

Christ the King Anglican Church



Hints for a First Confession

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O Lord, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear our prayers, and spare all those who confess their sins unto Thee; that they, whose consciences by sin are accused, by Thy merciful pardon may be absolved; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

It is very desirable that the First Confession should be as complete as you can make it. It is the great turning-point in life the nearest to Baptism which anything after Baptism can be. For having, as far as you can, brought all your sins before God, in the presence of His Priest, having repented of all, and received His pardon for all, you may begin to devote the residue of your life to Him. To facilitate this search into your whole past life, it is best to divide your life into periods, according to any outward changes; e.g. of first going to school (if you ever were at one), or of abode, or any marked events of life which make certain stages in it, or any turning-points for good or evil. Then in each throw yourself back as much as you can into your former life, thinking with whom you lived, acted, conversed, were intimate; how you employed, amused yourself, your conduct as to Church, &c. Try to bring everything before you: each separate scene in every placethe fields, or streets, or houses around your home or abode, your walks, rides, society, loneliness and lonely thoughts, the rooms you lived in, their very furniture everything helps to recover the memory of your past life, and so bring back (alas!) the memory of some sin.

As you recall them, you had better mark them down for yourself by some abbreviations which others cannot understand, else you might forget them. In any heavier sin, it is best to trace out the beginnings or forerunners of it (it is, alas! commonly something in childhood); then, when it begins to be more against conscience, the length of time it lasted any aggravations of it how it ramified into other sins, or, in what different forms it appeared; or if it were one in act as well as in thought and word; or, if it were a sin of the senses, what different senses were engaged in it as the sight, hearing, touch; whether it were resisted, or whether (as will be the case sometimes, e.g. as to lies told in childhood or school-days to

screen a fault, or to escape blame or punishment), committed almost as often as the temptation occurred, (so that if it was not more frequent, it was only that God did not permit the temptation to be so, and any escape from sin was only of God 's mercy): or again, whether it was broken off for a time and again committed.

Some estimate of the frequency of any sin, individualises it more. You will thus behold the sinful habit not in the main only, but in so many separate acts of sins, each displeasing to Almighty God. This is often the beginning of true repentance. If you cannot make any estimate of its frequency, you could at least recall the number of years during which it lasted; and in these whether there were intervals more or less long (as of months in which you were free from it). As you try thus to trace out your sin year by year (if it unhappily lasted for years), and month by month, you may probably be able to form some nearer estimate of its amount than when you looked at it only as a confused mass of sin. Do what you can, and then leave the rest to God. Take first whatever oppresses you most. When you have gone through this, your mind will be freer for the rest. Always bear in mind the great mercy of God, Who bore with us while sinning, did not cast us into hell, and has now brought you, as you trust, to repentance. Only so could the sight of sin be endured.

As much as you can, make this examination upon your knees, and in as much stillness as you can; sometimes a past life comes back most vividly in the dark, sometimes at night. Only bend your mind most earnestly to recover the past, and pray God to enlighten you. Place yourself in the Presence of God whenever you resume it, praying Him for light to know yourself, and for contrition. Look faithfully and most steadfastly to any trace of sin, however dim and it will often come back to the memory if you do not shrink from it. Mingle with your search short prayers to God for mercy, both in order to obtain mercy and true repentance, and because the very tracing out even of sin, as an act of the memory, being an act of the mind, will in itself interfere with sorrow. People will often complain that they are sifting themselves just as if they were the sins of some other

they were looking into. The very process makes them feel cold and dead. This often cannot be helped at the time yet it may be mitigated if you take care not to be absorbed in the search even after sins, but dwell upon them singly recall to yourself who you are what sin is who God is against Whom you have sinned and mingle with the search prayers for sorrow and pardon. When you have gone through what seems to you to have been the leading sin of your life (if there has been one, which is most likely), then go to any other, either connected with it, or whatever next to it is most on your mind. You will be able to see other things more clearly when these are removed. People can often hardly bear to look on lighter things till they have gone through the heavier. These face them whichever way they look, until the mind has got to the end of them, as far as it can.

Under each head of habitual sins, two things will occupy your mind. First, the grievous character of some acts of the sin: second, the frequency of it. It is best to take these two apart.

Conscience is the best guide. They are a separate weight upon it. They weigh it down singly, apart from the whole mass of sin, and the soul feels that it must be discharged of these singly. But apart from these, we must endeavour to make an estimate of the frequency of each sin. This, in habitual sins, will, at best, be very vague and imperfect; but we must do what we can. If you took no account of it, and cannot now recall it, yet you may make some average of it. Thus, a sin may have been committed under some circumstances and not under others; at school and not at home: or, again, you may have been freed from it, or nearly so, after your Confirmation or First Communion. Or you may have made resolutions to break it off, and kept them for a time, and then relapsed, or been surprised into it again. And this may have even taken place repeatedly. Or it may have diminished before you finally broke it off, even during a whole year. Look as closely as you can into your past life, year by year, month by month, and week by week. People have been able to recall that such or such a deadly sin was committed, at times twice in a week, or even daily. Make such an average, as nearly as you can, for each year; take

account of the periods, longer or shorter, during which you were free. It will often be a heavy sum at the end, yet so we shall the rather understand what the debt is which, if we humble ourselves, God will forgive us, for His dear Son 's sake. "My sins have taken such a hold upon me, that I am not able to look up: yea they are more in number than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me." It is often very miserable to find what very deadly sins a person may have committed, and yet can form no estimate of their number. One by one, they were each, deadly sin against God Who so loved us; each deserved His wrath; and yet we (if it be so) cannot recall how often we so grievously sinned against our Good Father and God! You must make such account as you can, and if you cannot make any estimate, count how many years you were more or less under its dominion, and confess truly all you know of yourself. Thus, it would be a true confession: "during six, seven, eight years of youth, I shrank from all manner of punishment, and told a lie whenever I was tempted (or almost always), to screen myself from either." But then, not to spare shame, it would be best also to confess such lies as are most upon the conscience.

Having thus cleared your mind of its chief sin, go on to others, as they weigh most upon your mind, going through the Ten Commandments and the seven deadly sins, observing the beginning of anything grievous. Then take some full book of self-examination; any full book will do. The book of conscience is the fullest, and any other is but as a sort of supplement to it. Hints for Self-Examination, though short, will do as well as any, if closely pressed. You will probably, through these, recall insulated sins, which did not stand out so marked in the mind. And throughout your self-examination note down any sin which occurs to your mind, although not under the head upon which you are examining yourself; for sins often flash across the mind, and are forgotten again, unless noted at the time.

Consider also your life with relation to the means of grace, as calls at different times, through Providence, to yourself or others Confirmation; First Communion; increase of Communions; sermons, or holy books, or

inward strivings, Holy Orders; whether there have been fallings off and back in different degrees; disuse of what you found good for your soul, without sufficient reason; want of perseverance; and these, both as aggravations of later sins, and as warnings for the future.

Having gone through this, look at your life as a whole, of which this review will give you the great features or outlines. People will often come thus to see some one thing which has been the bane of their whole life, or has eaten out the good of it as easiness, desire to please, love of praise, some leading way in which they have been seeking themselves, not God, or self has been their end, even where they hoped they had been doing their duty to God. This review of the past as a whole, will suggest how to strike closer into the narrow way.

With prayers for pardon often ask for grace through this Ordinance, saying to this end especially Ps. li. and the "Veni Creator," with the longing that He Whom sin hath grieved would again dwell more fully in your soul. The more you desire, the more God will give. "Open the mouth wide," He saith, "and I will fill it."

The order of the search into your own conscience need not be the order of the Confession. In the Confession itself, it is best, for the most part, to follow out each sin, as it developed itself through life, rather than confess the sins of any one period of life collectively. You would thus have more insight into the amount of each sin, which contributes much to shame and repentance. It is probable that, after all, unless you should from circumstances, have been a long time preparing for your First Confession, it will be incomplete. Let this not trouble you. God only requires of us faithfulness to do what we can. A Confession avails which contains all you can recall. If other sins come back into your mind afterwards, which you would have confessed had you remembered them, they should be confessed afterwards, because the forgiveness is conditional upon the completeness of the Confession. Completeness implies that there should be care and faithfulness in discovering sins, and that nothing so discovered should be held back; you would not have held it back had you

then remembered it. Do not hold it back when you next have the opportunity, and meantime your forgiveness is unimpaired, because you virtually confessed all, in that you confessed all that you remembered. Confessions after many years of life, full as they are of blessing, must be but fragments, as it were, of a sad whole, which we cannot recall. But God, as I said, accepts our all, as if it were all.

There is no reason to debar yourself from Holy Communion while preparing for the Confession. You have not been debarred before. It seems misplaced that you should now debar yourself, when you are seeking the fuller favour of God. I do not mean that a person might not, on the deeper humiliation of himself, and out of a sense of deep unworthiness, abstain for a time from that Heavenly Food. But, ordinarily, when a person has been a Communicant for many years, there seems to be no reason why he should excommunicate himself, when he is returned to his Father 's house, and is wishing only to make his Confession more perfect. What is done in intent, and delayed only in order to make it less imperfect, and more according to the Mind of God, God regards as done.

E.B.P.

*Lord, too late have I loved Thee,
May I never cease to love Thee.*