

Penance Service or Extended Examination of Conscience

Use this complete prayer service with Chapter 6, Section 4 of Your Life in Christ. You may also choose to use only individual parts of the prayer service.

Needs:

- copies as needed or projection
- a quiet, prayerful environment. A church or chapel is best, but if that is not available then a space of prayer with dimmer lights, some lit candles, and a central focus of prayer such as a crucifix.
- a priest for the Sacrament of Penance if available

Prayer Introduction

(It is best to do this prayer service in the context of a Sacrament of Penance service if possible. However, it can be used as a stand-alone time of prayer if the Sacrament of Penance is not available.)

One of the greatest gifts you have from Jesus is the power of a priest to forgive your sins. A life of ongoing conversion and growth asks you to honestly examine your spiritual and moral progress. This can take courage and humility to own up to your sins. Just like the prodigal son in the reading below, when you are truly aware of the pain sin has caused, then your heart is most open to the transformational power of God's mercy.

(Optional) Today you have the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance. Sometimes it can be easy to see preparing for this sacrament like preparing a list of mistakes you have made. However, it is about more than listing your transgressions. In this sacrament God is personally available to you, to listen to your troubles, help you discern what is getting in the way of a right relationship with him and others, and to help you be transformed by his grace.

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You have an opportunity now to begin this process, first by putting yourself in the place of the two sons in the Gospel reading we will hear. Then, you will take some time to slowly examine your conscience. Remember, the more honest and open you are in this process, the more deeply you let yourself into relation with Christ.

Scripture Reading

Leader: (Stand and begin with the Sign of the Cross.)

Priest/Reader 1: A reading from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (Lk 15: 11-32).

A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

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Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, "My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found."

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Examination of Conscience

Priest/Leader: (Have students sit.) Jesus, we come before you today because we seek your goodness through the Sacrament of Penance. Help us to know ourselves in your truth as you see us today.

Leader: (Read through the Examination at a slower pace allowing students space to reflect. Alternatively, give them each a copy of the Examination and allow them to read through prayerfully at their own pace.)

My Relationship Towards God

How do I pray?

- Out of need for something? Out of fear? Out of desire for personal gain? Out of my personal relationship and respect for God? I don't pray

How do I attend Mass?

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- Out of habit? Bitterly because I feel I have to? Out of fear? When it fits my schedule? Regularly, with respect for the Eucharist? As a part of the community? I don't attend Mass.

How do I use God's name?

- To swear? To express anger? As a joke? Out of respect and love?

How do I treat God's creation?

- Respect other people equally regardless of who they are... Judge people by appear, status, or power? I don't care if I waste the earth's resources? My relationship with God is separate from everything else and has no impact on how I see or treat the world around me.

My Relationship Towards Other People

How do I treat my family?

- Help when it's needed, even when it is not convenient? Tease my siblings? Tell my parents where I am going and what I am doing? Believe that family comes first? Fight with or ignore members of my family? I forgive them when I feel they've hurt me.

How do I treat other people's sexuality?

- Use crude language and jokes? Use people for my own physical pleasure? See sex as something to be shared by anyone who thinks they love each other? See sex as a gift from God and something that should be saved for marriage.

How do I treat my teachers?

- Am disruptive? Don't do my homework? Am rude? Am bored and don't pay attention? I do all my work and show respect.

How do I treat people that I don't know?

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- Cheat or lie to get what I need? Kind and courteous? Don't care because I'll never see them again? I share what I have with others.

How do I treat my friends?

- With love and respect? Use them to gain popularity? Make fun of them behind their backs? Accept and understand their differences? Forgive them? Encourage them.

My Relationship Towards Myself

How do I see myself?

- Created in the image and likeness of God? I focus only on what I don't like about myself.

How do I treat myself?

- Make choices based on how easy they are? Misuse drugs, tobacco or alcohol? Disrespect my sexuality? Cause physical damage to my body? I take care of my physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Closing Reflection

Now that you have reflected on your relationship toward God, toward other people, and toward yourself, ask yourself:

- For what do I seek forgiveness?
- How do I want God to transform me?
- What will I confess and ask God's forgiveness and grace to change?

(End with the Sacrament of Penance if available.)

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