

PART THREE

SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION



“IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS ,
HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE
US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANS US
FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS”

1 John 1:9

HIS GRACE BISHOP METTAOUS,
Abbott of El Syrian Monastery

The Sacrament of Repentance and Confession is a holy sacrament, by which the sinner returns to God, confessing his sins before the priest to be absolved by the priest through the authority granted to him by God. By this absolution the confessing person is granted the forgiveness of those sins which he confessed.

Confession means admitting and declaring a certain matter. The Sacrament of Confession means verbal confession before the priest of sins and mistakes committed by a person, and confessing and humbly repenting, in order to be granted the absolution and forgiveness.

Instituting the Sacrament of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession when He said to His disciples, the pure apostles: ***“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven”*** (Matthew 18:18).

Also, after the Resurrection the Lord said : ***“As the Father sent me, I also send you.’ And when He said this He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any they are retained’”*** (John 20:21-23).

By this He gave them the authority of binding sins or loosing them, through the authority given to them by the Holy Spirit, and according to the contriteness of the confessing person.

Conditions of Repentance

True repentance has four conditions:-

- ✠ Contrite heart and remorse for previous sins.
- ✠ Steadfast intention to improve.
- ✠ Strong faith in Christ and hope in His love to forgive.
- ✠ Verbal confession of sins before the priest.

Right Age for Confession

Parents must teach their children about the Sacrament of Confession from an early age, say, about twelve years old, so they may be acquainted from childhood with the Sacrament, for as the proverb says: “Teaching in childhood is like engraving on rocks”.

In the book of Ecclesiology entitled ‘The Precious Diamond’ by John Bin Elsabaa, is written the below mentioned text. In its time, it was adhered to and considered most beneficial :

Releasing the Guardian of Responsibility

When the child grows up in Christian virtues, the Church or guardian takes him before the temple of God, where he received him from the priest at Baptism and says (in the presence of the priest) :

“My son/daughter, when you were a child and a slave to Satan, your parents wanted to set you free through the Holy Baptism, and they asked my weakness to guarantee you before this priest of God. I received you from him, I renounced Satan on your behalf denied him and his deeds, confessed the Lord Jesus Christ for you, took you to receive His Holy Body and Precious Blood and you became a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now you stand before the Temple of God from where I received you, you must know that the one who renounced Satan and believed in Christ, must abandon the deeds of Satan which are pride, hatred, anger, murder, adultery, lies, swearing, curses, idleness in going to church and hearing God’s word. As you believe in Christ, you must seek the virtues of love, humility and holiness, for without which no one sees the Lord. From this place I received you, and here I surrender you to yourself and God. Do not request from me anything further; from now on, you are mature and conscious of what is good and what is evil.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and abide your heart in the Orthodox faith until the end, Amen.”

From that hour the priest will receive the child, teach them confession, and so the priest becomes a father and spiritual guide for the person who starts to practice the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession directly guided by the priest.

The Necessity of Confessing to a Priest

Verbal confession to a priest is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, for the Lord said to His Pure Apostles: *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”* (John 20:23.)

How can the fatherly priests forgive or retain sins if they are not aware of them? How can a judge decide a sentence if he is not aware of the case details? For this reason, the authority given to the Apostles and their successors to retain or forgive sins, oblige the congregation to confess their sins before those who have the authority of absolving or retaining absolution.

Confessing to the priest is necessary for gaining the forgiveness of sins. It also has many other benefits :

1. From a humane perspective ...

Human beings by nature require comfort and wise counselling, and the need to speak to someone regarding problems or worries. They feel the need to have someone share their joys as well as their sorrows, and this is especially so when disclosing sensitive issues to a person who is a priest, a confession father, a teacher, or a guardian; one who keeps secrets, and has a nurturing nature.

2. From the Old Testament perspective ...

Confession was a necessary act for the repentance of a sinner who brought the sacrifice, laid his hand on its head and confessed his sins to God before the priest. The priest then took

the sacrifice and slaughtered it, offering it onto the altar of burnt sacrifice as an atonement for sin. The Lord said: ***“If a person sins or touches any unclean thing ... or if a person swears ... he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing, and he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned ..., so the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin”*** (Leviticus 5:1-6).

Hence, the sinner is obliged to confess all his trespasses.

When Achan the son of Carmi sinned and stole, the anger of the Lord burned against the children of Israel, and they were conquered before the men of Ai. Then Joshua brought Achan the son of Carmi and said to him: ***“My son I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done, do not hide it from me.’*** And Achan answered Joshua and said, ***‘Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel’*** (Joshua 7: 19,20).

When David the King sinned and committed adultery and murder, his conscience did not rebuke him and the Lord sent Nathan to him who persuaded David to confess saying, ***“I have sinned against the Lord’, so Nathan the prophet said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin, you shall not die’”*** (2 Samuel 12). ***“Then Nathan declared to David the divine punishment for his sins. The Lord will strike his child and the child would die, the sword shall never depart from your house. I will raise up adversity against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of the sun”*** (2 Samuel 12), ***“and the child died and when Absalom rebelled***

against his father, he did what the Lord said exactly” (2 Samuel 16:2-22).

It is worth mentioning that the sins David committed against Bethsheba and her husband Uriah the Hittite was considered by God as personally committed towards Him, as Nathan said: ***“Why have you despised the commandment of the Lord and do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife”*** (2 Samuel 12).

When David confessed to Nathan the prophet, he heard the declaration of putting away his sin and that he would not die the eternal death or perish because of it, but certain punishments were imposed on him, necessary for repentance. Solomon said: ***“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy”*** (Proverbs 28:13).

3. From the New Testament perspective ...

John the Baptist preached repentance saying, ***“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand ... then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptised by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins”*** (Matthew 3:1-6).

The Lord Jesus Christ gave the authority to the Apostles and their successors by saying, ***“Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”*** (Matthew 18:18), and after His resurrection, ***“He breathed on them and***

said to them, ‘As the Father sent me, I also send you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (John 20:21,22).

When the prodigal son was aware of his sins, he returned to his father saying, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight”* (Luke 15:21).

The book of Acts tells us that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession was practiced during the days of the Apostles : *“And many who had believed came, confessing and telling their deeds”* (Acts 19:18).

Our teacher St. Jacob advises us saying : *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed”* (John 5:16).

Once the believer confesses all his sins before the priest, the priest prays for him the absolution prayer and asks God to forgive his sins and help him not to sin again. (Priests also have confession fathers, who are perhaps older and more experienced).

NOTES:

When the Apostle says: *“Confess your trespasses to one another”*, he does not mean for priests to confess to laymen, as laymen confess to priests, but what he meant is :

† “Teach each other” as the educated teach the ignorant.

✠ “Heal one another” as the physician heals the patient.

✠ Hence, in the words, “Confess to one another” he means the congregation should confess to those who have the authority of forgiving sins.

✠ St. John tells us : *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

God forgives our sins and cleanses us from our trespasses, when we confess to God in the presence of the priest, with humility and contrite hearts. St. Athanasius the Apostolic said, *“As the Baptised is enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, by means of the priest, the repentant is granted forgiveness of his sins by the grace of Christ, also through the priest.”*

✠ And St. Augustine said, *“The Lord Jesus Christ rose Lazarus from the death and those around him (the apostles) loosed him from the grave clothes that bound him.”* Was the Giver of life unable to loosen the grave clothes? By loosening them, the apostles denoted their authority of absolving and forgiving sins, which the Lord granted to them and their successors.

✠ St. Gregory of Nyssa said : *“Regard the church priest as a spiritual father for you, reveal to him your secrets openly, just as a patient reveals his hidden wounds to the physician, and so is healed.”*

✠ It is mentioned in the Apostolic Orders, *“You must honour your spiritual fathers as they are given the authority of*

life and death from God, to judge the sinners and punish them, or to absolve the repentants from their sins.”

- ✠ The Apostolic Church approves Confession as a Sacrament of the Church, and this is strong proof of the correctness and necessity of confession to a priest, for Church Sacraments are performed by priests only.

- ✠ The priest is entrusted with the Sacrament of Communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, and is required not to give it except to the true repentant, otherwise he will be condemned and held responsible before God for his neglect. In the commandment of ordination of the new priest, the Bishop commands him saying : *“Watch this treasure as the Cherub watches the tree of life. Be careful concerning these mysteries to rid yourself from crisis and traumas, do not give except to the good mannered, pure hearted persons. Rescue the sinner so he does not perish and you be held responsible.”*

Here we wonder how would the priest know whether someone is pure hearted, and another is an unworthy sinner who is prohibited from the Holy Communion?

Is it not through confession before the priest? The priest has the right to prevent a person who does not practice the Sacrament of Confession, from receiving Communion and from the Holy Sacraments, just as Christ the Lord gave His Holy Body and precious Blood only to His trusted disciples whom, He well knew were worthy of Holy Communion. Judas Iscariot, on the other hand, did not receive the holy Body and precious Blood of Christ because of his iniquity and evil.

- ✠ Confession to a priest and hearing the absolution comforts the soul, as sins confessed are forgiven according to the authority given to the priests.
- ✠ Confession to a priest benefits the confessing person as he receives instruction and advice from the priest, who is wise and experienced, and so he will benefit in his struggle against sin if he obediently applies the advice.
- ✠ Embarrassment during confession, is the penalty the soul must bear for falling into sin, but the penance imposed by the priest is the Church's chastening for the body, which together with the soul, shared in sin.
- ✠ Due to embarrassment, many people try to escape from confessing before a priest, claiming that they confess directly to God. However, the embarrassment experienced is very profitable to the repenting sinner, for through it we feel the shame of the sin committed in the presence of God. Reasons for escaping confession before a priest is due to pride and false dignity, for the proud find it hard to humble themselves before he priest.

**CHURCH PENANCE FOR THE REPENTANT TO
EXAMINE THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THEIR
REPENTANCE, IF OBEDIENTLY ADHERED TO**

- ✠ Abstinence
- ✠ Prostrations for repentance and humility
- ✠ Almsgiving to the needy

- † Prevention from Communion for a certain time
- † Returning stolen money
- † Apology to whom we insulted
- † Extra prayers other than the usual, to ask God's mercy.

These Church penances are spiritual remedies to help heal the sinner's wounds, as it implants reverence and remorse in a repentant, and initiates the hatred of sin so that we may remain watchful and not fall into sin again.

STEPS NECESSARY FOR AN ACCEPTABLE CONFESSION

- † True repentance because of our love for God, and not for fear of punishment, we should aim for spiritual healing in order to receive God's grace of forgiveness, and gain eternal life.
- † To be honest with ourselves, without being biased, so as to avoid the Lord's warning: "***He who loves his life will lose it***" (John 12:25).
- † To have honest intention and steadfast will, and so abandon sin and its causes.
- † To examine our conscience and self carefully, to be aware of the sins committed by deed or word or thought or senses, to repent and humble ourselves so that we may not fall into sin again.

- † To be truthful in confession, knowing that lying to the confession-father is lying to the Holy Spirit. As in the example of Ananias lying to St Peter : ***“Why has Satan filled your heart to be lying to the Holy Spirit?”*** (Act 5:3).

- † Not to hide any secrets and hidden thoughts, but to reveal all frankly before the priest to enable him to offer the best remedy in order to build and revive the spiritual life of the confessing person. Jeremiah the prophet speaks to the human soul saying: ***“Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord”*** (Lamentations 2:19). When water is poured forth, it leaves no trace or smell, but if oil is poured it leaves behind a trace, and if vinegar is poured, it leaves behind a smell. So just like water which leaves behind no residue, we also should pour forth all our confessions before the priest in order to be cleansed.

- † Not to find excuses for yourself, and blame others, for confession is about blaming yourself for the sins committed, and not condemning others. King Solomon advises us: ***“Do not say before the messenger (Priest) of God that it was an error”*** (Ecclesiastes 5:6).

- † A person must be fair with oneself, not too sympathetic nor too harsh, doubtful or anxious, but rather, should confess with a straightforward, mature conscience.

- † The confessor must adhere to the advice given them by their confession father, and be diligent in following his advice as a remedy necessary for spiritual life.

- † To practice all the spiritual exercises given by one's confession-father, and with love and patience, ***“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”*** (Philippians 2:12). As St Basil the Great says, *“As we bear the scalpel of the physician to remedy the body and the medicine's bitterness, we also should bear the suffering of rebuke, chastisement and various practices so that the soul may be remedied from its sins and weaknesses.”*
- † To confess bravely without embarrassment, all the sins and its details, and if the priest asks concerning certain points, one must not complain or hide, but answer honestly, knowing that it is for our own benefit that the priest will provide us with useful advice.
- † A confessing person must struggle with God in prayer as the Lord says: ***“Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool”*** (Isaiah 1:18).
- † After repentance, absolution and forgiveness, we must thank God who opened the door of repentance and saved us from the dangerous road of death, as Isaiah said: ***“For wickedness burns as the fire, it shall devour the briars and thorns and kindle in the thickets of the forest; they shall mount up like rising smoke”*** (Isaiah 9:18), and our teacher St. Peter said: ***“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and the reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according***

to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness” (2 Peter 2:9,10). When the repentant knows that through repentance they are rescued from all this, they will deepen in their love toward God and seek to always abide in God, in order to receive power in their struggle against sin. God will make us victorious over Satan and all his enticements, and bring our bodies and all its weaknesses and lusts into subjection.

- † Our teacher St. Paul advises us saying: “***And having done all, to stand”*** (Ephesians 6:13). The repentant must walk on the pure path of repentance, and not be willingly returning to sin again.
- † The confessing person must not venture from one confession father to another, as this may be cause delay in one’s spiritual growth. Unless for very strong reasons, one should not change their confession father.
- † The person who confesses must have strong love and confidence in the confession-father to trust his guidance, obey and benefit from him, like a patient trusting their doctor.
- † We advise every husband and wife to have the same confession-father so that the spiritual providence for their marital life become one, and the priest will know their natures and guide them adequately for the welfare of the family. And if a problem exists between them, the priest gives the correct solution without interference from a third party who might have a different opinion, and hence cause

harm to the family. Hence, a mutual confession-father is a necessity for the family welfare.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR A CONFESSION FATHER

- † To be a legally ordained priest
- † To have permission from his Bishop to accept congregational confessions, for he will be accountable for such a responsibility.
- † To be wise and experienced in psychology, and knowledgeable about souls and their depths.
- † To be spiritual and close to God, so that he can pray for his children and plead with God to solve their problems.
- † To have a strong personality, not double-faced, and not afraid to speak the truth and rebuke the sinner, regardless of who they may be.
- † He must be righteous with an ability to listen to problems without being affected. He must also be patient with the confessing person and treat them as his son/daughter. He must be able to give them comfort so that they may be able to confess their sins.
- † He must be strong in spirit, able to bear the weakness of the weak, accept their confession, listening to their sins without

despising or judging them, they must be attentive and able give the person enough chance to say everything they need to say. Then he must give the appropriate advice and instructions necessary for helping the person overcome the sins in future.

- ✠ He must be wise and spiritually experienced in order to guide his children, so as not to give them wrong instructions that may harm their spiritual life.
- ✠ He must be biblically knowledgeable as well as being informed concerning areas such as psychology and education, so that he may be able to understand different phases of growth and special psychological reactions. Hence, he must give the correct medicine for every illness, without hurting feelings, but rather, to encourage a person to confess.
- ✠ He must be old enough to accept confessions, reverent and sober so that every one respects and listens to him.
- ✠ He must be pure in intention, thoughts, heart and body so he can accept the confessions of women and guide them without causing disruption to himself.
- ✠ He must be honest with people's secrets, not to reveal them to anybody whatever the causes are, knowing that Church rules forbid this and punishes the priest who reveals secrets and the confessions of people and so cause them embarrassment (Basilian Laws, 34).

- ✠ He must be well learned about church laws in order to apply them wisely to those confessing to him.
- ✠ He must imitate St. Paul in his love for his children: “*My little children for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you*” (Galatians 4:19), readily labouring for them until they become true Christians in their virtues and manners.
- ✠ He must be convinced that Confession is a source of comfort for a person who confesses, and growth for spiritual life. If a person does not feel comfortable confessing to him and seeks his permission to change confession fathers, he must not forbid them, for by so doing, he may cause the person to rebel and cease from confessing again. It is important, however, that the priest be aware of the reason for the person wanting to change confession fathers, so that he may help them in choosing another who will be a source of help and comfort. If the priest insists on not allowing them to change confession fathers, the person may go directly and seek permission from the bishop, without involving the priest. It is also important to note that the priest is an adviser in personal matters, such as marriage or career decisions, and so should never enforce his opinion on others.
- ✠ He must never attempt to intimidate any person confessing to him, such as those without a confession father. A priest should be considerate of the feelings of other priests he serves with, such as in accepting the confessions of a person who has recently been absolved from confessing to his fellow brother the priest.

17. In the Sacrament of Confession, the priest is a father, judge and teacher.

FIRST : A FATHER



Who yearns for the repentance of every one of his children, as their repentance and salvation will be a cause for his salvation, and so at the last day, he will say to the Lord: ***“Here am I and the children whom God has given me”*** (Isaiah 8:18), and together with St. Paul he will proclaim: ***“For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord”*** (Thessalonians 3:8). He resembles the father of the prodigal son, who awaited his son’s return every single day, and, ***“When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him”*** (Luke 15:20), and accepted his repentance and forgave him all his sins, rejoicing for his return, and saying to the elder son: ***“It was right that we should make mercy and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found”*** (Luke 15:32).

SECOND : A JUDGE

Who judges the case of his children according to the authority given to him: ***“Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”*** (Matthew 18:18). The priest must be accountable to this divine responsibility, neither favouring nor neglecting or

oppressing or using this authority unduly, for personal purposes. He must be strict with sin regardless of who the sinner may be, just like a physician who loves the patient but hates the disease, and so tries to abolish it by the best possible medicine.

THIRD : A TEACHER

Who teaches according to the Holy Bible, and makes disciples of Christ of all those coming to him. He teaches them the way to God and Christian perfection, through his knowledge, experience and trials. The priest who wants to teach and make disciples of Christ, must himself be a disciple and be obedient towards his confession-father (who may be older, wiser and more experienced). Hence, he resembles our teacher St. Paul who says: *“I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me”* (Roman 15:18). He experiences, learns then teaches.

- † The priest must teach his children that absolution is granted after practicing the Sacrament of Confession directly. Group absolutions which are granted during the Holy Mass, (when each person remembers their sins, confesses before God and bows to receive the priest’s absolution), is sufficient to receive Communion. It is not necessary, therefore, for the priest to read the absolution in the Church for each individual who has not confessed. Following the transubstantiation of the holy Body and Blood, the reading of the absolution is a grave mistake, for the absolution itself (the Holy Sacrament) is present on the altar. It is not right that Jesus Christ, the

great High Priest is present on the altar, and the priest, ignoring Him, gives the absolution.

- † The priest must care to give his children adequate spiritual practices for their lives, so that they may be able to abandon certain sins and habits and replace them with virtues.
- † He must follow these practices with them by praying for them and asking about them in every confession. It is also useful if a spiritual note-book is available, so that the priest can see it and provide them with advice and practical applications to help them in their spiritual life.



THE RITE OF PRACTICING THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

1. Before Confession :

- † The period of Confession must not exceed one month or a month and a half maximum. Delaying confession encourages a person to be negligent, and forget may sins

committed. Delaying confession is a great loss to a person and delays their spiritual growth noticeably.

- † Some fathers use a notebook in which they write the names of their children in confession - when they confessed and the date of their next confession. This keeps the person confessing prepared at all times for confession.

- † A person must sit firstly with themselves, to examine themselves very carefully before going to confession. You may start with a short prayer to ask God's help in revealing your sins, as Jeremiah said: "***The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways***" (Jeremiah 17:9,10.)

- † In preparing for confession, it is advisable to write down on a piece of paper, all the sins committed, however, it should be written in such a way that only the writer understand. This is to prevent it from falling into wrong hands. The wisdom behind writing sins is so not to forget them during confession.

- † The confessing person must care for three important things while preparing for confession, and jotting down notes :

1. Sins and mistakes committed

2. Thoughts and feelings encountered which need counselling from the confession-father in order to distinguish the good from the bad
3. Any questions regarding the spiritual life which need guidance or discussion with the confession father.

† Self-examination must be honest, and without condemning others, for in confession we should blame ourselves, not other people or circumstances.

† After having prepared for confession, the repentant prays before God in their private room, mentioning before Him every sin and pleading for forgiveness, and power from God so that they may abandon them.

† Sins to be forgiven must be confessed three times :

1. Before the person whom we sinned against, as the wise King Solomon said: ***“For you have come into the hand of your friend: go and humble yourself, plead with your friend, give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids, deliver yourself”*** (Proverbs 6:3-5), rescue yourself from the results of sins and its harm by apologising to whom you sinned against.
2. Before God as the responsible Father for all people whom we sin against. When David sinned against Bethsheba and her husband Uriah, God considered it a sin directed toward Him personally and blamed David saying: ***“Why did you despise Me?” and David confessed his sin saying, “I***

have sinned against the Lord” (2 Samuel 12). In the Psalm of Repentance, David spoke humbly before God saying: *“Against You and You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight”* (Psalm 51:4)

3. Before the Church represented by the priest. The church is our mother and cares for her children’s peace, their love and reconciliation with one another. The priest is the dove of peace and reconciles the rights of the just from the unjust. The confessing person receives the absolution and forgiveness of their sins from the mouth of the priest, the officiate of the Mysteries of God, who sees the truthfulness, or otherwise, of one’s repentance. If otherwise, the priest provides penance and certain spiritual exercises in order to help the confessor fulfil the conditions of an acceptable repentance. Once accomplished, the person is granted absolution and forgiveness from the priest who receives the authority from the Holy Spirit : *“Make them absolved by the Holy Spirit, through me.”* Once absolution is granted from the priest, the person can receive the Holy Communion of our Lord Emmanuel, so that they may be cleansed of their sins by the Blood of Christ, just like the saints who, *“Washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb”* (Revelation 7:14), and, *“The Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (John 1:7).

2. During Confession :

- ✠ Confession must take place be in a quite corner in the Church, facing the altar, so that we feel empowered and sanctified. Confession, being a sacrament, should always

take place in Church, however, if the priest comes across a person who has not been regular in church or in church life, but wishes to repent, the priest may visit them at home and accept their confession there, and at the same time encouraging them to come to church. In addition, the Sacrament of Confession may take place at home if someone is sick, before they receive the Holy Communion.

- † The priest must wear a cloak or cape whilst accepting Confession, as he is taking part in a holy sacrament which needs physical and spiritual preparation.
- † In church there must be a waiting place for those awaiting confession, with various spiritual books which they can occupy themselves with.
- † The priest must always be alert. He must not eat or drink during confession, for confession is a sacrament, and as such should be practiced while fasting (similar to the rest of the sacraments). After the person comes to kiss the hand of the priest, they should sit before him respectfully, as he is the minister of the Mysteries of God, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- † The priest and the confessor make the sign of the cross, and together pray 'The Lord's Prayer'.
- † The priest then encourages the person to confess, asking them about their spiritual life.

- † The confessing person takes out the paper in which the sins are written, and begins confessing them one by one, without embarrassment, and waiting to hear the appropriate advice and instruction of the confession father. We can resemble this to one waiting for the verdict of a judge after having done wrong, or waiting for the doctor to prescribe the best medicine possible to cure ailments. The confessor should acknowledge their sins completely and repent in contriteness, aiming to struggle against sin till death. Discussion with the priest should take place with respectfulness and decency.

- † The confessing person should commence by confessing the most grievous sins, followed by the less grievous. In this way, the confessor will be humbled.

- † It is important for the confessor to be mindful of the priest's time and others waiting, and so not divert from the confession by telling stories which may be unrelated. They must be mindful of the reverence of the sacrament and being in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

- † The priest must be careful not to condemn or degrade the person confession, so they do not despair. On the other hand, it is important the priest is not too lenient, otherwise the confessor may become negligent. The priest must be wise and moderate, able to love those who confess, despite their failures and sins.

- † After confession, the confessing person kneels before the priest, bowing their head and repeating the words, ***“God be merciful to me a sinner”*** (Luke 18:13). The priest,

standing, places the cross in his right hand on the confessing person's head, and prays the absolution.

NOTES:

- (1) The priest places the cross over the head of the confessing person, as the gift of absolution and forgiveness is obtained from the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is shed on the cross. The head is humbly bowed from the load of sin, and the cross over it works mysteriously to sanctify the confessing person in thought, body and soul by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who is called by the priest to grant absolution and forgiveness to the repentant. Hence, reconciliation between God and the repentant is fulfilled, as our teacher St. Paul says: ***“Having made peace through the Blood of His Cross”*** (Colossians 1:20), ***“And now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation”*** (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).
- (2) When the priest places his hand on the confessing person's head, holding their temples between his fingers, he denotes the compassionate fatherhood of God accepting the repentants, and it is also a symbol of the hand of God, the Pantocrator, who holds everyone in His hands, for He controls man's movements and thoughts and is able to sanctify them and guide them towards the right direction, for their welfare and salvation : ***“Bringing every thought into***

captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5), and applying the words of St. Paul : “***But we have the mind of Christ***” (1 Corinthians 2:16), and so become the servants of God who, “***shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads***” (Revelation 22:4). Hence, they have the name of God filling their thoughts and lives.

PRAYERS TO BE SAID BY THE CONFESSOR, IN ORDER TO RECEIVE ABSOLUTION

- † Psalm 50 : “***Have mercy upon me, O God ...***”

- † The prayer of : “*O God absolve, remit and forgive us our sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly and those which we committed knowingly and unknowingly, the hidden and the visible. O Lord forgive us for the sake of Your Holy Name that is called upon us, and according to Your Mercy and not to our sins.*” Followed by, “*O Lord I have sinned, absolve me*”, or the tax-collector’s prayer: “***God be merciful to me, a sinner***”.

- † Then following the absolution, the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is said.

PRAYERS OF THE PRIEST ON THE HEAD OF THE CONFESSOR

- † Thanksgiving Prayer: To thank God for the return and the repentance of the sinner.
- † Psalm 50: for repentance and humiliation
- † Litany of the Sick: for the sinner is in need of remedy
- † The Three Absolutions: What is noticeable is that the priest prays them in the plural form placing himself with the confessing sinner, asking absolution and forgiveness for both of them, with all the other blessings. In these absolutions are many meaningful and touching supplications, which deserve contemplation. The priest should pray them quietly but audibly, so that he and the confessing person may meditate on every word. It is worth mentioning also that these absolutions which are read on the head of the confessing person, are prayed in Church during the Matins and Vespers Prayers, and in other Church Rites, such as the Sacraments of Unction of Sick, Matrimony and others.

THE FIRST ABSOLUTION : PRAYER OF SUBMISSION TO THE SON

“Oh Lord who has given authority unto us to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy, crush his heads beneath our feet speedily, and scatter before

us his every design of weakness that is against us. For You are the King of us all, O Christ our God”.

Notes on the First Absolution:

1. God gave the authority to His pure Apostles saying:
“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”
(Luke 10:19).
2. *“Crush his heads beneath our feet speedily,”* as the devil does not have only one head but many heads, denoting his plans and deceit, thoughts, and seduction which are various and destructive to those attracted to them.
3. *“Scatter before us every design of weakness that is against us.”* The Satanic designs are the evil thoughts which he tries to implant in us, we ask God to scatter them before us so we do not perish.

**THE SECOND ABSOLUTION :
ALSO CALLED THE PRAYER OF SUBMISSION TO
THE SON**

“You, O Lord, who created the heavens, You descended and became man for our salvation. You are He who sits upon the Cherubim and the Seraphim, and beholds them who are lowly. You also now, our Master, are He unto whom we lift up the eyes of our hearts, the Lord who forgives our iniquities and saves our souls from corruption. We worship

Your unutterable compassion, and we ask You to give us Your peace, for You have given all things unto us.

Acquire us unto Yourself, God our Saviour, for we know none other but You; Your Holy Name we do utter. Turn us, God, into fearing You and desiring You. Be pleased that we abide in the enjoyment of Your good things, and those who have bowed their heads beneath Your hand, exalt them in their ways of life, and adorn them with virtues. And may we all be worthy of Your Kingdom in the heavens, through the goodwill of God, Your good Father...”.

Notes on the Second Absolution:

In this absolution the priest asks God,

1. To give us the peace we lost through committing sins, for sin destroys peace, as fire destroys hay. For thus says the Lord, ***“There is no peace for the wicked”*** (Isaiah 48:22).
2. To instil within us the fear of God, as, ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,”*** (Proverbs 1), and when one’s heart is filled with the fear of God, one becomes enlightened, as Abba Anthony said: *“As light entering a dark house casts out its darkness, so if the fear of God entered into a human heart, it casts out ignorance (by which he falls into sin).”*
3. To cause us to desire the Lord, and taste those things which are spiritual and divine, rather than partake of those things which cause us to sin and thus result in death. For this reason,

the priest asks God to return this desire to the hearts of those confessing, so that together with King Solomon, they may declare : **“Lead me away! We will run after You”** (Songs 1:4).

4. The priests asks God to exalt the repentant who is bowing in contriteness beneath the hand of God (which is symbolised by the hand of the priest placed on the head of the confessing person), and adorn them with virtues, after having saved them from sin, so they may glorify God and become worthy of Eternal Life and the Kingdom of God, which is prepared for those who struggle diligently in order to perfect their holiness.

THE THIRD ABSOLUTION

*“Master, Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son and Logos of God the Father, Who has broken every bond of our sins through His saving, life-giving sufferings, who breathed into the face of His holy disciples and saintly Apostles, and said to them, **“Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you will remit, they are remitted to them, and those which you will retain, they shall be retained”**. You also now, our Master, through Your holy apostles, have given grace to those who for a time labored in priesthood in Your Holy Church, to forgive sin upon the earth and to bind and to loose every bond of inquiry. Now, also, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind, for Your servants my fathers, and my brethren and my weakness, those who bow their heads before Your Holy Glory. Dispense unto us Your mercy, and loose every bond of our sins, and if we have committed any sin against You, knowingly or unknowingly*

or through anguish of heart, or in deed, or in word, or from faint-heartedness, You O Master, who knows the weakness of men, as a good and loving God, grant us the forgiveness of our sins (the priest signs the confessing person, then says...) Bless us, purify us, absolve us (and absolve your servant ...). Fill us with Your fear, and straighten us unto Your holy, good will, for You are our God, and all glory, honour and dominion and adoration are due unto You.”

Notes on the Third Absolution:

1. By reciting this absolution and making the signs of the cross mentioned, the Holy Spirit comes upon the confessing person, and grants them the forgiveness of sins which were confessed to the Holy Spirit in the presence of the priest.
2. This absolution asks forgiveness for many types of sin : *“If we have committed any sins against You, knowingly or unknowingly, or through anguish of heart (fear), or in deed, or in word, or from faint-heartedness (feeling of inferiority, despair or desperation).”*
3. Now He asks God to grant him the necessary remedies : *“Bless us, purify us, make us absolved, straighten us unto Your Holy, good will”*. When the sinner is granted these divine remedies, he is healed from sins and walks in holiness which leads to eternal life.
4. After the absolutions, the priest says the blessing, and concludes with the Lord’s Prayer, which is also said by the confessing person.

5. The priest breathes into the face of the confessing person three times asking the Holy Trinity to absolve and forgive them.

6. The confessing person prostrates, touching the ground with his forehead, then stands and kisses the priest's Cross and hand saying: "*Father absolve me*", and the priest answers: "*May God absolve you*". Then they leave confession, rejoicing for repentance, exalted by the praises of angels and saints, for, "***There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance***" (Luke 15:7). One feels a great burden released from one's heart after confession, the burden of sin and now a person is justified and feels victorious, and renews their hope for gaining entry into the eternal life together with the multitudes of repentants, who have been redeemed and saved.

NOTES:

- † The prostration (metania) done at the end of the absolution, is a sign of humility and remorse, repentance for sins, and an intention to struggle to change one's thinking and behaviour for the better. Metania is Greek in origin, meaning 'repentance' and 'to change one's mind'.

- † After kneeling, the repentant kisses the Cross and the priest's hand, for through the priest we are granted forgiveness and reconciliation with God, by the power of

the Divine Blood shed on the Cross for our salvation. And from the priest's hand we receive the sacraments :

- The priest baptises us by his hands, and we are granted the Divine citizenship and rebirth.
- The priest anoints the baptised by the Myron oil, through which the Holy Spirit comes and abides in us, and we become temples of the Holy Spirit.
- The priest holds the Cross in his right hand and prays the absolution so the Holy Spirit comes upon us and grants us the Absolution and forgiveness of sins that were confessed.
- The priest holds the Holy Communion in his hands, carries it and distributes it to the believers, in order for them to have Christ abiding in them, and so gain eternal life. For this reason, we kiss the priest's hand.

✠ When the confessing person asks for the absolution saying, “*Absolve me father*”, the priest answers, “*May God absolve you*”, for it is God who grants the absolution, and is the source of absolution and forgiveness.

✠ After confession and having received the absolution, the confessing person receives the Holy Communion as soon as possible, so that they may be empowered by grace to grow in virtues and gain strength in their spiritual struggle.

3. After Confession :

✠ A person prays the ‘Thanksgiving Prayer After Confession’ (found at the end of the Agbia). This prayer thanks the Lord for

accepting ones confession, and seeks God’s help to strengthen them in their life of repentance and honesty with God.

✠ The repentant must be watchful over their spiritual life, so as not to fall again into sin, for every sin is caused by negligence or laziness.

✠ To repentant must obey the advice and guidance of the confession father, regarding church rules, penance, or spiritual exercises, which are spiritual remedies to anoint our wounds and heal our illnesses and weaknesses.

✠ We must adhere to the advice of the confession father in order for us to grow in grace and spiritual stature. St Basil said, *“As we bear the bitterness of medicine to heal bodily pain, so must we bear the remedy of the spirit through chastisement and rebuke, for the spiritual healing from sins”*. As God teaches us, ***“Surely I will pour out My Spirit on you, I will make My words known to you”*** (Proverbs 1:23).

RITE OF A PRIEST’S CONFESSION TO ANOTHER PRIEST

✠ For every priest there must be a confession-father who is older in age and priesthood, and more experienced so he confesses to him and becomes his disciple. He must be very regular in confession so that he does not neglect and lose his eternal life, as St. Paul says, ***“Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”*** (1 Corinthians 9:27), and every priest should take care to heed

the advice of our teacher St. Paul : ***“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in then, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”*** (1 Timothy 4:16).

- ✠ During confession the priest must sit down honestly before his confession-father, like a patient before the physician, and confess seriously and frankly, asking for absolution, forgiveness and salvation.
- ✠ After confession the confessing priest removes his priestly hat and kneels before his confession-father bowing his head to accept the absolution.
- ✠ During the absolution the priest does not place the Cross on the priest’s head but on his shoulder, or otherwise, he lifts the Cross near the priest’s head without touching it, and so prays the prayers and absolutions specified for confession.
- ✠ By the end of Absolutions, the confessing priest bows to his spiritual-father, kissing the Cross and his hand, thanking God for the grace of absolution and the forgiveness granted by confession and absolution.

NOTES:

1. The priest does not place the Cross on the confessing priest’s head as he is equal to him in the rank of Priesthood, while the blessing is granted by the older to the younger, as St. Paul said, ***“Beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better”*** (Hebrews 7:17).

2. If a priest confesses to a Bishop, the bishop has the right to place his hand with the Cross on the confessing priest's head and pray the absolution, as he is higher in rank than the priest.

PRAYER FOR THE APOSTATE

For those who deny Christ (Apostasy) or profane their bodies by adultery, the Church does not grant, in the first place, the Sacrament of Confession on their return, but rather prays for them the 'Prayer for the Apostate', or 'Prayer of capability' as they call it, which requests forgiveness for grievous sins which need God's mercy.

This prayer, which is full of benefit and spirituality, is recorded from the book entitled 'Make Me Repent Lord' by Reverend Father Yousef Asaad, (pp 160-166), and is most beneficial for asking God for blessing and power.

RITE OF THE APOSTATE'S PRAYER

A new ceramic container of fresh water is filled with simple oil, which the priest pours three times, whilst making the sign of the cross. Then,

✠ The priest prays the Thanksgiving Prayer.

✠ Then the Verses of the Cymbals is chanted.

- ✠ During prayer the priest raises incense whilst audibly praying the Pauline prayer: *“O God the Great and the Eternal, without beginning and without end, great in His counsel and mighty in His works, who is in all places, and dwells with everyone. Be with us also, our Master, in this hour and stand in our midst. Purify our hearts and sanctify our souls. Cleanse us from all sins which we have done willingly and unwillingly and grant us to offer before You worthy sacrifices and sacrifices of blessing, and a spiritual incense entering within the veil of the holy place of Your Holies”* (and then he offers incense in the four directions).
- ✠ Following the Verses of the Cymbals, the congregation pray : *“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, Now and forevermore, Amen, Alleluia!”*
- ✠ The congregation then prays ‘The Lord’s Prayer’
- ✠ .
- ✠ Followed by Psalm 50: ***“Have mercy on me O God”***.
- ✠ They conclude by kneeling, saying, *“We worship You O Christ, with Your gracious Father, and the Holy Spirit, for You have come and saved us.”*
- ✠ The deacon then reads the Pauline Epistle : ***“As I urged You when I went into Macedonian - remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which comes by faith. Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a***

good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they saw nor the things which they affirm. But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and in subordinate for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for killers of fathers and killers of mothers, for murderers, for liars, for perjurers and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust and I thank Jesus Christ our Lord who has enabled me because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Jesus Christ. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise be honour and glory for ever and ever Amen” (1 Timothy 1:3-17). May the grace of God the Father be with us all Amen.’

- † The congregation sings the Trisagon (Agios).
- † Followed by the priest praying the Litany of the Gospel.
- † The gospel is then read by the priest: *‘A Psalm of our teacher David the prophet and King, may his blessings be with us all, Amen. “Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. According to Your mercy remember me, for Your Goodness’ sake O Lord... For Your name’s sake O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great, alleluia”* (Psalm 24: 6,7,11). *Gospel according to St Luke, the evangelist and pure apostle, may his blessings be with us all, Amen. “So He spoke this parable to them saying: What man of You, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours saying to them: Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance”* (Luke 15: 3-10) *Glory be to You, O God forevermore.’*
- † The congregation then says the appropriate response of the Gospel: *“I have sinned, I have sinned my Lord Jesus Christ forgive me, as there is no servant without sin nor master without forgiveness. Grant me Lord repentance so that I may repent before death, and close before me*

the doors of Hades. Intercede on our behalf, O Archangel Michael, leader of the heavenly hosts, that He may forgive us our sins. Supplicate on our behalf, O my masters the fatherly Apostles and the Disciples that He may forgive us our sins. Blessed is Your name, O Father and Son and the Holy Spirit. We worship You now and forever Amen.”

✠ Then the priest prays the three Major Litanies for Peace, The Fathers, and The Congregations.

✠ At the conclusion of the Prayer for the Congregations, the repenting person says together with the congregation, the Orthodox Creed.

✠ The priest then prays the following for the repenting apostate: *“O Lord, Master and Almighty God, the Father of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ who wants every one to live and come to the knowledge of truth, we ask You Master for your servant (...name of Apostate), who bows his head and seeks You to absolve him from the hands of Satan and from every evil deed by which he rejected You. We ask and appeal to Your goodness, O Lover-of-mankind, send Your Holy Spirit and Your power to your servant (...name) at this hour. Cast away from his heart every vain and wicked intrigue. Purify his heart from all evil thoughts. If he profaned his body with an unbeliever, forgive him and justify him for righteousness, that which was preached by the prophets, apostles and church teachers. Your servant (...name) count him with Your people and the flock of Your inheritance. Grant him the forgiveness of*

all the sins done since his birth till this hour, by the coming and dwelling of Your Holy Spirit upon him so he lacks nothing from the Baptismal graces which he first accepted. Bless him, purify him, sanctify him, fill him with Your fear, straighten him towards Your Holy good will. Through the intercession of our lady the mother of God St. Mary, and all Your Saints, by the grace, mercy and love-of-mankind of Your only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Glory, honour, dominion and worship are due to You together with Him, and the life-giving and consubstantial Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.”

- ✠ The congregation prays ‘The Lord’s Prayer’.

- ✠ Then the priest says the following supplication : *“Yes Lord our God, who does not allow any one to be tempted beyond what we are able, due to our weakness. We ask You to save us from these temptations to be able to quench the fiery arrows of the adversary. Save us from the devil and his intrigues, through Jesus Christ our Lord, glory honour...”*.

- ✠ The deacon says : *“Bow your heads before the Lord.”*

- ✠ The priest then prays : *“O Lord who said, **“I will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,”** for with temptation You will also send us a redeemer, send from on high Your grace so that we may be able to stand. Save us O Lord our God from every troublesome temptation. Cast it away together with all the wicked*

deeds, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Glory, honour, dominion...”

- † The deacon says : *“Let us attend in the fear of God.”*
- † Now the priest prays the following absolution: *“O Lord God, healer of our souls, our bodies and spirits, You are He who said unto our father Peter through the mouth of Your Only Begotten Son, **“You are Peter, upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, and I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens. That which you will bind upon the earth shall be bound in the heavens, and that which you will loose upon the earth shall be loosed in the heavens.”** Therefore, O Lord let your servant (...name of Apostate) be absolved from every sin, from every curse, from every denial, from every false oath and from every encounter with the heretics and the heathens, through Your Holy Spirit, O You, the Lover of Mankind. O God who takes away the sins of the world, hasten, to accept the repentance of your servant for a light of understanding and forgiveness of sins. For You are a compassionate and merciful God. You are patient. Your mercy is great and true. Forgive him O God, and Lover of Mankind.”*
- † The deacon then says : *“Saved, Amen. And with Your Spirit.”*
- † The priest makes the sign of the cross on the water three times whilst saying, *“The Holies are for the holy people,*

blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

✠ The congregation responds : *“One is the Holy Father, One is the Holy Son, One is the Holy Spirit, Amen.”*

✠ Finally, the congregation chants the hymn **“Praise God”** (Psalm 150), whilst :

✠ Behind the curtain, the repentant undresses and the priest sprinkles water on him three times, saying: *“I protect you (...name), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God Amen”*.

✠ After the priest finishes pouring the water on his head and sprinkling him, He takes the oil and anoints his forehead, heart and palms, whilst saying: *“Blessed be God the Father the Pantocrator Amen. Blessed be His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete Amen”*.

✠ After the anointment is completed, he dresses, and bows his head, whilst the priest prays: *“Master, Lord, the only God, and Logos of the unblemished Father, who came into the world to call sinners to repentance, who does not wish death for the sinner, but to repentance and life, who said if your brother sins against you, seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying “I repent”, you shall forgive him. You now, our Master and King, look unto us bowing before You, we Your servants, and sinners, cast away all evil thought from the heart of your servant (...name), forgive all his sins,*

liberate him from all evil darkness to see the greatness of the glory of Your beauty. Lord grant us pursuit, repentance and freedom from our sins, iniquities and transgressions . Do not let us return to them once more, but raise us from falling, walk with us by Your power and save us from the intrigues of Satan. Restore us truly to You, manage our life as deemed fit and purify us from all impurity, liberate us from every unclean inclination. Blot out our transgressions and save us now, so we are able to be empowered by Your help against the evil hosts and its images so they retreat with failure in our second warfare and we come to the path of divine worshipping. Count us with the true strugglers who were saved by the goodwill of God the Father, with whom You are blessed, with the Holy Spirit, who is of one essence with You, now and at all times, and unto the age of all ages. Amen.”

- † Following this prayer, the priest prays the Absolution to the Son (which is the third absolution of the litanies), “*Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son and Logos of God the Father...*”
- † The priest concludes by ordering him not to commit the sin again. He says the blessing, and together they pray ‘The Lord’s Prayer’.



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Many priests neglect giving their children some spiritual exercises during confession. This negligence may be due to the laziness of some priests who are not ready to make an effort to follow up with their children during these practices, by encouraging them and praying for them. Some priests may find the excuse that those confessing have low levels of spirituality which cannot handle the spiritual exercises, or that the priests do not have time for follow up.

Hence, this causes a stop in one's spiritual growth, and confession becomes a routine, words said, and absolution read.

Some who are spiritually fervent or interested in their spiritual growth complain from lack of spiritual practices which help them in their spiritual life. At times they may ask their confession fathers for exercises, but this is very rare. Some make their own practices according to their needs. But this is not correct, for no spiritual exercises should be done without the permission of the

confession-father. The reason for this is so that the devil does not intervene, for he may use one's innocence or inexperience to encourage them to struggle more and hence cause them to fall into the sin of pride, or any other wicked plan of Satan. The wise King Solomon warns us saying: ***“But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up”*** (Ecclesiastes: 4:10), and Abba Anthony says, *“Ask your father to tell you and your elders to speak to you”*, the person who proceeds in their spiritual life on their own, and without guidance, falls in Satanic traps, as Solomon says: ***“Where there is no counsel the people fall, but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety”*** (Proverbs 11:14), and if he falls, he regrets saying: ***“How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof. I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers”*** (Proverbs 5:12,13). Priests must care to give their children in confession, certain practices and follow their progress, and those confessing must like spiritual growth. So ask for these practices in earnest, so that you may grow in grace and stature before God and others.

EXAMPLES OF SOME SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- † For those who are sinning from personal weakness, such as lying, swearing, gossiping, for example, a penance such as five prostrations can be applied for each time the person commits these sins.

✠ Spiritual exercises may also be taken from the Holy Bible, where there are many examples, such as in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) :

- Remember the day of the Lord, keep it holy
- Honour your father and mother (especially in old age)
- Do not murder
- Do not commit adultery (either in action or thoughts)
- Do not steal (or bribe)
- Do not bear false witness (such as lying or forgery)
- Do not covet that which is not yours

✠ Another great Biblical example from which to apply spiritual exercises, is from Christ's Sermon on the Mount :

- Spiritual poverty or humbleness
- Meekness towards all people
- Mercy for the needy
- Struggling for purity of heart and simplicity.
- Struggling to be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker.

- Bearing tribulation and persecution and false witnessing with joy, as long as it is for God's sake.
 - Not provoking hostility with others, and hence hindering prayer.
 - Being lawful in all things.
 - Whoever asks anything of you, give unto them, regardless of your situation. Learn to give, even if it only a little.
 - Love your enemies, pray for them, ask for their blessing, help them in times of need.
 - Give in secret, and pray and fast in moderation.
 - Trust in God, just like the lilies of the field and the birds, who trust in God's providence. Trusting means to depend on God on not on oneself.
 - Struggle with all your might to hold your tongue so that you do not fall into condemnation. For the sin of the tongue is dangerous and may bring about the wrath and judgment of God.
- ✠ Practice praying at all times. Ask, you will be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open and to you. It is important to persevere in he life of prayer.
- ✠ Follow the golden rule of treatment:- Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.

‡ From the first Epistle of our teacher St. Paul to the Corinthians, (Chapter 13), let us practice all kinds of love :

- ***“Love suffers long and is kind”***; bear all people kindly.
- ***“Love does not envy”***; let us practice not to envy others.
- ***“Love does not parade itself”***; a person must not boast before others concerning the things they may have.
- ***“Love is not puffed up”***; pride is a terrible vice, for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble.
- ***“Love does not behave rudely”***; a loving person does not speak rudely but decently, just like a clear spring bringing forth sweet water.
- ***“Love does not seek its own”***; the loving person is not selfish but loves others, sacrificing and giving readily. Avoid selfishness for it is the cause of many troubles.
- ***“Love is not provoked”***; does not get angry, for the anger of man does not result in the righteousness of God.
- ***“Love thinks no evil”***; for all things are pure to the pure minded. The pure person always puts others before themselves.
- ***“Love does not rejoice in iniquity”***; nor in catastrophes that may hurt others.

- ***“Love rejoices in the truth”***; rejoices for the good of others, whether it be success, riches, joy, children, or any other blessings given by God. ***“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”*** (Romans 12:15).
- ***“Love bears all things”***; practice being patient. Do not lose your temper quickly lest you fall and commit grave mistakes, and even lose the love and respect of others. To be able to bear is to be able to love. Bear all things, all situations and all people, without complaint.
- ***“Love believes all things”***; for love is simple, and is not deceiving. It is wise and insightful.
- ***“Love hopes all things”***; hopes for the good and happiness of others.
- ***“Love endures all things”***; practice patience, for with it comes the crown of life. Learn to bear others, even those who may be troublesome, knowing that your patience will result in goodness.
- ***“Love never fails”***; despite the various trials and tribulations which may occur, true love will never fail but will stand fast in the face of any test. ***“Love is as strong as death ... many waters cannot quench love, nor can floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised”*** (Songs 8:6-8).

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN HUMILITY

- † Do not provoke people to anger
- † Be quite and peaceful in all things; your speech and actions should be peaceful
- † Do not interfere in the affairs of others, regardless of who they maybe, relative or otherwise. Love all and avoid all
- † Practice being a good listener, and listen patiently to all, regardless of whether they may be younger or in less of a position than you.
- † Do not complain to anyone, other than God, with humility.
- † Practice being cheerful with all people, regardless of whether they may be aggressive or rude.
- † Every Christian should be obedient, wise and flexible.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN PRAYER

- † Practice reverence during prayer : reverence of heart and body, and tranquillity of the senses.
- † Learn the Psalms, Gospels, and prayers of the Agbia, gradually.

- ✠ Practice praying at all times, whether while you are working, walking, or even sitting with others.
- ✠ Practice reciting always the ‘Jesus Prayer’ : “*O my Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner!*”
- ✠ Practice praying for others, and at all times, show love to all.
- ✠ Practice the Lord’s commandment of praying for enemies and for those who insult you.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN FASTING

- ✠ Be committed to church fasts, with all care.
- ✠ A period of abstinence during fasting is necessary, but may differ from one person to another.
- ✠ Be moderate with the types of fasting food you may eat.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IN READING

- ✠ Daily reading of the Bible is very important.
- ✠ Read at least one chapter from the Old Testament daily.
- ✠ Bible reading must be done on a regular basis, but not just as a habit.

- † Keep beside you a pen and notebook whilst reading the Bible, to jot down points.
- † Highlight or underline the verses which you find most effective, and write your notes or thoughts in the margins.
- † Write in the notebook the verses you need to learn during that day, and keep reciting it throughout the day. If possible, write a small contemplation of what you found effective and beneficial about the verse or the chapter read.
- † Record and make special note of the practical verses from the chapter, which you feel can benefit you and practically be applied, such as: *“Whoever asks you for anything, give to him”, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged”, “Love without hypocrisy”, “Hate evil and do good”, “Share in the needs of the saints”, “Bless and do not curse - rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.”*
- † Try to practice these spiritual exercises, and learn to live by them.

CONDITIONS FOR THE SUCCESS OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

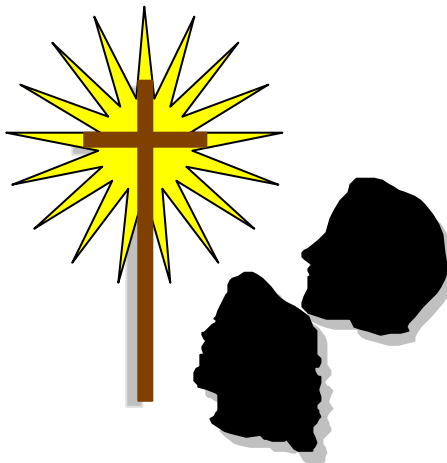
Some conditions are necessary to ensure the success of the spiritual exercises, for those who practice them :

- † Clarity of the exercise: it is important that the instructions of what must be exercised are clear to the repenting person, and not vague or generic.
- † Specification of the exercise: specific points must be emphasised, such as, abstinence, no judging of others, no stealing, and so on.
- † The occasion of the exercise: for example, we cannot practice silence on a day when there is a special family gathering. Likewise, we cannot fast when there is a wedding, and so on.
- † Gradual progression in exercises: it is important for one to progress gradually in their spiritual life, lest they suddenly fall.
- † Duration of the exercise: these spiritual exercises must be ongoing so that they may eventually bear good fruits and result in good habits. St. Ephram said, “*Every practice which does not take long, does not bear fruits.*” One of the saintly fathers applied one spiritual exercise every year, which he would practice with diligence. St. Arsenius took three year to perfect the virtue of silence in his life.
- † Success of the exercise: requires the person to be convinced of its need and benefits.
- † Success of the exercise: requires the constant prayer of the confessing person, to God so that He may help and strength him in his spiritual life and progression so that his spiritual exercises leads to bearing good fruit. He also needs the prayers and fellowship of his confession-father, so that he

may consistent in his spiritual life. This is especially so for those beginning in their life of confession. It is important for them to accurately write down the instructions given to them by their confession father, and for them to strive diligently in compiling with his instructions.

‡ Success of the exercise: requires the use of a spiritual notebook, which the confessing person to assist them in their progression, so that they may grow in spiritual stature and grace.

AMEN.



"COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR
AND ARE HEAVY LADEN,
AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."

Matt 11:28