



FORGIVEN

A Guide to Confession
& the Examen Prayer

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& the Examen Prayer

By Sister Orianne Pietra René Dyck, FSP,
and Sister Allison Regina Gliot, FSP



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*For Zoe—without you,
this book wouldn't exist.
Thank you for your “yes” to God
and for being just who you are.*

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

I have a confession: I've never enjoyed going to Confession. In fact, it used to terrify me. Sharing the worst parts of myself with a priest? The thought made me cringe, and I could never remember the Act of Contrition under pressure. I'd go to Confession once a year because I knew I was supposed to . . . but then spend the other 364 days shoving it as far from my thoughts as possible.

It took a long time for me to realize that the sacrament of Reconciliation has nothing to do with checking off some arbitrary spiritual box or shaming myself in punishment for my sins. It's not that at all. In reality, it's an encounter with the God of mercy who longs to forgive me and free me from the chains that bind me. When a priest hears my Confession, he is acting *in persona Christi*, which means that I encounter the

person and power of Christ through the presence and actions of the priest. In a very real way, Jesus Himself is lovingly listening to me and praying those prayers of reconciliation through the priest—the very same Jesus who shed every drop of His Blood on the Cross to save me from my sins. After going to Confession, I don't need to doubt how God really feels or whether I'm actually forgiven. I *know* with total confidence that I have received forgiveness and God's healing grace through the power of this sacrament—a sacrament that Christ gifted to His Church. And that is something to rejoice over, not run away from in fear.

Yet even knowing this, I still get nervous waiting in line for Confession. Honestly, I probably always will. But remembering what it's really about makes it so much easier. So does knowing all the steps. Practice really does make perfect (or at least makes it a lot less stressful). When I started going to Confession more regularly and learned what to expect and how to properly prepare myself, that made a world of difference. That's the difference I want to share with you.

In this book, you'll find:

- ✚ A guide to help you prepare for Confession (using an examination of conscience).

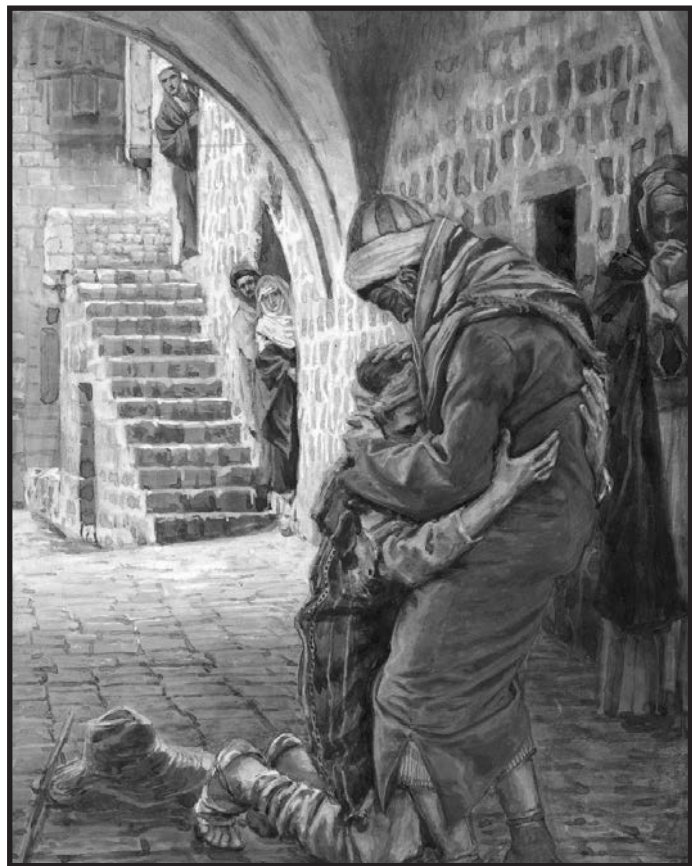
- ✦ A step-by-step breakdown of what happens during the sacrament of Reconciliation.
- ✦ Practical tips and tricks for making a good Confession.
- ✦ Ways to become more aware of God's presence in your everyday life through the examen prayer.
- ✦ A collection of prayers and Scripture passages on mercy and forgiveness.

I hope that through these pages you'll discover the confidence you need to take full advantage of this amazing sacrament and grow closer to our loving God. He's waiting to heal you, strengthen you, and set you free. All He needs is for you to take the first step.

See you in the Confession line!

SR. ALLISON REGINA

lifelong sinner in need of God's grace



PART ONE

**THE SACRAMENT
OF RECONCILIATION**

WHAT CONFESSION IS . . . AND ISN'T

Before it can rise, a [hot air] balloon needs to unload the weights. To rise to God, the soul needs to remove the small weights that are sins.

*Blessed Carlo Acutis,
patron of computer programmers*



The Big Picture

The sacrament of Reconciliation, also called Confession or the sacrament of Penance, isn't some elaborate ritual invented by the Catholic Church just to torture us. Nor is it a magic formula that we can

use as an excuse to get away with things with the mentality, “Oh, I’ll just confess it later, God will forgive me.” Confession is a sacrament. Sacraments are visible signs given to us by Jesus that produce invisible, spiritual effects. They are one of the most important ways God communicates His grace to us and intervenes directly in our lives. The sacrament of Reconciliation is a gift from Jesus, who has the power to forgive sins because He is God. We see in the Bible how Jesus often forgave the sins of those who came to Him for healing. Although only God can forgive sins, Jesus made His apostles ministers of this power through the Holy Spirit when He appeared to them after the Resurrection and told them, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (John 20:23). The apostles and their successors, the bishops and priests, carried out this ministry of reconciliation from the very beginning of the Church. Though it looked quite different in the early centuries than it does today, the essence of the sacrament remains the same: reconciling a person with God through the divine forgiveness of sins.

So what, exactly, is a sin, and why is it so important that it’s forgiven? Sin is an action, word, or thought by which we turn away from God and His goodness. Sin

always involves making a choice against God and His will. God is pure goodness, so an act that moves us away from God is by definition evil—a sin. Sin hurts our relationship with God, placing us in opposition to Him and to all that is true and good. It also hurts us because by choosing sin, we are separating ourselves from the very source of life and love. This has consequences not only for us, but for the people and world around us. When we lie or steal, other people suffer from the injustice we're inflicting on them. When we are greedy or wasteful, this can also have negative implications for the environment and other living creatures, whom we have the responsibility to care for as part of God's creation. Sin disrupts the harmony God intended and replaces it with discord, pain, and chaos.

Even though we know sin is bad, we keep doing it. Maybe we come up with excuses to justify it to ourselves, or we sacrifice the greater good because we want to experience a passing pleasure. We might think we know better—that an action isn't really all that bad, or that it might be wrong for others but fine for us. Or we simply give in to the temptation to indulge our rebellious streak. We might even be trying our hardest to do the right thing and then fall in a moment of weakness.

This perpetual struggle against sin is nothing new, and even great saints struggled with it. Saint Paul once lamented, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19). Through our own powers, it is an impossible battle to win. But God didn’t leave us alone.

God sent His Son to save us. Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity become man. He came into the world to save us from our sins and restore the harmony God always intended. The word “redemption” originally meant gaining someone’s freedom by paying a price or paying off a debt. This is exactly what Jesus did for us by dying on the Cross. Jesus was completely innocent. He never sinned. Yet He took upon Himself the weight of the sins of all of humanity, bringing them to the Cross. By shedding His Blood, He set us free from sin and death. Saint Peter says we were ransomed, “not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18–19). We were ransomed as a human race, but we were also ransomed as individuals. If you were the only person in the whole world, Jesus still would have come and shed all His Blood on the Cross to redeem *you*.

In a sense, the sacrament of Reconciliation is a highly personal encounter with the saving grace of Christ. In

the confessional (the room or booth where you make your Confession), there is no hiding in the crowd or pointing fingers at other people we believe are worse than we are. We come as individuals to own up to the sins we've committed, laying everything bare so that the redemption Jesus won for us on the Cross can be applied directly to us and our unique situations. Through the grace of the sacrament, we encounter Jesus, and He heals our souls, just as He did for the people who came to Him in the Bible.

The Nuts and Bolts

In order for a Confession to be valid and fruitful (for it to “work”), there are certain essential elements that must be present. As with the sacrament of the Eucharist, we need a priest as the minister of the sacrament. But the “material” for the sacrament of Reconciliation is a little different from other sacraments like Baptism or the Eucharist, which require water or bread and wine. In order for the priest to give the absolution (forgiveness), there are three things *we* need to contribute: