

An Examination of Conscience for Children

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Catholic. Pastoral. Trusted.

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**“Contrition is
the first step in
learning to love
ourselves, other
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What Is This “Confession” Thing, Anyway?

Imagine you broke your dad’s trophy—the one he won for playing high school football. It’s one of his most prized possessions. What do you do?

He’s busy all the time, so maybe he won’t notice if you prop it back together on the shelf. Maybe you can hide it behind the pile of shoes in your closet, and he’ll think Mom put it away. Or maybe he’ll never find it. Nobody has to know. Life can just go on like usual. Right?

Except it doesn’t.

When you know you’ve done something wrong, it feels awful. It’s like a billion squirrels are digging around inside. Your heart feels like it weighs a thousand pounds. You can’t enjoy anything.

This is your conscience talking, and although it feels bad, it's actually a really good thing. Why? Because it shows that you can feel God living within your heart. You know you've done something wrong, and you're sorry for it. It's almost like you can feel a tiny bit of the pain your actions caused somebody else. And that helps you understand God a little better, too, because God feels the pain of every one of his children.

Feeling the presence of God inside your heart makes you want to be more like him on the outside, too. When we're truly sorry for our sins—so sorry that we don't ever want to commit them again—that's called contrition. Contrition is the first step in learning to love ourselves, other people, and the whole world the way God does.

God knew we'd need help. That's why he gave us the sacrament of reconciliation.

Read this story from the Gospel of John:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained." (20:19–23)

This story tells about the beginning of the sacrament of reconciliation. Any sin we commit hurts a human being in one way or another. So God gave human beings—our priests—the power to stand in Christ’s place and forgive sins, just as Christ did for so many people during his time on earth.

If It’s Not “Serious” Sin, Why Do I Need to Confess It?

There are two kinds of sin. The really serious ones are called “mortal” sins—things such as murder or stealing or not going to Mass on Sunday without good reason. People who have committed mortal sins are not allowed to receive Communion until they go to confession.

But it takes a lot for a sin to be called “mortal.” Not only is it a big, big sin, but we have to know it’s a big sin and choose to do it anyway.

Most of us don’t do that. We commit smaller, “venial” sins. But even though they’re small,

they still hurt us, others, and God. Think about it this way. What happens when a drop of rain falls on the surface of a quiet lake? It sends out ripples in every direction.

Everybody's little sins are like raindrops. The ripples from one raindrop fade away quickly, but when there are many raindrops, the ripples run into each other until the whole surface is churning. In short, it's a big mess!

That's what sins do. And that's why we need them wiped away. That's why we go to confession.

But It's Scary!

You might be afraid to tell a priest what you've done wrong. What if he tells your parents? What if he gets mad or thinks you're a bad person?

Well, you don't have to worry. First, there's something called the "seal of the confessional." This is a fancy term that means a priest is not allowed to tell *anyone* what he heard during the sacrament of reconciliation. It's between

you and God. The priest is just there to help. He will never, ever tell anyone what you said.

As for a priest thinking you're a bad person, don't forget that priests are human beings, too! They commit sins every day, just like you. They have to go to confession, too. (Did you ever think about that? They do!)

Plus, priests hear a lot of confessions. Chances are, two days from now they won't even remember what you told them. Their job is to offer God's forgiveness, not to keep track.

So let's talk about how to get ready to go to confession.