

IGNITE GROW



Examination of Conscience
+ Reconciliation Guide

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

An 'examination of conscience' is a tool to help guide you in thinking about what you want to say before you go to the sacrament of Reconciliation (or 'confession'). Give yourself some time and space where you will be free from distractions and can really reflect on the following questions.

Now some of these may seem full on, a little bit confronting or hard to answer. But the thing to remember is when we face our sins – those darker parts we would rather keep hidden - we bring them in to the light of Christ. How good is that!!

Our starting point for this examination is the 'golden rule' of Jesus.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matt 22:34-40

This is the core of the Gospel. At the centre of everything that Jesus said and did is this message: to *love God and love others*. As disciples of Jesus this is *the code*, the mantra that we want to live our lives by every day. The following questions break open this scripture to help us see some of the ways in which we may have fallen short in our...

1. Love for God 2. Love for others, and 3. Love for ourselves

Love for God

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'

As Jesus says, this is the greatest, the most important of all the commandments. It's not about 'oh yeah I love God', but about loving him with our *whole heart, soul and mind*. That takes it up another notch doesn't it! How have you been going at loving God like this?

- Have I been praying recently? Or have I let my relationship with God fall to the side?
- Do I go to Mass regularly or have I been skipping Church?
- Have I put other things before my relationship with God? Do I care more about friends, possessions, popularity, my social life or other activities than I care about my relationship with God?
- Are there areas in my life in which I have 'put God in the back seat'?
- Do I use Gods name to swear or in other careless ways?

Love For Others

'Love your neighbour as yourself'

In order to love one another as Christ loved us, we need to treat each other as we would want to be treated. This may sound like something your primary school teacher would have said, but really if this was something all of us did our world would look very different! Here's some food for thought:

- How have I treated my family? Have I argued with my parents, or siblings?
- Have I been helpful at home or have I been selfish?
- Do I speak to my family with kindness and disrespect? Do I complain about them to others?

- Do I treat my friends with love? Do I respect the things they tell me in confidence? Or have I gossiped about them and spoken behind their back?
- Have I been there when they needed me or just when I wanted to be around for them?
- Do I hold grudges? Am I bitter towards someone for what they have done to me?
- Have I lied to anyone? Over-exaggerated a story? Made a drama out of a situation when it didn't need to be one?
- Have I ever stolen from others, either from someone I know or from a store?
- How do I treat those who are in need? Those who are marginalised in society? The poor, homeless, elderly, handicapped, refugees. Do I reach out to them in love, or do I treat it as someone else's problem?

Love For Yourself

'I praise you for I am wonderfully and fearfully made.' - Psalm 139:14

"Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you?...Therefore honour God with your body" – 1 Cor 6:19-20

Often it is this area that we pay the smallest attention to. We think it's 'being selfish' to love ourselves. Yet as the Psalmist writes, we are wonderfully made! For God, who created us with such love and care, how we treat ourselves is really, really important. And as Jesus said, we cannot learn to love others until we first learn to love ourselves.

- How do I portray myself when I dress – with modesty and self-respect or not?
- Do I stand up for my values and beliefs, or have I let others walk over me?
- Do I swear or use vulgar language?
- Have I abused alcohol or drink in excess? Have I taken illegal drugs or abused drugs?
- Have I looked at or watched pornography?
- Have I engaged in sexual activity outside of marriage? Have I pushed the sexual boundaries in relationships further than what I know is right?

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

HOW-TO GUIDE

Before You Go

Prepare

Like anything, the best way to get the most out of going to Reconciliation is by putting some thought into it. If you take the time to prepare – such as by going through the Ignite Grow **Examination of Conscience** - we guarantee you will have an amazing experience. It really isn't about the priest and what he says or doesn't say – it's about you and Jesus. That's a really good thing to remember.

If you made some **notes** from your reflection and you're worried about forgetting what to say, don't be embarrassed about bringing them with you to help you remember. It's important that you say what you need to say, but remember God wants to connect with your heart here, not go through a check-list. If you miss something He understands.

Think about how long it was since you last went to confession. It may have been at your first Reconciliation in primary school, or you may not even remember. If you have never been to Reconciliation before, or are not a Catholic, let the priest know so he can guide you through things from there. Don't worry about the exact words to say. What's more important is that you are truly sorry for the things you are going to confess (what's called *contrition*.)

Once You're There

Get comfortable

Depending on the venue where confession is available, it could be more formal – such as a church confessional - or as relaxed as outside in the sun at a school retreat or a World Youth Day. If you can, sit face to face with the priest. It helps that this be as natural and personal experience for you as possible.

Kicking things off

How different Priests will choose to kick things off may vary. Some may like to do small talk first so you feel at home, and then invite you to confess in a very conversational style. Others may simply begin with the sign of the cross and then - respecting your privacy - simply wait in silence for you to begin. It's OK; don't be nervous! There's nothing they haven't heard before and nothing you are going to say will shock them.

Confess your sins

Now is where you simply begin by sharing those things you came to get off your chest. You may prefer to do this using your own words, but it also helps to follow a basic formula such as the one below.

'Forgive me father, for I have sinned. It has been ___ long since my last confession.
The sins I would like to confess are...'

Now just go ahead and confess your sins in your own words to the priest. If there is no time demand, feel free to take as long as you need.

Counsel and advice

When you have finished sharing, the priest usually offers some counsel or advice to help you overcome the particular struggles you are facing. Many people find this really helpful and supportive as priests have heard many different confessions from a variety of people over the years. If the priest says something in here you're unsure about, don't worry, you can always follow up on it later. Remember this is between you and God.

Act Of Contrition

Next the priest will ask you to pray an 'Act of Contrition' (a short wrap-up prayer saying you're sorry). A simple one to pray is this:

O my God, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you.
Because You are so good, and with Your help, I will not sin again.
Amen.

Penance

The priest will then give you some 'penance' to help you live out your commitment to change. This may be a spiritual exercise such as reciting a prayer, or an active exercise such as doing some extra good deeds throughout the week ahead. The whole idea of Penance is to not just walk out of Reco, rub your hands together and say 'well, that's done; glad that's out of the way!' and forget all about. Confession is meant to stir us to an *ongoing conversion* – a real change of heart and life.

Prayer of Absolution

The last thing the priest will do is lay his hands above your head and say the following incredible words:

"God, the Father of mercies,
through the death and resurrection of his Son
has reconciled the world to himself
and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins;
through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace,
and I absolve you from your sins
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit."

After It's Over

Woo-hoo! You're done!

Congratulations. You are now a free son or daughter in Christ; sin has no hold on you! If you walk away feeling 'as light as a feather' after Reco don't be surprised, many people do. And no wonder! As St Paul said:

"O Death where is your sting? O Death where is your victory?" – 1 Cor 15:55

It's important not to let doubt (or other people) creep in and steal your joy a day later. If you feel this happening, repeat those words of absolution spoken by the priest in your head and have faith that Jesus truly forgives you. Here's a famous bit in the bible (written by St Paul) that we really recommend you read after going to Reco; read it loud and get your head around it. It's a ripper!

Romans 8:31-39

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sweet! What next?

'It's over, but it 'aint over', if you know what we mean. After you've gone to Reco, the *real work* has just begun; the work of moving on from your old ways and seeking to live a life that's holy. But now you'll be in a *much* better place to deal with your junk. They say that 'a good habit leads to a good lifestyle, and a good lifestyle leads to a good character', and good character is what you want! Here are some handy tips to help you get there:

- **Get good friends around you** – the kind of people who will help you be the person you want to become. The book of Proverbs in the bible says "*He who walks with the wise will grow wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm*" (13:20). That's pretty wise advice from over 4000 years ago! I'd be taking it.
- **Chuck out or disable** anything that will lead your thoughts astray from purity – such as magazines, apps, porn websites etc.
- **Start to pray** – If you're not in the habit of praying every day, make an effort to start. It doesn't have to be fancy or go for hours – just setting aside 10 minutes a day to talk/journal to God will make a massive difference to your day.
- **Go to church regularly** - If you're not in the habit of going to Mass, start going at least once a week. Go with your family, or if they are not church-goers, look for somewhere that supports you in your faith as a young person
- **Go to the sacrament of Reconciliation again** – Book it in your diary to head back to Reco in one month from when you go. That gives you plenty of time to gather some material (jokes) and seriously, is a great habit to get into. It's not about 'looking for more and more sins to confess', but about making a regular pattern of sitting before the Lord, sharing your struggles and being open to receiving His grace. Simple!

You got this. With God's grace – *God's amazing grace* – we believe you can do it. Go for gold!