

# THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY: EXAMINING YOUR CONSCIENCE

The spiritual exercise of examining our conscience is something that every Christian should do on a regular basis. The habit of reviewing our actions or behaviors each day to see how our life is, or is not, in accord with the way God asks us to live can be a wonderful opportunity for spiritual discernment and growth.

Of course, as the *Rite of Penance* reminds us, “the inner examination of heart and the outward accusation must be made in the light of God’s mercy.” (6) In other words, the way for us to begin to examine our conscience and to uncover the areas of sin in our life that need to be healed by God’s forgiveness is to start with God’s love. God has created each and every one of us, redeemed us through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, and has given us all that we need to live a good and moral life. In the light of God’s goodness and mercy, we should never be afraid to be brutally honest with ourselves about what our sins are.

When going to the Sacrament of Penance, it is important to spend time examining our conscience before we go to Confession. It’s not helpful to think about our sins for the first time only while we are waiting on line, for example. If examining our conscience is a regular part of our prayer life, this preparation for the sacrament will come easy.

In examining our conscience, we should look at our relationships both with God and with other people. We should ask ourselves if we are really growing to be a

better, more loving, and less self-centered person, and if we are growing closer to God. We should pray to the Holy Spirit for the Spirit’s guidance to see those areas of our life where sin has damaged our relationship with God and with others.

Sometimes we will discover that our sins are quite specific and have to do with concrete actions; other times we will discover that our sinfulness is related to a general pattern of behavior or attitude. To help us in discerning what our sins are, the Ten Commandments are a great place to start, as are the Beatitudes, as found in Matthew 5:1-12, for example. There are also many guides to examining one’s conscience that can be found in spiritual reading and in other Catholic resources. For example, the Bishops of the United States have provided some guides for the examination of conscience on their website: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/penance/examinations-of-conscience.cfm>

Remember that not all sin is equally serious. Sin might be serious enough such that I have broken off my relationship with God (mortal sin), or it might be less serious and only damage my relationship with God (venial sin). Whichever it is, we should never hesitate to confess all our sins openly.

Our celebration of the Sacrament of Penance will be all the more fruitful and beneficial to the degree we have done the work ahead of time in examining our conscience. ✠

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