

Proper Confession and Communion

Proper Confession

Before confession one should attempt to recall all the sins which one has committed voluntarily or involuntarily. One must attentively reexamine one's life in order to recall not only those sins committed since the last confession, but also those which have not been confessed through forgetfulness. Then, with compunction and a contrite heart, approach the Cross and the Gospel and begin the confession of your sins.

1. Confess your sins honestly, remembering that you open them not to a man, but to God Himself. God knows your sins already and only wants your admission of them. You should not be embarrassed before your spiritual father: he is a person just as you are. He knows human shortcomings well, man's tendency towards sin. For this reason your spiritual father cannot be your terrible judge at confession. Is the reason that you are embarrassed before your spiritual father that you are afraid to lose his good opinion of you? On the contrary, your spiritual father will have all the more love for you when he sees your open, honest confession. Furthermore, if you are afraid to reveal your sins before just one person, your spiritual father, how will you overcome your embarrassment when you appear at God's Last Judgment? There, all your sins which you have not confessed will be opened before God Himself, the Angels and all the people.

2. Be specific when you confess, listing all your sins separately. St. John Chrysostom says: "One must not only say: I have sinned, or I am sinful, but one must declare each type of sin." "The revelation of sins," says St. Basil the Great, "is subject to the same law as the Declaration of physical ills..." The sinner is spiritually ill, and the spiritual father is the physician or healer. It stands to reason that one must confess or tell about one's sins in the same way as one who is physically ill describes the symptoms of his illness to a physician from whom he expects to receive healing.

3. Do not mention anyone else during confession, i.e. do not complain about anyone - what sort of confession is this? It is not confession, but judgment and a new sin.

4. Do not attempt to justify yourself in any way during confession: blaming weakness, custom, etc. The more one justifies himself during confession, the less one is justified by God. The more one denounces, judges and accuses oneself, the more one is justified in the eyes of God.

5. When questioned by your spiritual father, do not say: "I can't remember, maybe I committed that sin." God commanded us to always remember our sins. In order not to justify ourselves with not remembering, we must confess our sins as often as possible. Those who, because of carelessness, confess and take communion infrequently, and because of this forget their sins, have no one to blame but themselves. They cannot hope for remission of the sins which they failed to confess. Thus, it is imperative that we try to recall all our sins. When someone owes us something we are sure to remember this. Yet we forget our own debts before God! Does this not reveal an utter absence of concern for our soul on our part?

6. Unless asked by your spiritual father, do not list the sins you have not committed or things you have not done. Doing this, you liken yourself to the Pharisee of the Gospel. You do not confess your sins, but boast, thereby increasing your judgment.

7. We must confess with sorrow and a contrite heart the sins by which we have grieved our Lord God. It is not good that many tell of their sins matter-of-factly, without any remorse. They speak as though they are engaged in some casual conversation. What is worse, some even allow themselves to laugh during confession. These are all signs of unrepentedness. Confessing in this manner, we do not cleanse ourselves of our sins, but rather increase them.

8. Finally, confess your sins with faith in Jesus Christ, with hope in His mercy. Only with faith in Jesus Christ and hope in Him can we receive forgiveness of our sins. Without faith, we cannot receive remission. An example of this is Judas the traitor—who was remorseful of what he did, but did not have faith in Jesus, no hope in His mercy, and thus ended his own life.

This then, is how we must confess in order to receive remission of our sins from our Lord God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

Prayerful Preparation for Communion

Of all of the days in the life of a Christian, the happiest is the day on which we receive Holy Communion worthily, with complete attentiveness and preparation. Through confession, we have washed ourselves of all sins, opened before the Lord our entire soul, and received into the house of our soul the Holy Heavenly Guest, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who said "He who eats of My Body and drinks of My Blood abides in Me and I in him." On the day on which we receive Communion, it is extremely important for us to

recognize what we are doing, and in participating in the awesome Mystery, to understand what responsibility we are taking upon ourselves. To receive the Divine Guest carelessly, without the requisite attention, is to condemn ourselves. May it not be so! Here is the minimum that is essential for us to do in order to derive spiritual benefit.

1. Confess on the eve of the Liturgy, in order to give yourself and your spiritual father time for a complete confession.
2. Read the Prayer Rule before Holy Communion. The Rule consists of a series of Psalms, a Canon, and Prayers before Communion. The more zealous may add to this rule the Canon to Sweetest Jesus, the Canon and Akathist to the Most-holy Theotokos, and the Canon to the Guardian Angel.
3. On the day of Holy Communion, it is essential to come to the church by the beginning of the Liturgy, and on an empty stomach, i.e. having abstained since midnight from food and drink, as well as from smoking.
4. We ask female parishioners to ensure that when they commune, they not wear lipstick, and that they have their heads covered.
5. The Church instructs those who approach for Communion to cross their arms over their breast, and to approach with lips confessing Christ, and hearts filled with a fervent love for Him and with thanksgiving. In 961, the 6th Ecumenical Council established this Canon: "Whosoever wishes to partake....let him form his hands into the shape of a cross, and thus approaching, let him receive the communion of grace.... (Canon 101).
6. In the instructions for the Order of Service it is stated that upon receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, swallow them with reverence, and after wiping their lips, kiss the rim of the Chalice as the actual rib of Christ from which flowed blood and water.
7. After Communion, read the thanksgiving prayers. At our church, these prayers are always read while our parishioners are venerating the Holy Cross. Communicants gather near the Reader, together listen to the prayers, and only upon their completion, approach the Cross.

The Food of the Mystical Supper is the Heavenly Food of our restoration, of the New Testament between God and mankind. Whoever receives this food without due preparation brings on the opposite—destruction. May it not be so!

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