

An Examination of Conscience for Teens

Sarah Reinhard



Catholic. Pastoral. Trusted.

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Kevin Zubeł, CSsR, Provincial
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Second Edition

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**“Confession is
our chance to
make things
right with God.”**

For many Catholics, confession is right up there with spiders, heights, and death as one of the things they're most afraid of. Even if they don't *say* they're afraid of confession, how else do you explain the lack of people approaching the sacrament?

I won't lie to you: confession *is* hard. It's challenging. It takes courage. It goes against what we see and hear in the media and popular culture. For one thing, you have to think about what you've done wrong. For another, you have to tell *another person* what you've done wrong. Finally, going to confession requires some planning.

As hard as it is, though, confession is one of the great gems of our Catholic faith. It's worth learning more about before you give up on it. God is the doctor of our souls, and confession is one of the most important ways that we are healed. Confession, or reconciliation, is one

of the seven sacraments of the Church, which means it is an outward sign of inward grace. So confession gives us the ability to experience God's forgiveness first-hand, face-to-face. Confession is our chance to make things right with God.

"But," you might be thinking, "I haven't done anything to confess!" Well, neither have I...until I think about it. If someone such as St. Teresa of Calcutta or St. John Paul II went to confession weekly or daily, then I probably have *something* to confess. Sin weighs a person down. If you're not careful, sins can become habits. Habits are hard to break, and after a while, you hardly notice them. And you know what? The more I get in the habit of going to confession, the more I notice that I have no shortage of things to confess.

Sin: Just What Is It (Besides Three Little Letters)?

For me, the best image is that of stepping away from God. When I sin, I'm taking a step away from God. Instead of keeping myself in line with his will, I'm doing what I want to do.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “sin is an offense against God” (CCC 1850). Sin turns our hearts away from God's love for us (CCC 1850). It is, at the heart of things, disobedience.

Think about it: What did Adam and Eve do in the Garden of Eden? They disobeyed.

And when we sin, we are disobeying what God asks of us. We are stepping away.

There are many kinds of sin, but we'll focus on mortal and venial.

What Is a Mortal Sin?

Mortal sin is a sin that attacks what the *Catechism* calls “the vital principle within us”: charity. Charity here means more than just donating to people who are poor. It has two parts: love of neighbor and love of God.

To be a mortal sin, a sin must meet three conditions:

- The object is a grave matter.
- It is committed with full knowledge.
- It is committed with full consent.

Grave matter is not determined by popular opinion or by what others think. We can define it by looking at the Ten Commandments. We can also look at the answer Jesus gave to the rich young man in Mark 10:19: “You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness;

you shall not defraud; honor your father and your mother.”

The seriousness of sin, or how grave it is, is on a scale of sorts. For example, murder is graver—more serious—than theft. We also have to look at who’s wronged: violence against our parent is graver—worse—than violence against a stranger.

To have full knowledge, you know that what you’re doing is wrong. To have committed the sin with full consent, you agree to it and choose to do it. However, that doesn’t mean that ignorance—not knowing—is a valid excuse. We are responsible for knowing right from wrong.

If you have committed a mortal sin, you need to go to confession as soon as possible to make things right with God. You’re not supposed to receive Communion until you have gone to confession, because by committing a sin you have closed yourself off from God. You aren’t

open to receiving him, even in the Eucharist. We call that sin “sacrilege” because it is a sin against the Eucharist.