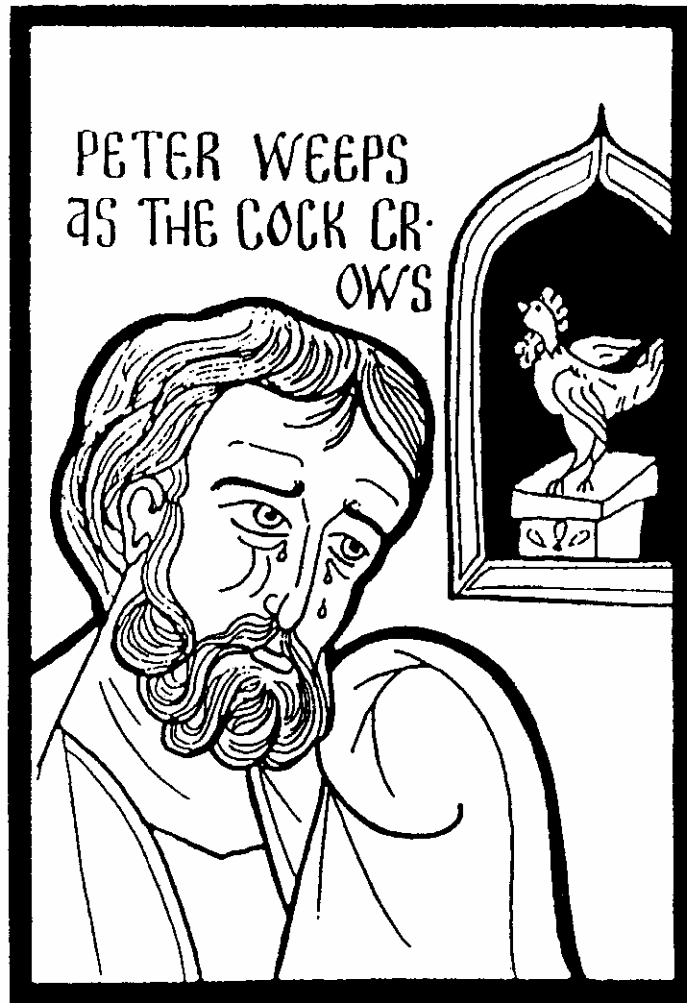


WE RETURN TO GOD



A Guide to Preparing Children for the Sacrament of Confession

**NSW Church School Teachers
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia & New Zealand**

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To the Parents

Your child is now at the stage of religious development when he/she is being introduced to Confession which is the Sacrament of Penance. It is essential that you, the parents, understand the meaning of this unique event and help your child in preparing for it.

1. Why is the Sacrament of Confession needed?

Confession is necessary because each one of us constantly sins, i.e. betrays and rejects the grace of Christian life given us in Baptism. Sins separate us from God, darken our consciousness, undermine our will, make us slaves of passions, moods, temptations. And just as we must wash ourselves in order to be clean, we must repent for our sins, acknowledge them before God, receive His forgiveness and have a “new start” – in peace with Him and with all people.

2. Why should we confess our sins to the Priest and not simply to God Himself?

Because it is from and through the Church that we receive the knowledge of God and His Commandments, the grace of salvation and the joy of new life, and, it is the Priest who represents the Church. He has received, through ordination, the power “to loose and to bind”. A real repentance begins with overcoming our shame. The Priest can help us to detect sins of which we are not aware. He can, in Christ’s name, absolve our sins and reconcile us with the Church. Finally, he must instruct us in God’s ways after we have decided to lead a better life.

3. How should we prepare ourselves for Confession?

By evaluating our daily life, our thoughts and acts, our desires and our imaginations in the light of Christ’s commandments; by asking God to help us in seeing our own sins; by “repenting” – i.e. regretting our evil deeds and desiring to change and to improve our lives; by concentrating our minds on the ultimate goal and meaning of life: **salvation for life eternal in and with God.**

4. What is the unique significance of the first Confession?

The first confession means that the child has become capable of moral responsibility for his/her acts and can fulfil the main commandment which is to discern between what is good and what is evil. If properly prepared for it, the child will always remember that a Christian must always choose the right way, fight the evil and refer his/her whole behaviour to God’s commandments.

5. How can the parents help prepare the child for the first Confession?

By helping the child to ask the questions about his/her life: about praying, being good to other people, selfishness, disobedience, etc; by creating at home an atmosphere of peace and concentration (e.g. limited TV time); by reading together with the child selected passages from the Gospel; and by helping him/her to “organise” his/her confession.

In the following pages, there is an introduction to that Sacrament of Confession for the child. It includes some selected passages from Scripture that present essential attitudes for repentance, forgiveness, etc. In addition, there are selected prayers that can be said before Confession, and before and after receiving Holy Communion. Finally, there are some practical guides for the preparation for Confession and for the Rite of Confession itself. You may help your child to read this material and to prepare for his/her first and subsequent confessions, until such time as he/she is able to do the reading and preparing for Confession themselves.

Coming to God

Do you remember the first time you realised that you had done something wrong? How did you feel? Most of us, when we do something wrong, want to correct it right away. We feel very bad as long as we know things aren't just right. If we have hurt or angered someone else, we want them to forgive us. If we have disobeyed our parents, we want them still to love us. But usually, it is up to us to make things right again. It is up to us to say, “I'm sorry” or “forgive me” or to admit we were wrong. The wonderful thing that usually happens when we do admit our wrongs is that things are made right again. We do feel again that things are good and that we really do live together with other people in love.

The person who loves us more than anyone else is God. He loves us more than we can ever know. He never stops loving us, even if we stop loving Him or forget to live in a good way as His children. But God does want us to be good children; He does want us to obey Him and to love others as He loves us.

Jesus used many stories to tell people how much God loves them and wants to forgive them when they behave badly. He showed us how God helps us to come back to Him after we have forgotten Him or forgotten to live as His children. These stories of Jesus are read in Church from the Holy Gospel just before Great Lent begins. They help us to remember how God wants us to live so that we can try again during Lent to return to God's life. These are the lessons, if you want to read them in your Bible:

1. The story of Zacchaeus, the small man who really wanted to see Christ. He was a rich tax collector and was not well liked. But he wanted so much to see Jesus, he climbed a tree to get a better look, even though this probably made him look foolish to other people. Christ saw him and came to his house. Zacchaeus was sorry he had treated others badly. He promised to give half of his money and goods to the poor and to repay four times anyone whom he had cheated. Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house." (LUKE 19:1-10)
2. The story of the Publican and the Pharisee, the humble sinner and the proud man. In this story, Jesus shows us the picture of two men. The Pharisee was a proud man who was very pleased with himself because he followed all the rules of the Church and bragged to God about how good he was. The Publican who was a sinner, knew how bad he was and simply said to God: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus tells us that only the man who knows he has sinned and asks God to forgive him will be given a place in heaven. (LUKE: 18:9-14)
3. The story of the Prodigal Son, who returned to his father, after he realised that he had wasted his money and sinned against God and his father. In this story, Jesus compares the Prodigal Son and his father to our life with God our Father. Only if we see how we have wasted the gifts God has given to us, only if we are sorry that we have sinned against God and other people, can we finally return to God ourselves. We must return to God our Father and confess our sinfulness. But God, just as the father of the Prodigal Son, truly loves us and is waiting to welcome us back to give us a place in His Kingdom. (LUKE 15:11-32)
4. The story of the Last Judgement, where God will judge all of us according to how much love we have shown to other people. Jesus tells us that we must treat everyone with love, just as we would treat Jesus Himself if He came to us. Those who are good and kind to all people, even strangers, will be welcomed into God's Kingdom. If we are not good to others, we shall face His judgement and eternal punishment. (MATTHEW 25:31-46)
5. The lesson on Forgiveness in which Jesus tells us that we must forgive each other as God forgives us, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you." In this lesson, He tells us also to fast "in secret" – in such a way that we do not "show off" that we are fasting. God knows all that we do and will reward us if we do His will. (MATTHEW 6:14-21)

In these few lessons, we learn what is important if we wish to return to God. We must:

- Really want to be with God and try to live as His good children.
- Try to see how we have sinned and be ready to confess our sins to God.
- Try to understand that God wants us to be with Him, to enjoy His love and all good things He has created for us. And, when we have forgotten God and behaved badly, to return to Him in the Sacrament of Confession, to ask Him to forgive us and welcome us back into His love.
- Try to treat everyone with kindness and love, so that at the Final Judgement, God will choose to have us with Him in His Heavenly Kingdom.
- Try to forgive others, as we would like God to forgive us, and obey the commandments of God.

In confession, you will be coming to God to tell Him you are sorry for sinning against Him and against other people. God will welcome you and receive you with love. He will welcome you back into His House. He will give you the good of a new life, in Holy Communion, so that we may live forever with Him in His Kingdom.

In the next few pages, you will find questions to help you think about how well or how badly you have behaved. You will find prayers that should be said before Confession, and prayers that should be said before and after receiving Holy Communion. These can be read together with other members of your family who are preparing for Confession and Communion. Most importantly, try to spend enough time quietly by yourself, or with your parents, preparing for your Confession. In this way, you will be easily able to tell God and the priest how you have behaved, and the priest, in turn, will be better able to help you to live a better life as a good child of God.

Preparing for Confession

These are some of the things you can do to get ready before coming to Confession:

1. Think about how you have behaved, what you have done wrong, and how you can be better. Use the list of Questions to Think About to help you remember how you may have disobeyed God and your family and friends. Do not use the list only; try to look at your own life to see other ways in which you may have sinned.
2. Read, if you can, the Prayers before Confession – at home or in Church.
3. When you come to the Church, first say your prayers, then wait for the priest to come out to hear your confession. The priest will stand by a table

on which there will be a Gospel or a Cross, or both. Go up to the priest, kiss the Gospel and Cross. The priest will tell you in a few words how he wants you to confess your sins. Try to remember the main ways in which you have been disobedient or have behaved badly. When you are finished, the priest will talk to you and help you to see how you can live in a better way.

4. When you have nothing more to confess and have asked God to forgive you, then kneel before the table. The Priest will place his stole on your head and pray to God to forgive you for your sins. After he has finished the prayer and made the blessing upon your head, stand, make the sign of the Cross and kiss the Gospel and Cross again. The priest will give you his blessing, kiss his hand and you can then return to your place in the Church.

Questions to Think About before Coming to Confession

A few days or at least the evening before we come to Confession, we should sit down and carefully think about the ways in which we have behaved toward God, toward our family and friends, and even toward ourselves. As we look at our lives, we should try to keep in mind the ways in which we have sinned – if we have been disobedient, if we have hurt or angered others, or if we have done anything which would keep us away from God’s love and God’s life.

Here are some questions which you can ask yourself: try to see the ways in which you have behaved well or badly.

1. How have I behaved towards God?

Did I pray to Him every day?

Did I thank Him? – in the morning, at meals, in the evening, or whenever I remembered how good He has been to me?

Have I used words which use the Name of God in a bad way?

Have I really loved God and tried to live as He wants me to live, or do I easily forget Him and forget to follow His Commandments?

2. How have I behaved towards my family and friends?

Have I remembered my family, my friends and all people who need God in my prayers?

Have I been good to my parents and given them my love? Have I been honest with them and answered them truthfully whenever they asked me something? Or, have I lied to them? Have I been stubborn or disrespectful? Have I become angry? Have I disobeyed them? Have I been kind to my grandparents and to older people?

Have I been good to my brothers and sisters? Have I shared my things with them? Or, have I been selfish and taken everything for myself?

Have I helped them? Have I done my share of my duties at home? Have I been mean to them or teased them?

Have I been good to my friends and teachers? Have I become angry, or selfish, or disrespectful? Have I taken something which doesn't belong to me? Have I been lazy in my schoolwork, or have I cheated in my work?

Have I tried to help someone, even in some small way? Have I made fun of anyone? Have I tried to make new students feel at home, or, have I ignored them and played only with my old friends? Have I tried to make friends with someone who is lonely and doesn't have many friends?

Have I spoken badly about someone else? Have I been mean to anyone? Have I told lies about myself or about others?

Have I used in a good way the things that God, my family and friends have given to me? Have I treated my pets and other animals well? Have I treated other people's property in a good way?

3. How have I behaved towards myself?

Have I been responsible? – have I done things that other people have asked me to do: at home, in school, with groups of other people?

Have I boasted (or thought) about being better than other people?

Have I taken the advice from my parents and teachers about how to treat my own body in a good way – by getting enough sleep, eating the right kind of food, etc.

Am I often angry? Do I often want everything for myself? Am I jealous of other people? Am I lazy or stubborn?

Finally . . .

Am I truly sorry for my sins? Am I truly sorry for hurting others? Do I forgive others for hurting me?

Do I really want to change my habits and behave as God wants me to behave? Do I know what I must do to live in a better way as a good child of God?

Do I really know that God loves me and will help me change if I want to?

Do I really believe that God is good and will forgive me and be with me?

Prayers before Confession

(Before you come to confess your sins to the Priest, you should say these prayers as part of your preparation for Confession. Sometimes these prayers may be said together in the Church if a group of people are going to Confession on the same day; if this is done, the Priest will usually lead you in your prayers.)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory be to You, O God, Glory be to You!

O Heavenly King, Comforter, and Spirit of Truth, You that are in all places and fill all things; the Treasury of blessings and the Giver of Life; come to dwell in us, cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O gracious One

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

All Holy Trinity have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us from our sins; Master, pardon our transgressions; Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Your Name's sake.

Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day, our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.
Amen.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for laying aside all excuse, we sinners offer to You, as to our Master, this request: have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, have mercy on us, for in You have we put our trust. Do not be angry with us, nor remember our wicked deeds, but look down on us even now, since You are compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies; for You are our God, and we are Your people; we are all the work of Your hands, and we call on Your name.

Now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

O blessed Theotokos, open the doors of compassion to us whose hope is in you, that we may not perish but be delivered from adversity through you, who are the salvation of the Christian people.

Psalm 51

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving-kindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight -- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart -- These, O God, You will not despise. Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

Preparing for Holy Communion

Before you receive Holy Communion, you may read the Prayers before Holy Communion by yourself or with members of your family. Remember that you are to fast from the evening before and try to be at peace with all your family

and friends. During this time, you can also think about how to live a better life, remembering the words of advice that the Priest gave to you.

After you have attended the Divine Liturgy and have received God's gift of Holy Communion, say a prayer of thanks to God, or read, if you can, at least one of the Prayers of Thanksgiving (in Church or at home). And most importantly, begin now to try to live a good life as one of God's children.

Prayers before Holy Communion

(After you have confessed your sins to the Priest, you may read the prayers on pages 7-8 (through "Our Father") as part of your preparation for Holy Communion. In addition, you should fast from the evening before, and be at peace with all your family and friends before you receive Holy Communion.)

Then, before coming to Communion say:

I believe, Lord, and I acknowledge, that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost.

And I believe that this is truly your own most precious Body, and that this is indeed your most precious Blood.

Therefore I pray You to have mercy on me and to forgive me my transgressions, both voluntary and involuntary, whether by word or deed, knowing or unknowing;

And make me worthy to partake without condemnation of your most pure mysteries, for the forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life. Amen.

Accept me today, O Son of God, as a communicant in your mystical supper; for I will not speak of the mystery to your enemies, nor will I give You the kiss of Judas; but like the thief I will acknowledge You and say:

Remember me, O Lord, in your kingdom.

May my partaking of your holy mysteries not be to me an accusation or a condemnation, but for the healing of my soul and body.

Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving

(There are many prayers that can be said to thank God for giving us the gifts of new life in Holy Communion. Here are five prayers which you can say:)

I thank You, O Lord my God, that You have not rejected me, a sinner, but have suffered me to be a partaker of Your holy things. I thank You that, unworthy as I am, You have enabled me to receive of Your most pure and heavenly gifts. But, O Master, Who love mankind, Who for our sakes did die and rise again, and gave us these awesome and life-creating Mysteries for the good and sanctification of our souls and bodies; let them be for the

healing of soul and body, the repelling of every adversary, the illumining of the eyes of my heart, the peace of my spiritual powers, a faith unashamed, a love unfeigned, the fulfilling of wisdom the observing of Your commandments, the receiving of Your Divine Grace, and the attaining of Your Kingdom. Preserved by them in Your holiness, may I always remember Your Grace and live not for myself alone, but for You, our Master and Benefactor. May I pass from this life in the hope of eternal life, and so attain to the everlasting rest, where the voice of those who feast is unceasing, and the gladness of those who behold the goodness of Your countenance is unending. For You are the true desire and the ineffable joy of those who love You, O Christ our God, and all creation sings of Your praise forever. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ our God: let Your holy Body be my eternal life; Your precious Blood, my remission of sins. Let this Eucharist be my joy, health, and gladness. Make me, a sinner, worthy to stand on the right hand of Your glory at Your awesome second Coming, through the prayers of Your most pure Mother and of all the saints. Amen.

O Master Christ our God, King of the Ages, Maker of all things: I thank You for all the good things You have given me, especially for the communion with Your most pure and life-creating Mysteries. I implore You, O gracious Lover of Mankind: preserve me under Your protection, beneath the shadow of Your wings. Enable me even to my last breath, to partake worthily and with a pure conscience of Your holy things, for the remission of sins and unto eternal life. For You are the Bread of Life, the Fountain of Holiness, the Giver of all Good; to You we ascribe glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and throughout all ages. Amen.

We thank You O Master who loves mankind, Benefactor of our souls, that You have made us worthy this day of Your heavenly and immortal mysteries. Make straight our path; Strengthen us all in Your fear; Guard our life; Make firm our steps; Through the prayers and intercessions of the glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, and of all Your saints. Amen.

Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people; a Light to lighten the gentiles, and to be the glory of Your people, Israel. Amen.