune-telling, symbols). These include national beliefs, customs and symbols that are associated with Church Feast days, and days commemorating specific Saints, as well as utilising holy church items and even the Sacraments toward blasphemously magic purposes. Superstitions are weeds in a spiritual meadow that smother spiritual offshoots and true faith. Fastening themselves like parasites on a person's soul, they devour its energy, warp the true spiritual path and cloak Christ's Truth. Superstitions foster spiritual illiteracy and blind faith in "ancient" (in reality pagan) traditions.

All these sins and problems of the mind are treated with studies of the Holy Scriptures and reading of spiritual books endorsed by the Church.

**Passivity** and indifference to Christian Teachings and absence of spiritual interests. This state is the result of a lazy mind and spiritual drowsiness. In a spiritually passive individual, the truth of faith is not rejected but simply ignored, thereby not allowing it to illuminate the mind with Christ's Teachings. Signs of passivity: absence of thoughts on God, lack of love and gratitude to Him, indifference to the participation in the life hereafter.

Passivity engenders lukewarm relationship with God and to the purpose of saving one's soul. Even though a person may pray, this spiritual tepidness emerges because of his inattentiveness and the feeling of being obliged to do it. In relation to Church Services, this feeling is reflected in rare and irregular church attendances, in inattentiveness or conversing during Church Services, unnecessary walking inside the church, distraction of other people through requests and comments and coming late or leaving early during the Service.

The sin of indifference to the Mystery of repentance is usually seen through infrequent confessionals, in preference for general confessions (rather than individual ones) thereby avoiding personal discomfort, in not wanting to deeply understand yourself, in maintaining an unrepentant and proud attitude, in the unwillingness to abandon sinful behaviour, to eradicate sordid leanings and conquer temptations: instead — strive to minimise the gravity of sin, to justify yourself and not reveal the more shameless deeds and thoughts.

It must be remembered that a person that partakes of Sacraments without the necessary preparation and not cleansing his soul through repentance, commits a grave sin and will bring upon himself more harm than good. After Holy Communion, he soon forgets that he has the Holy Gifts within him and quickly returns to his old iniquitous and sinful habits.

Reasons for passivity: attachment to earthly blessings and various pleasures. In its entirety, this sin leads to absence of awareness of God's grace and His nearness to us and as a consequence, that person becomes a Christian in name while being a pagan in his lifestyle.

**Stickler of the law** — adherence to the letter of the law, extreme and fanatical commitment to the outward facet of church life, oblivious as to its meaning and purpose. Belief in salvation through the strict and accurate though perfunctory carrying out of ritual acts  $\frac{3}{4}$  without realising their inner meaning — is testimony to a flawed conviction and a decrease in the true treasures of faith (Romans 7:6). This type of conviction arises from insufficient immersion into the good News from Christ, Who gave us the ability to be His servants of the New Testament — not to the word, but to the spirit, because "*...the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*" (2 Cor. 3:6).

A stickler of the law testifies to an inadequate comprehension of the Church's teachings and non-conformity to its majesty, or to an indiscriminate zeal in serving old customs.

**Lack of trust in God** through the absence of belief in that our life with all its minutest details is in God's hands, Who loves us and is concerned for our salvation. This lack of trust occurs through not having a living relationship with Him and being engulfed in earthly interests.

This sin engenders ungratefulness toward God, despondency, pusillanimity and not being concerned for the future, anxious efforts to insure oneself against suffering and This sin is exhibited to avoid ordeals, and in instances of misfortune — to remonstrate against God. The antithesis to this  $\frac{3}{4}$  placing all your faith in God & having total trust in His fatherly concern for us.

**Complaints.** This sin is a consequence of not having trusted in God, which in turn may lead to a falling away from Church and total loss of faith.

**Ungratefulness to God.** Many people turn to God when faced with trials and tribulations, yet during auspicious periods, they forget Him, not realising that all the benefits they receive are from Him. It is essential to compel yourself daily to thank God for his mercy — especially, for sending His Son, who suffered for our sins through the most humiliating death, and Who now constantly thinks about us, directing us toward our salvation.

**Absence of fear** of God and reverence before him. Careless, inattentive prayers, irreverent behaviour in church before the Holiest of the Holy, disrespect for the clergy. No conscious realisation of death and the expected Final Judgment. This condition ensues from a mindless attitude toward faith, which in turn prompts us to perform many of our obligations perfunctorily, through habit, just as it is written in the Bible: "*as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from Me*" (Is. 29:13).

**Disobedience toward God's will.** This usually takes the form of open disagreement with God's will as expressed in His Commandments, Holy Gospel, directives of the spiritual father, voice of one's own conscience, misinterpret the will of God in one's own favour so that it either justifies his actions or condemns another, placing one's will above that of God's, practicing senselessly ardent acts of asceticism and obliging others to emulate them, not honouring promises given to God during past Confessions.

**Frivolous attitude** to God and Church. The use of God's name in jokes and idle conversations; flippant conversations and jokes on items of Faith; cursing or swearing with the use of His name.

**Mercenary attitude** toward Faith: Rushing to church and turning to God in times of need, not from feelings of love for Him or for the sake of saving one's soul, but for the ulterior motive of receiving something instant and earthly. Having achieved success or with a change of the situation, the person reverts to his customary mundane activities.

### **Sins Against the Neighbour**

**To judge.** Proclivity toward noting faults in others and present them in a reproaching manner. Sometimes, without even realising his judgmental actions toward his neighbour, that person's heart formulates a distorted picture of him. Consequently, this image serves as an inner justification for not loving and ignoring him.

**Pride** — attributing to yourself exceptional abilities (mental, knowledge, talents, "spirituality") which give rise to feelings of superiority over others, or belief in one's self-righteousness and sufficiency. Pride is expressed in feelings of ill will, or sometimes in highly opinionated and condescending attitudes toward others.

**Vanity and conceit** — are related to pride. We fall into these sins when we show off our talents, scholarship or when we demonstrate our spiritual knowledge, our attachment to the Church or our piety.

Ask yourself: don't you boast in front of other people about your efforts, charitable acts, helping your neighbours, and expecting their approval or praise? How do you treat members of your family as well as people you come into contact or work with on a regular basis? Do you patiently tolerate their weaknesses or do they irritate you? Are you ever arrogant, testy, impatient to others failings or differing views?

**Domineering** — desire to be pre-eminent and to dictate to others. Do you love to have people listening to you or serving you? How do you treat people that rely on you both at home and at work? Do you love insisting people carry out your will? Don't you strive to say the last word just for the sake of not agreeing with another person, even if he is right?

**Self-isolation** — alienation from people, unwillingness to associate or pray with others. Are you attentive to the needs of your family and close ones? Do you withdraw into yourself and your problems, ignoring the sorrow of others? This feeling comes about from the absence of spiritual fire and Christian love.

**Neglect** of and **indifference** to your close ones. This sin becomes especially frightful when it is applied against parents, when we do not express our gratitude, do not have concerns for them, are brusque and neglectful toward them. If the parents are dead, we must pray for them, serve Pannihidis (requiems) and lodge commemorative notices during Liturgy.

**Pleasing people.** On the face of it, this sin is the opposite side of Dominance. We fall into it when we try to get people to like us by currying favour with them. Through this, we close our eyes to their iniquitous acts or even try to mask them. Have you practiced flattery in order to secure their favour? Because of covetous ambitions, have you subordinated yourself to other people's opinions or tastes that differed to

yours? Have you been untruthful, dishonest or hypocritical? Have you ever betrayed another for personal gain? Have you ever shifted your blame on others? Have you kept other people's confidences?

There are many peoples' sayings regarding flattery: "On top of the tongue — there is honey, underneath it — ice." "Warm greetings — cold consequences." "Where there is flattery — there is obloquy."

Are you sinning by satisfying your physical passions through mindlessly adopting the lifestyle and behaviour of the people surrounding you, including those that are members of your church, but who are devoid of the Christian spirit?

**Violation of peace.** Are you able to maintain peace in your family, with your neighbours and fellow workers? Do you allow yourself to slander, defame, judge, evil laughter? Are you capable of curbing your tongue, is it too loquacious? Do you display a superficial curiosity toward the lives of others?

**Envy and malevolence.** Have you been jealous of another's success or well-being? Have you wished misfortune and failure to another, or rejoiced when it happened? Have you instigated others to commit wrong deeds while remaining seemingly innocent? Have you ever been overly suspicious of another, seeing only deficiencies in him? Have you ever pointed out to one person the defects of another, so as to start an argument between them? Have you ever betrayed a trust of a close person, disclosing his or her deficiencies and sins to others? Have you ever spread rumours? Have you done anything to produce sorrow or jealousy in another person?

**Anger, irritation and antagonism.** Are you capable of controlling your fits of anger? Do you use swearwords or curses when you argue, or when you are angry with your children? Do you use foul language in everyday conversations so that you are "part of the crowd"? Do you permit yourself rudeness, vulgarity, impertinence, sarcasm?

**Callousness and hard-heartedness.** Were you ever stingy, overcautious, afraid not to receive back that which was asked of you? Do you respond to requests for help? Are you prepared for self-sacrifice and charitable acts? Do you lend things and money freely and willingly? Do you rebuke your debtors? Do you rudely and persistently demand the repayment of your advance or return of borrowed property?

How do you bear the misfortunes of your close ones, do you remember the directive: "Bear one another's burdens"? Are you prepared to come to the aid of another, sacrificing your rest and felicity? Do you a close one who is in trouble?

We succumb to these sins either, because of our attachment to earthly blessings or from fear of losing our material advantages — forgetting that God sends us people in need to test the sincerity of our love.

**Grudges and vengeance.** Excessive demands from your close ones. These sins deny the spirit as well as the written word of Christ's Gospel. Our Lord teaches us to forgive our close ones their infractions against us. By not forgiving others, avenging our hurts and maintaining our animosity toward others, we cannot hope for forgiveness for our transgressions.

**Insubordination.** Have you sinned by disobeying your parents, your elders or your superiors at work? Have you violated the advice of your spiritual father or failed to fulfil acts of penance that he has directed you to perform?

**Sins Against Yourself:  
Sinful leanings.**

**Physical excesses.** Have you been prone to abusing your physical rest and comfort by oversleeping or lying in bed for lengthy periods after awakening? Have you submitted yourself to laziness, lethargy, inactivity, feebleness? Are you so attached to your lifestyle that you are unwilling to change it for the sake of your close one? Did you indulge in various forms excesses to the detriment to your health, through: gluttony, gorging on sweets, appeasing the body, eating out of hours?

Have you sinned through drunkenness or attachment to narcotics — these most frightening vices that destroy body and soul, bringing suffering to our loved ones? How are you combating these iniquities?

Likewise, are you addicted to smoking, which also destroys health? As the cigarette replaces prayer to the smoker, smoking distracts him from a spiritual life, supplants the awareness of sin, destroys spiritual purity, serves as temptation to those around him and brings harm to them, especially the young.

Have tempted anyone to overdrink, smoke or do something sinful?

**Sensient thoughts and temptations.** Do you wrestle with your sinful thoughts and desires? Do you avoid places that present tempting sights and sounds? Did you turn away from seductive conversations, feelings and self-defilement? Have you not sinned through immodest scrutiny of members of the opposite sex? Do you recall your past carnal sins with relish?

**Unconscientiousness.** Do you force yourself to discharge your obligations and promises? Have you sinned by not working conscientiously or through the careless upbringing of your children? Have you ill-treated people by your late arrivals, your offhandedness & flippancy? Are you responsible at work, in your household and when you are driving? Are you scatter-brained at work, forgetting to finish one task before embarking on another? Are you endeavouring to strengthen your resolve to render everything for God?

**Laziness, wastefulness, attachment to things.** Do you waste your time? Are you applying your God-given talents to achieve good? Are you dissipating your God-given money and other resources without any purpose? Are you sinning with your predilection to the comforts of life, your attachment to material things and your saving of resources for "a rainy day," thereby showing your lack of faith in God and the realisation that you may appear before His Judgment tomorrow?

**Hoarding.** We succumb to this sin when we are captivated with accumulating money and riches: when we decline to pray or attend church because we are too busy — even on Feastdays and Sundays, when we submit to many activities and bustle. This vice leads to a captive mind and a callous heart.

**Egoism and self-love** — when we place ourselves in the centre of everything, endeavouring to utilise other people for achieving personal aims, and do everything for personal gain.

**Lack of will to struggle** with sin. Fallen spirits direct this feeling by implanting thoughts, that it is pointless to fight against sin, as sooner or later the person will fall again. These feelings must be vanquished with hope on God's mercy and His omnipotence. He promised that He would help us. Therefore we must struggle. It is said that if death finds us in a state of battle and atonement, then God will be merciful to us, but if it finds us in a state of sin and despondency, then He will reject us. Consequently, we must assume that each day is our last one on earth. By inclining ourselves this way, we will be able to conquer the wiles of our enemy.

**Impatience** in our **efforts.** This refers to our non-fulfilment of our obligations toward reciting prayers, violating fast days, eating at abnormal times, leaving church before the conclusion of the Service.

**Depression and despair.** Have you ever succumbed to dark thoughts and feelings? Have you ever fallen into despair? Have you permitted yourself thoughts of suicide?

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When you reflect on your past, try to remember all the transgressions that you have committed — intentionally or involuntarily — with regard to God and the ones close to you. Were you ever the cause of sorrow or misfortune for others? Have you destroyed your family? Have you kept your marital fidelity and have you pushed others into sin? Have you directly or indirectly been involved in the sin of abortion? Have you been inclined toward indecent jests, anecdotes, immoral insinuations? Have you ever insulted the sanctity of love with cynical jeers? Bring the most sincere atonement in front of God and your spiritual father in all these and similar sins.

We are forever sinning, if not in deed, then in thoughts, feelings and words — consciously or unknowingly, voluntary and involuntary, so that it is impossible to remember all our sins.

However, we now genuinely repent and seek blessed help to improve ourselves. We promise to be vigilant and with the help of God, to avoid sin and create acts of love.

You oh Lord, through your mercy and sufferance, forgive and remove from us the heavy weight of sin. Bless us to partake of Thy Holy and Lifegiving Mysteries, not for judgment or condemnation, but for healing of soul and body. Amen.

**Missionary Leaflet # E36b**  
**466 Foothill Blvd, Box 397, La Canada, Ca 91011**  
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