Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church
St. Nikodemos Catechism Program

"MAKE ME TO KNOW YOUR WAYS, O LORD, TEACH ME YOUR PATHS." PSALM 25:4
Patron Saint: Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite

Saint Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain was born on the Greek island of Naxos in the year 1748, and was named Nicholas at Baptism. At the age of twenty-six, he arrived on Mount Athos and received the monastic tonsure in the Dionysiou monastery with the name Nikodemos. As his first obedience, Nikodemos served as his monastery’s secretary. Two years after his entry into the Dionysiou monastery, the Metropolitan of Corinth, Saint Macarius Notaras (April 17), arrived there, and he assigned the young monk to edit the manuscript of the Philokalia, which he found in 1777 at the Vatopedi monastery. Editing this book was the beginning of many years of literary work by Saint Nikodemos. The young monk soon moved to the Pantokrator skete, where he was under obedience to the Elder Arsenius of the Peloponnesos, under whose guidance he zealously studied Holy Scripture and the works of the Holy Fathers.

In 1783 Saint Nikodemos was tonsured to the Great Schema, and he lived in complete silence for six years. When Saint Macarius of Corinth next visited Athos, he gave the obedience of editing of the writings of Saint Symeon the New Theologian to Saint Nikodemos, who gave up his ascetic silence and occupied himself once more with literary work. From that time until his death he continued zealously to toil in this endeavor.

Not long before his repose, Father Nikodemos, worn out by his literary work and ascetic efforts, went to live at the skete of the iconographers Hieromonks Stephen and Neophytus Skourtaius, who were brothers by birth. He asked them to help in the publication of his works, since he was hindered by his infirmity. There Saint Nikodemos peacefully fell asleep in the Lord on July 14, 1809.

According to the testimony of his contemporaries, Saint Nikodemos was a simple man, without malice, unassuming, and distinguished by his profound concentration. He possessed remarkable mental abilities: he knew the Holy Scriptures by heart, remembering even the chapter, verse and page, and he could even recite long passages from the writings of the Holy Fathers from memory.

The literary work of Saint Nikodemos was varied. He wrote a preface to the Philokalia, and short lives of the ascetics. Among the saint’s ascetical works, his edition of Lorenzo Scupoli’s book, Unseen Warfare is well known, and has been translated into Russian, English, and other languages. A remarkable work of the ascetic was his Manual of Confession (Venice,
1794, 1804, etc.), summarized in his treatise, “Three Discourses on Repentance”. His most edifying book Christian Morality was published in Venice in 1803.

The saint also made great contributions by publishing liturgical books. Using materials from the manuscript collections of Mt Athos, he published sixty-two Canons to the Most Holy Theotokos under the title, New Theotokarion (Venice, 1796, 1849).

Saint Nikodemos prepared a new edition of the the Pedalion or Rudder, comprised of the canons of the Holy Apostles, of the holy Ecumenical and Local Synods, and of the holy Fathers.

Saint Nikodemos had a special love for hagiography, as attested by his work, New Eklogion (Venice, 1803), and his posthumous book, The New Synaxarion in three volumes (Venice, 1819). He completed a Modern Greek translation of a book by Saint Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria, Paul's Fourteen Epistles in three volumes. Saint Nikodemos himself wrote An Interpretation of the Seven Catholic Epistles (also published at Venice in 1806 and 1819).

The exceedingly wise Nikodemos is also known as the author and interpreter of hymns. His Canon in honor of the Mother of God “Quick to Hear” (November 9) and his “Service and Encomium in Honor of the Fathers who Shone on the Holy Mountain of Athos” are used even beyond the Holy Mountain. Some of his other books include the Heortodromion, an interpretation of the Canons which are sung on Feasts of the Lord and of the Mother of God (Venice, 1836), and The New Ladder, an interpretation of the 75 Hymns of Degrees (Anabathmoi) of the liturgical book called the Oktoechos (Constantinople, 1844).

Purpose of the Catechism Program:

To prepare catechumens to be received into the Holy Orthodox Church through an alignment of faith and practice so that they live a solid and fruitful Christian life in the Church. Please note: completion of the catechism program does not guarantee entrance into the Church, which is at the sole discretion of the pastor.

Catechists: Fr. Hector Firoglanis & Fr. Theodosios Palis

The job of the Catechist is to shepherd the catechumens through a minimum time of one year in the process of formation in the faith and practice of the Holy Orthodox Church.

Catechumen Requirements:

- The catechumens main task during the Catechumenate is to be established, strengthened, and confirmed in the Orthodox Faith. They should be ‘listeners, not talkers.’ They should listen to instruction asking questions of the priest, deacon, lay catechist and sponsors but not opine with others or get into theological dialogues or disputes with others. They may invite others to church with “Come
and See,” but should not instruct heterodox or non-Christians in dogmatic or
spiritual matters including on social media. No ministry or activity in the Church
shall be placed before a Catechumen’s learning and preparation.

- Must attend the Catechetical Classes, or meet with the catechist to discuss the
missed material (whether by phone, zoom, or in person).
- Must attend Feasts, Lenten (especially Presanctified Liturgies) and Holy Week
evening services.
- Must offer an ‘unofficial’ Confession monthly.
- Serve on at least 2 of the Food Box Distribution Teams (or other service teams).
- Begin to tithe (give 10% of income), or a purposeful growth toward tithing their
income to Christ in His Church. “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be
also.” (Matt. 6:21)

Meetings Requirements:

1. Bi-Monthly Meetings (1 meeting per month in June, July & August)
2. Supplemental Audio Catechetical Lectures by Fr. Josiah Trenham
   a. January 16th - Introductions & Catechumen Packet
   b. January 23rd - Church History: The Apostles through the 7 Ecumenical
      Councils (Part 2 / Lecture 1: The Mystery of Holy Baptism)
   c. February 6th - Church History: Islam, Crusesades, Diaspora &
      Communism (Part 2 / Lecture 2: The Mystery of Holy Chrismation)
   d. February 13th - Christian Living: Evangelism & Missions (Part 2 /
      Lecture 3: The Mystery of the Holy Eucharist)
   e. March - House of God: Architecture & Iconography (Part 2 / Lecture 5:
      The Mystery of the Holy Priesthood)
   f. March - House of God: Singing & Hymnography (Part 2 / Lecture 6: The
      Mystery of Holy Matrimony)
   g. April - Christian Living: Obedience, Humility, Morality & Community
   h. April - Christian Living: Holy Confession & Preparing for Holy
      Communion (Part 2 / Lecture 4: The Mystery of Holy Confession)
i. **May - Christian Living**: Liturgical Offerings; Prophora, Kolyva, Flowers, Candles, Fanouropita, Artoclasia, Vasilopita (Part 2 / Lecture 7: The Mystery of Holy Unction)

j. **May - Stewardship**: Tithing, Ministry, Hospitality (Part 2 / Lecture 8: The Mystery of Death & the Funeral)

k. **June**

l. **July**

m. **August**

n. **September - Holy Scripture**: The Old Testament (Part 1 / Lecture 1: The True God)


q. **October - Holy Scripture**: Liturgical usage, Praying the Psalms, & Reading the Bible (Part 1 / Lecture 4: Jesus Christ, the Son of God)

r. **November - Christian Living**: Prayer & Fasting (Part 1 / Lecture 5: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World)

s. **November - Christian Living**: Pilgrimage & Almsgiving (Part 1 / Lecture 6: Repentance and Faith)


u. **December - House of God**: Church Etiquette (Part 1 / Lecture 8: The Church and the Mother of God)
1. Practicum:
   a. Field Trips:
      i. Pilgrimages:
         1. Visit at least one Orthodox Monastery (e.g. Holy Protection, St. Nektarios or St. Tikhons)
         2. Visit the Myrrh Streaming Icon in Taylor, PA
      ii. Visiting other Orthodox Churches:
          a. Antiochian
          b. ROCOR
          c. OCA
          d. Serbian
          e. Romanian
          f. Albanian
          g. Bulgarian, etc.
   b. Internships
      i. Serving on Food Box Distribution Teams
      ii. Serving on Off the Street Teams
      iii. Joining in at least one of the Ministries from our Ministry Catalog
      iv. Assisting with Parish Festival and Parish Retreats

2. Reading Suggestions:
   a. Read and then Report completion to the Lead Catechist.
      i. Starting Down the Royal Path: How to Become Orthodox by Fr. Josiah Trenham  
         http://saintandrew.net/catechumens
      ii. BASIC DOGMATIC TEACHING - An Orthodox Handbook by Fr. Anthony Alevizopoulos
      iii. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology by Fr. Michael Pomazansky
      iv. The Christian vs. The University by Garrison McKeen Cattell
      v. For the Life of the World by Fr. Alexander Schmemann
      vi. Way of the Ascetics by Tito Colliander
viii. Baptism Service & Pre-Communion Prayers
ix. *The Orthodox Church* by Bishop Kallistos Ware
x. *The Orthodox Way* (1998) by Bishop Kallistos Ware
xi. *Follow Me* by Augustinos Kantiotes
xii. *On the Priesthood* by St John Chrysostom
xiii. Baptismal Catecheses by St. John Chrysostom

3. **Forms and Documentation:**
   a. Catechumen Patron Saint Form
   b. Catechumen Renunciations and Affirmations Form
   c. Catechumen Personal Information Form
   d. Catechumen Ortho-Praxis Form
   e. Pledge Form
   f. Ministry Catalog Link & Printout

4. **Appendices**
   a. Appendix 1 - Study Questions for Audio Lectures
   b. Appendix 2 - Confession Resources
Catechumen Patron Saint Form

All Orthodox Christians are given Christian names by Christ through his priests. The Christian name is the name of the person's patron saint and serves as one's first name.

The catechumen is encouraged to propose to the priest a patron saint as soon as possible. It is recommended that if the catechumen already has a Christian name that this name be retained. Devotion to this saint should begin, if not already in existence. Catechumens must obtain the blessing of the priest for their proposed patron saint.

Name: ______________________________________________

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will be your Christian name with which you are received into Orthodoxy? Write it below.</th>
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<td>Who is this Saint? Obtain the life story of this saint and study it. Summarize it below.</td>
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<td>What is the date of your nameday? (Month, Day)</td>
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<td>What is the troparion of your patron saint? Write it below.</td>
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<td>Do you know the prayer to your patron saint? Write it below.</td>
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<td>How does an Orthodox Christian celebrate his/her nameday? Write it below.</td>
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Catechumen Renunciations and Affirmations Form

**Exercise:**
Part of the formal process of conversion is clearly identifying the heresies of one’s previous confession and renouncing them. Heresy is from the devil, and all Christians are called upon by God to hate with righteous hatred all heresy. Use the chart below to write down Orthodox doctrines and next to them the doctrines of your former confession which are heretical. Be thorough.

Having identified your heresies you will be asked by the priest who is catechizing and receiving you into the Orthodox Church to renounce these heresies and to affirm Orthodox teachings. In some traditions this formal renunciation takes place at the beginning of the service of the reception of converts.

At the same time it is of the utmost importance for converts to realize that wherever truth is found, it is authored by God Himself. In virtually all religious traditions there are true beliefs and practices, and in some there are many. In the procession of conversion the catechumen should also be able to identify and appreciate the Orthodox elements of his previous confession and be genuinely thankful for them. It is very important to avoid a critical and negative spirit. (List of common heresies are listed below this form)

| Name: |
| Write the name of your former Confession: |

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<th>Orthodox Beliefs</th>
<th>Heresies/Errors</th>
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(List of common heresies next page)
List of Common Heresies

- **Filioque** – The word *filioque* means “and the son” in Latin. It is referred to as the “filioque clause” because the phrase “and the son” was added to the Nicene Creed by the Roman Catholics in the 11th century, indicating that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father “and the Son.”

- **Papal Infallibility** – Papal infallibility is a dogma of the Latin Church which states that, in virtue of the promise of Jesus to Peter, the Pope is preserved from the possibility of error "when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church" (Letter of Pope Agatho, 680, on the two wills of Christ, received by the Third Council of Constantinople). This doctrine was defined dogmatically in the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870. The doctrine of infallibility relies on one of the cornerstones of Latin dogma: that of petrine supremacy of the pope, and his authority to be the ruling agent in deciding what will be accepted as formal beliefs in the Roman Catholic Church.

- **Iconoclasm** – Iconoclasm constituted a ban on religious images, accompanied by widespread destruction of images and persecution of supporters of the veneration of images. Today this heresy consists of viewing the reverence of Saints through icons as a form of idolatry.

- **Monophysitism** – Greek: monos (meaning "only, single" and physis meaning "nature"), is the Christological position that, after the union of the divine nature and the human nature at the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Co-Eternal Son and Word (Logos) of God, had only a single "nature" which was either divine or a synthesis of divine and human.

- **“Symbolism Only” and Sacramental Theology** – The belief that Baptism, the Eucharist and other Mysteries are non-efficacious and only symbolic.

- **Sola Scriptura** – The Bible alone is authoritative for Christian dogma.

- **Sola Fidei** – Salvation by Faith Alone. The doctrine of sola fide or "by faith alone" asserts God's pardon for guilty sinners is granted to and received through faith, conceived as excluding all "works", alone. God, on the basis of the life, death, and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ alone, grants sinners judicial pardon, or justification, which is received solely through faith.

- **Millennialism/Chiliasm** – Christ will come back and rule on earth for 1,000 years before the end of the world.

- **Marian errors** – The belief that the Holy Virgin was not a perpetual virgin, had other children, committed actual sins, or was conceived without original sin (Immaculate Conception), etc.

- **Total Depravity** – Total depravity is the fallen state of man as a result of original sin. The doctrine of total depravity asserts that people are by nature neither inclined nor able to respond to the Gospel or to love God with their heart, mind, and strength. Therefore, in Reformed theology, if God is to save anyone He must predestine, call, or elect individuals to salvation in order to enable fallen man to respond to the Gospel.

- **Instantaneous salvation** – The belief that justification is a once-for-all, instantaneous pronouncement guaranteeing eternal salvation, no matter how wickedly a person may live from that point on.

- **Invisible Church** – The invisible church or church invisible is a theological concept of an "invisible" body of the elect who are known only to God, in contrast to the "visible church"—that is, the institutional body on earth which preaches the gospel and administers the sacraments. Every member of the invisible church is saved, while the visible church contains some individuals who are saved and others who are unsaved.
- **Judaizing Errors** – Refers to a Christian who has accepted the necessity of adhering to specific OT laws such as, OT dietary restrictions, circumcision, Sabbath observance, or observation of the Passover.

- **Soul Sleep** – “Soul Sleep,” means that after death believers are not conscious of anything and their souls become completely inert until the time of the final resurrection of the dead. During this period of soul sleep, the soul resides in the memory of God.

- **Annihilationism** – This refers to the belief that when the wicked die, the soul ceases to exist, or will cease to exist at the Judgment – i.e., the non-immortality of soul.

- **Original Guilt** – The belief that man is inherently guilty of the sin of Adam from birth.

- **Created Grace** – This belief understands grace not as God’s uncreated energies, but as a created substance, hence obliterating the believer’s authentic union with God Himself.

- **Purgatory** – is the condition of purification or temporary punishment by a purifying fire by which those who die in a state of grace are believed to be made ready for Heaven.

- **Indulgences** – The full or partial remission of temporal punishment due for sins which have not been fully repented of. The belief is that indulgences draw on the Treasury of Merit accumulated by Christ's superabundantly meritorious sacrifice on the cross and the virtues and penances of the saints. They are granted for specific good works and prayers and may be obtained for those in purgatory by others on their behalf.

- **Development of Doctrine** – the belief that doctrine improves over time.

- **Superogation** – The technical term for the class of actions that go “beyond the call of duty.” The special merit of supererogatory acts accredited to their agent can be used both for that individual's own salvation and for the salvation of others. In the Roman Catholic Church, the “superabundant merit,” most typically collected by the actions of Jesus and the saints, who far exceeded what was required for their own salvation, is deposited in the Spiritual Treasury of the Church to be disposed by the Pope and the bishops for remitting the sins of other, ordinary believers.
# Catechumen Personal Information Form

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<th>Name:</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Christian/First Name</th>
<th>Middle Name</th>
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<th>Marital Status:</th>
<th>Married:</th>
<th>Unmarried:</th>
<th>Divorced:</th>
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<td>Marital Status:</td>
<td>Mark X in box indicating status.</td>
<td>Date of Divorce(s)</td>
<td>Attach copy of divorce decree(s)</td>
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**Reasons for Divorce(s)** *(Attach other sheet if needed)*

**Children:** Please provide each child’s full name, age and birthdate.

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<th>Child 1</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthdate: Month/Day/Year</th>
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<th>Child 2</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthdate: Month/Day/Year</th>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthdate: Month/Day/Year</th>
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<th>Child 4</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Birthdate: Month/Day/Year</th>
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<th>Child 5</th>
<th>Name</th>
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**Employment:** Please provide employment history.

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<th>Current Employer</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Years Employed</th>
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<th>Past Employer 1</th>
<th>Employer</th>
<th>Years Employed</th>
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<th>Past Employer 2</th>
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| Education:      | | |
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| High School     | Year | College | Major(s) | Graduate School | Degree |
|                 |      |         |          |                |        |
(Personal Information continued)
Name: __________________________________________

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<tr>
<th>Month and Year you became a catechumen:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Describe your Religious Background <em>(Attach other sheet if needed)</em></th>
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<th>Church/Denominational Affiliation prior to Orthodoxy</th>
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<td>Church/Denomination</td>
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<td>Church/Denomination</td>
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<td>Past 3</td>
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<td>Church/Denomination</td>
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<tr>
<th>If Christian, were you baptized in your previous confession?</th>
<th>(Y/N)</th>
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<td>If yes, a copy of this baptismal certificate must be attached to this form.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Have you notified your previous confession to remove you from their membership rolls?</th>
<th>(Y/N)</th>
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<tr>
<td>This is a requirement for all catechumens upon enrollment in the catechumenate of Annunciation Orthodox Church.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Do you have a criminal record?  Y / N</th>
<th>(Y/N)</th>
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<td>If yes, please arrange to speak with the pastor in person concerning this.</td>
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<th>Hobbies/Interests</th>
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<th>Any other important information you would like the priest to know?</th>
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Ortho-Praxis Form
Personal Prayer Rule, Scripture Reading, Confession, Fasting and AlmsGiving and Service

Personal Prayer Rule

“But as regards prayer, it is certainly our bounden duty to use it every day, morning and evening, before and after both dinner and supper, as far as possible, at the beginning and ending of every work” (Q&A #551 The Longer Catechism of the Orthodox Church – by Metropolitan Philaret, 1830).

A prayer rule is the outline of our daily prayer routine. It is important to have a tangible rule blessed by one’s spiritual Father. There are also fine resources for developing one’s Prayer Rule online. One link is: http://www.orthodoxprayer.org.

Name:______________________________________

Answer the questions below regarding your Personal Prayer Rule:

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<th>When will you privately pray during each day?</th>
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<th>What non-obligatory services will you attend at Church?</th>
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Scripture Reading

We should read scripture daily. There are Orthodox online scripture readings available. There are Orthodox daily scripture reading apps available for smartphones, and there is a “Read the Bible in a Year” outline available on the St Andrew website to aid you in your scripture reading.

Please answer the questions below regarding your daily scripture reading:

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<th>When will you read Holy Scripture?</th>
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Fasting

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<th>Do you need to fast from anything particular other than that expected of every other Orthodox Christian?</th>
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Almsgiving and Service

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<th>Besides your tithe are there areas of service you wish to make an offering to God on a regular basis?</th>
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Confession

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Annunciation Ministries

Link to our Ministries Catalog: https://tinyurl.com/Lanc-Ministries
Appendix 1 – Study Questions for Audio Lectures
Advent Season

Lecture One: The True God
1. What did we learn about coming to know God? List at least at least four points made by Father Josiah in the opening statements of this lecture.
2. What are some false concepts that people believe about God?
3. What are the consequences of having false beliefs about God?
4. List several ways that God reveals Himself to us.
5. We cannot completely know God – how is He unknowable?
6. What can we know about God?

Lecture Two: The Human Being
1. What was God’s purpose for us when He made us?
2. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
3. What does it mean to be “Human” when we consider mankind as fallen versus unfallen?

Lecture 3: Sin
1. What is the consequence of sin?
2. Describe the difference between ancestral and original sin.
3. What is meant by generational sin?
4. How should we view our sin before God?
5. What are the eight vices or cardinal sins?

Lecture 4: Jesus Christ, the Son of God
1. List a minimum of four truths we know about Jesus Christ as revealed in scripture?
2. Describe the persons of the Holy Trinity in relation to each other.
3. Who is Jesus Christ as described in the Nicene Creed?
4. What is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Lecture 5: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World
1. List five truths found in the Gospel testimony regarding Jesus Christ.
2. Briefly describe what these terms and phases mean relative Jesus Christ as Savior:
   1) Incarnation
   2) Obedience and Sinlessness
   3) The Temptations of Christ in the Desert
   4) Passion of the Cross
   5) Burial
   6) Resurrection from the Dead
   7) Ascension
   8) Return

Lecture 6: Repentance and Faith
1. Describe the person of the Holy Spirit
2. What is the work of the Holy Spirit? List at least three things.
3. What does it mean to be "sealed" by the Holy Spirit during chrismation immediately following holy baptism?
4. What role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of a Christian in terms of continuous learning and of gaining the mind of Christ?
5. What does this lesson teach us about the Saints?

Lecture 7: The Holy Spirit
1. What is meant by saying “Repentance is a way of life”?
2. Describe at least five characteristics of repentance – what is it?
3. What are the three ways the Holy Church forms repentance in Christians?
4. What is the relationship between repentance and faith?
5. What is the relationship between repentance and joy?

Lecture 8: The Church and the Mother of God
1. Many names are given for the Church in this lecture. List five of them.
2. What is the Church?
3. There is one Holy and Apostolic Church. What is the Churches reaction to false teachers and assemblies and schisms?
4. Explain these points regarding the Church as a spiritual hospital:
   1) The Christian as a sick patient
   2) The Christian in recovery
   3) The priest as spiritual physician
   4) The Christian as athlete
Study questions for Audio Lectures - Lenten Season

Lecture 1: The Mystery of Holy Baptism
1. What are some non-biblical forms of initiation into the Christian church, taught by the non-Orthodox?
2. Although there is no true number of sacraments in the Church, name the seven that are most often mentioned and taught in Orthodoxy.
3. How did the Western Catholic Church alter the sacrament of baptism and chrismation?
4. Here in America where Anabaptist protestant sacramental thinking is prevalent, what is baptism considered to be?
5. What is a Holy Mystery?
6. What are some foreshadows of Holy Baptism that are found in the Old Testament?
7. What is the theological significance of baptism? List five among those taught in this lecture.
8. How many times can a person be baptized?
9. What is Economia? When would it be used for one seeking entry into the Orthodox Church?

Lecture 2: The Mystery of Holy Chrismation
1. How is Holy Chrismation unique among the sacraments?
2. Provide three scriptural references to Holy Chrismation, or being sealed by the Holy Spirit.
3. What is the function of the Holy Spirit relative to Chrismation?
4. How are we changed through Chrismation?
5. Where are we anointed with Chrism during Chrismation, and why?
6. What is the relationship between Anointing and service?
7. What is Holy Chism? How is it made and regarded in the church?

Lecture 3: The Mystery of Holy Eucharist
1. What is the Holy Eucharist?
2. What does Holy Eucharist provide for us as Christians?
3. What is worthy and unworthy partaking of the Holy Eucharist?
4. What is our guidance regarding frequency of receiving Holy Eucharist?
5. What is meant by “open” and “closed” communion?
6. How should one receive Holy Eucharist (approaching the chalice and partaking)?
7. What are the dual purposes of Antidoron and Blessed Bread?

Lecture 4: The Mystery of Holy Confession
1. Who should practice repentance?
2. What is repentance?
3. How does the Church form repentant people?
4. What are examples of Old Testament repentance?
5. What are examples of New Testament repentance?
6. What is a life confession?
7. What is the relationship between confession and Holy Eucharist?
8. How should one prepare for confession?
9. What is penance and how should we regard it?
10. After being received into the Church, how often should we go to confession?

Lecture 5: The Mystery of Holy Priesthood
1. What are two examples of a holy priesthood in the Old Testament?
2. Jesus Christ is the model for all priesthood. Give at least four examples of the example he left for us.
3. How did Jesus Christ reveal Himself as the Ordainer?
4. What is meant by Apostolic Succession?
5. What are the differences between a layman and a priest?
6. Explain what is meant by: “Ordination is not just one of the holy mysteries instituted by Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world, but it is the very foundation of all the other holy mysteries”.
7. What is the nature of the calling to the priesthood?
8. What are the qualifications for being a priest?

Lecture 6: The Mystery of Holy Matrimony
1. What is Christian marriage?
2. How did Jesus change marriage as understood in the Old Testament?
3. How should the Christian home be modeled?
4. How does marriage form us as Christians?
5. What is the Church teaching on premarital sex?
6. What is the Church teaching on sexual relations within a marriage?
7. What are the teachings of the church regarding divorce and remarriage?
8. What are the meaning of the acts of Crowning:
   a. Betrothal
   b. Rings
   c. Use of both Christian names
   d. Sponsors
   e. Crowns
   f. Crowning
   g. Candles
   h. Sign of the Cross
   i. Dance around the Gospel book
   j. Blessed wine and common cup
9. What is the sacrament of monastic tonsure?
10. What is the relationship between monasticism and the Church?

Lecture 7: The Mystery of Holy Unction
- What is Holy Unction?
- On what day of the year does the church participate in Holy Unction?
- Describe the service of Holy Unction.
- What other times besides the service of Holy Unction, do people receive Holy Unction?
- Where is the institution of the Mystery of Holy Unction found?
- Who performs the mystery of Holy Unction?
- How should one prepare to receive Holy Unction?
- What are the elements of Anointing?
- What are misuses of Holy Unction?
- Why isn’t everyone cured when they are anointed?

Lecture 8: The Mystery of Death and the Funeral
1. What is the origin of death?
2. Why didn’t man die immediately or cease after transgression against God?
3. Who was the first person to die in body?
4. How is death both a punishment and a blessing?
5. How is death conquered?
6. How is the Christian attitude toward death expressed during the Feast of Feasts – Great and Holy Pascha?
7. For Christians, death is the door to
8. What is the purpose of the funeral service?
Appendix 2 – Confession Resources
Catechumen Life Confession Tips

These tips plus the three reading resources provided on the following pages are helpful for preparing your life confession. They will be useful for you as aids in self-reflection and preparing for confession throughout your whole life as an Orthodox Christian.

- Read the three resources on the following pages. Read *If We Confess Our Sins* by Fr. Hopko Confession Booklet first, then the Preparation for Confession, then the General Confession of St. Ignatious Brianchannov (the general confession is a pattern for confession).
- Spend time reflecting on your life relative to these tools for self-examination.
- Prepare a written list of the things that you recognize as your sins committed before God.
- If you have committed a type of sin numerous times (it was a practice or habit) - Write down the nature of the sin rather than every instance, and pick one or two strong examples that illustrate the seriousness of this sin in your life.
- BE CONCISE. A life confession can be done in about 15 or 20 minutes. If you have more than this, you may need more than one appointment. Monthly confessions should take 2 – 5 minutes.
- If you have an embarrassing sin – that is *exactly* the sin you should confess. It is suggested that you confess the one(s) you are most uncomfortable with first, then the others.
- On the day of your confession: Say the prayers that are appropriate to say prior to confession. Fast before confession like you would before any sacrament (six hours).
- Remember that Absolution following confession is a sacrament – so you will not receive the actual sacrament of absolution until after you are received into the church. However the life confession and a practice of regular confession leading into being received has great benefit for the soul.

It would be helpful for you to get Father Josiah’s lecture series on confession and listen to it. It can be found at: [https://patristicnectar.org/bookstore_140321_1.html](https://patristicnectar.org/bookstore_140321_1.html)

When you feel ready to come in for your life confession, or if you would like to ask questions and discuss this with Father Hector, contact the church office.

Remember, there is no such thing as a “perfect” confession. Everyone will ultimately do it a bit differently, because we are all a bit different.
If We Confess Our Sins by Fr. Thomas Hopko
An Orthodox Explanation of the Mystery of Confession

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 5-10, 2:1-2)

The Christian Life

Many people confess that the practice of confession is confusing to them. They do it, they say, from a sense of habit or duty, as a ritual formality without meaning or inspiration. There are any number of reasons for this avowed condition, and we could not begin to diagnose its causes or treat its symptoms in this couple of hours tonight. It is my hope that we can come to a clear insight into the meaning of human life as God see it and shows it to us in Christ and the Church, so that the practice of confession as we do it will become meaningful for us and will be the inspiring event that it should be: the liberating experience of life in Christ and the Holy Spirit which leads to communion with God.

Be perfect as God is perfect

We claim faith in Christ. This means that we must do what Christ has shown us to do. And this means, more than anything else that we must love with perfect love. Christians are called not merely to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength; and their neighbour as themselves. These are the chief commandments of the Old Testament. However, we Christians are called to hear the Lord of the New Testament and to fulfil His commands:

Love you enemies, Do good to those who hate you, Bless those who curse you, Pray for those who abuse you, Turn the other cheek to those who strike you, Give to those who steal, beg or borrow from you, asking nothing in return, Do to all people – not as they actually do to you – but as you would wish them to do to you, Do not condemn or judge, but give and forgive. You, therefore, must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5, Luke 6)

This is the teaching of Jesus Christ, told simply and clearly on the pages of the Gospel.

Love with Christ’s love

All of the commandments of Jesus Christ can be summed up as the “perfection of God” in the one new commandment that the Lord gave: that we should love with the very same love with which he loves.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

The original destiny of humanity

This new commandment of Christ came to a world without God as something radically new. But it was not originally meant to be new at all. God wanted the world to be filled with His Love from the moment of creation. This was the original destiny of human beings: to live with God’s life and to fill all the ends of creation with his Divine Presence, which is Love Itself. (See 1 John 3 and 4)

Continual Confession
We all fail to fulfil our destiny to be “perfect as God,” the bearers of His Presence which is Love. In some sense our failure is understandable – not justifiable, but understandable. It is understandable to the extent that such a task is never fully achieved. In this sense, the Christian life, the life of every person as Christ has revealed it, is not a “state” but a “movement.” No one is a “real” Christian – or even a real person – until he/she is fully filled with God’s love. And this is an eternal life.

Our failure, however, is not merely that we have not achieved what is in fact eternal, for that is certainly not sinful! Our failure is that as baptised, chrismated Christians who have the Holy Spirit and Holy Communion with God in the Church, we hardly even realize our task! We hardly pay attention to it! We hardly desire it! We hardly work at it!

This is our sin. Not only that our life is not the constant and continual growth to perfection which St. Paul called the movement to “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13). But our sin is that we are not really aware of our “high calling” and we constantly and continually offend against it by thoughts, words and acts that are in fact movements in exactly the opposite direction. This “movement in the opposite direction” is the definition of sin. It calls us to repent, which means literally to change ourselves. It demands that we confess our sins.

Our life in the Church, therefore – the icon of what all human life must be – must be continual change towards God. This means continual confession and repentance. This is the fundamental realisation which alone can make the practice of confession meaningful to us. This is what Christ has revealed, and His revelation is always before us whenever we gather as the Church for the Divine Liturgy where we hear His Word, beg His Mercy, and receive His Body and Blood always and forever “for the remission of sins and unto life everlasting.”

CONFESSION IN THE CHURCH

The possibility for the continual forgiveness of sins in the Church rests in Him who makes all things possible in the Church: the Holy Spirit sent by Christ from the Father to those who are His. We have received the Holy Spirit just as the apostles of Christ have received Him. And we know that the words of Christ are spoken to us: *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”* (John 20:22-23)

The presence and the power of the Forgiving Christ remains in His Body, the Church, in the gift of the Spirit. Just as Christ the Teacher, the Pastor, the Priest, the Sacrifice, the Truth and the Life … and all that Christ is … remains living and active in His people by the power of the Spirit; so also does Christ remain with us always as the Forgiver of Sins.

Forgiveness through public confession

“If we confess our sins … He will forgive us …” But to whom do we confess? To God, of course. But where is God? God is with us, is the Church’s faith, through Christ in the Holy Spirit. We confess to God in His church. If we come to the Church to be baptized and confirmed, and to receive Holy Communion … it would be strange if we did not come to the Church to confess our sins and to receive God’s forgiveness.

We confess to God in the church. This meant for centuries that we confess to the Church, to all the members of the church. And it means the same today. Christian confession and even confession in the Old Testament, was always public confession. In fact there was no idea that confession could be anything but public. A “secret” confession done in the privacy of one’s soul “to God alone” – an idea not unheard of in recent times – is completely unknown both in biblical and church history. A confession which is not totally open and public confession before God, humans and all creation, is no confession at all. This is the Orthodox Faith.

To one as if to all

In the early church confession was to all the church. Then, when it was clear to all that the repentance of the person was sincere, the head of the congregation – the bishop or the priest – read the “prayer
of absolution” which manifested plainly that God had forgiven the penitent through Christ, present in the gathering by the Holy Spirit.

As time passed, however, the public character of confession became more and more difficult to practice in the Church due to the growth of membership, and the subsequent loss of intimacy, community and mutual concern of the church members for each other. Therefore, confession became in fact more and more private, and Christians revealed their sins to specifically chosen men, priests, or even lay monks who were considered competent and compassionate enough to hear, co-suffer, to counsel, to encourage… and most of all, to love the person in his/her sins.

Although the practice changes, the theory remained exactly the same: Christians confessed their sins openly, one to another. Christ in the Spirit in the Church granted forgiveness from God the Father. This forgiveness was pronounced by the leader of the local church, the bishop or priest as he received the penitent to Holy Communion. However, the confession was done to one person as if done openly and to all; or put it another way, the confession was still made openly and to all, but in the person of one of the brothers.

The pastor becomes the confessor

We confess our sins today to our pastor. But we should still understand that we confess to him as if confessing to all. We confess to all in his person. The pastors of congregations – although not universally in the Orthodox Church since some Churches have special confessors – received the function of hearing the confessions of the people because their function in the Church is to care for the spiritual integrity of their particular community; to be in charge of the Eucharistic Altar; to see that no one approaches the Table of the Lord in a faithless, blasphemous or plainly sinful manner; and in general to, care for the total life of the local parish as the one who manifests the presence of Christ in the Body.

We confess to our pastors, therefore, not because they have the power to forgive as individual men, but because they have the service to stand in the community as the concrete manifestation of the Lord who is Himself present in the Spirit. We confess to our pastors also as the personal manifestation in a church of the whole membership to each individual member, as well as to God and the world. Therefore, in hearing confessions and bearing witness to sincere repentance and pronouncing the words of forgiveness, the priest represents not merely the Lord, but all of the members of the Lord’s Body, the Church. He stands in behalf of all.

Open confession to another

Although it is easy to demonstrate that confession in the Bible and the Church was always a public confession, the question remains, especially today, why this should be so? Cannot God forgive a person secretly if he/she confesses to God in the secret of his heart? Of course, He can. Yet God Himself who has revealed Himself to us has also revealed that sincere repentance involves the opening and publicizing of one’s life to all, the exposing of one’s real self to the eyes of the universe, the begging of forgiveness from every creature.

But why is this so? There are many answers, and the most obvious of them appear to be these: In the first place, the experience of the Christian is the experience of the Last Judgement, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Full Presence of God. In this experience the Light of Christ Illumines and exposes all the hidden things in the world. If we will stand the judgement at the “end,” we must stand it already now in the Church to be perfectly purified. And this is not just a punishment and a shame – though it certainly is this – it is also the gift of freedom, of cleansing, of forgiveness, of loosing from all that is dark and hidden and sinful within us. It is a liberating experience. At every Liturgy Christ comes in our midst to judge and to forgive. We constantly say: Lord have mercy! And we lay bare our life before Him that we might be forgiven and blessed.

Secondly, in our sins, even in the most personal and hidden of our sins, we sin not merely against God, but also against all people and the whole world. Each individual life has universally social and
cosmic proportions. And indeed, as far as our sin is concerned, we might even say that we are “more guilty” before creation than before God for our evil. Our sins cannot really hurt God – except as we offend His Love – but they can and really do wound and infect our brother, sisters, and our world. We must, therefore, confess to those whom we have stained and injured by our transgressions. We confess to all.

Thirdly, it is a fact that we cannot see the true ugliness and hideousness of our sins until we seen them in the mind and heart of the other to whom we have confessed. We also cannot realize the disgusting and humiliating shame of sin until we stand revealed before an “equal.” In this sense we should see that confessions is not confession at all except when it is confession to our peers, to one like us, to one of our own level, to one before whom we are guilty, to our brother in Christ.

Therefore, there is no repentance before God which is not repentance before our brother/sister, before every creature and all creation. For only such confession fulfils the fullness of what confession really means.

PREPARING FOR CONFESSION

To confess properly we must prepare ourselves. And the preparation for confession has just one proper goal: that we would see ourselves as we really are in the eyes of God so that we could confess our sins with the sincere desire to be forgiven.

Self-examination

To confess our sins we must know what they are. And to know what they are we must examine our lives: what we think, what we say, and what we do. The great problem here for many of us is that we do not have proper measure by which to judge ourselves. We judge by what we think are true standards but which are in fact far from Christianity as heaven is from earth.

For example, we judge ourselves by our own idea of the normal human person: “We are normal, average, like other, not worse …” Or we judge by the standards, which our society provides: “We are upright citizens, law abiding, hard working, thrifty …” Or we judge by some churchly practices, which have, in themselves and by themselves, no genuine Christian value at all: We go to Church on Sunday, do not eat meat on Wednesday and Friday, say prayers, do not dance during lent …” Or, finally, we judge by Old Testament standards which are very good, but not all on the level of life to which Christians are called: “We do not steal, lie, murder, commit adultery …”

The real point here is that self-examination must be a deep and serious look at ourselves with honesty and courage and the desire really to see. But it also must be a judgement made by strictly Christian standards: the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Study of the Lord’s teachings

Before we can make a self-study, we must make a study of the Gospel and the New Testament as whole. How can we judge ourselves according to strictly Christians standards when we do not really know, or tale seriously, what these standards are? In preparing for confession, therefore, we should really spend more time looking at Christ than looking at ourselves. For it is certainly true to say that we can see ourselves more clearly by looking intensely at Christ for a short time than by hours of personal introspection.

Christians should know the Gospel and the teaching of the New Testament. In preparation for confession the Fathers of the Church give us some particular scriptural passages, which can help us to see what we are in respect to what we should be.

a. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7, Luke 6)

b. The Last Chapters of St. Paul’s Letters to Romans (Romans 12, 13, 14)

c. The 13th Chapter of St. Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13)

d. The First Letter of St. John (1 John)
Of course these sections do not exhaust the totality of Christian life, but they are invaluable in self-examination. If we read them carefully, with attention and in application to our own attitudes and actions we will have more than sufficient opportunity to judge ourselves by the standards on which Christians are to be judged. Altogether they do not add up to more than 13 pages in a normal sized Bible.

**Prayer and fasting**

In addition to our self-analysis in the light of the Christian ideals, we must prepare for confession by prayer and fasting. Both of these disciplines are necessary for us to clarify our vision, to gain mastery over our thoughts and to put us in living contact with God who will Himself inspire us to see those things in actual fact which are well pleasing to Himself.

In prayer books there are prayers before confession which we can read, together with the “penitential psalms” if we wish to read them (Psalms 32, 37, 51, 102, 130, 143). These prayers may be read privately, and possibly even more effectively in common with other repenting Christians. It certainly would not be sad if we could recover in our churches the communal character of repentance before the Lord – that we all who are “members one of another” are also sinners before God and each other – and in this way recapture the “public” character of confession at least through our common devotion. If this is not practically done as a whole congregation, it certainly can be done on evenings of confession, in church or with family and friends. In general, it is sad that families do not confess and receive communion as families more often.

**Setting right our life**

The final step in preparation for confession is the “setting right” of whatever sins are still in our power to set right. This means, for example, that we cannot confess theft without returning what we have stolen; or hatred, without forgiving our enemy; or anger, without apologizing to the one we have offended.

To do this is clearly stated as a strict requirement for repentance by Christ Himself when he tells us that if we are at the altar offering our gift and we remember that our brother has something against us, we must go and be reconciled with our brother before we can offer our gift (Matthew 5:23).

Even here, however, we must be careful not to sin more by making a “display” of our setting things right, by using our supposed “Christian piety” as an occasion for vainglory or boasting or showing-off. Therefore, even our action of setting our life in order should be done with discretion; quietly, secretly, even silently if our actions will speak louder and more convincingly than our words – but in any case these things must be done before confession, or most certainly before Holy Communion.

On this point too it should be very clear that no amount of fasting and prayer can replace the necessary actions of true repentance in confession. Thus, the person who insists that he/she be allowed to Communion on the grounds that he/she has “read all the prayers and fasted for a week” even though he/she still refuses to be reconciled to his brother/sister must come to know that these ritual acts mean nothing, absolutely nothing, in detachment from real Christian life.

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. (1 John 20-21) “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

**COMING TO CONFESSION**

There are many different customary practices concerning the actual methods of confessing in different churches; therefore, I will discuss just the most general aspects.

**Follow the local practice**
When we actually come to confession the priest may ask us to stand or kneel; to say this or that prayer before or after or even during confession; or before or after Communion, or even for some time in days ahead. He may ask us questions, or he may not. He may give us a special penance, or he may not. There are many methods and no hard fast rules on these points. However, the Christian point here is that we should be loving and humble enough to follow whatever method is in use where we are and not try to enforce our own particular style. This does not mean that we cannot discuss our preferred method with our confessor, but it does mean that we should realize that any method is secondary to the essential meaning of confession and repentance itself.

**Come to be forgiven**

We come to confession for no other reason than to receive forgiveness from God. We may seek advice and counsel from our confessor. But we should keep clearly in mind that confession is not a “cosy spiritual chat” or a sort of “religious psychoanalysis.” It is standing before God with the longing to be accepted and loved by Him, to be purified and reconciled to His Kingdom. Spiritual counselling may be part of confession, and in the present time when, sadly enough, we almost never discuss our spiritual life except in confession, it may be the only occasion to do so. But still we must realize that this is a by-product, albeit, a valuable one, of confession, and that the “success or failure” of confession by no means depends on the personality or advising ability of the confessor.

God Himself acts in confession! And He may speak to us at a time when we least expect it, or through a priest from whom we least expect it, if only we are humble enough to open ourselves to hear Him without letting any human prejudices block His Living Presence in the sacrament. However, be all these things as they may, the fact remains that our sincere and genuine repentance and desire to be cleansed and renewed to new life is the sole aim of confession in the Church.

**Confess our sins**

We come to confession to confess our sins. We are to say them clearly and openly, not indulging in gross details, but not skirting the full force of their evil by such generalities as “the normal things, household sins, everyday sins, etc.” A clear vision of Christ’s teaching is the only thing that can help us to do this well. We should also make it a practice say what we think is the only sin or several sins which most dominate our life.

We come to confession also to confess our own sins. It is quite easy to fall into the temptation of confessing the sins of others – members of our own family, people we work with, other members of the parish. Some people do this quite regularly, and not in the context of a “mutual problem,” but purely and simply in self-righteous judgement, although not seldom veiled in the guise of interest concern. If there is a genuine need to have a spiritual discussion about another person it should be done strictly outside of confession. It is absolutely imperative that we concentrate in confession solely and exclusively upon ourselves, our own lives and our own sins and offences.

**Avoid being scrupulous**

Before we even approach the confessional we should know that we will not, and are not expected to, remember every single one of our sins. Thus if we happen to forget something inadvertently and involuntarily in confession, we need not be anxious that God will not forgive it. After a sincere confession in which we have made every possible human effort to confess all our sins, “the prayer of absolution” is indeed for all our sins: voluntary and involuntary, known and unknown, confessed or unconsciously not confessed. We need not return to the priest if we have honestly forgotten some small sin in confession.

In general it is very important that we avoid at all cost being scrupulously anxious over our sins to the point where we doubt God’s mercy or think that His forgiveness depends upon our human worthiness or our frail memory. God judges our intentions and sincerity in repentance and not our capacity of memorization. This, of course, does not mean that a “sincere intention” takes the place of an actual
confession of sins. But it certainly does mean that the power of God's forgiveness is not bound to our recollection of actual sins, or even our ability to avoid them.

There are never so many or so great sins that God is not able to forgive them. There is never a confession so perfect that it merits God's mercy because of its perfection. There is never a Holy Communion, which is not both given and received by a sinner. Any other thoughts on any of these points is not only bad theology, but blasphemy; and could even lead to mental and spiritual disorder.

**Struggle to overcome**

God forgives our sins nor merely on the condition that we confess them, but on the condition that we truly hate them and try to overcome them. When one saint was asked how we could tell if we were forgiven by God, the reply was: "If you hate your sins you are truly forgiven."

In Christian repentance there is no place for pitying our sins, or justifying them, or explaining them away, or blaming them on others or on the "situation or on human weakness. Sins can only be recognized, confronted, despised and rejected by people – and forgiven by God. And there is no more to it than that. In confession, therefore, we must promise that we will try with every method known to us to overcome our sins and to correct our lives. Our only promise, however, can be that we will try. We cannot seriously guarantee any good results. And this is, in fact, all that God desires: a firm struggle to overcome. If we make this struggle with all the strength and courage in us, then God Himself will give the victory – and at the time when He alone sees fit to do so. Our sole task is to remain faithful in battle.

**AN EXAMINATION BEFORE CONFESSION**

The best preparation for confession is a self-examination on the basis of the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. These few chapters in the Gospel which begin with the beatitudes summarise the Christian life in its most important aspects.

Before confession, we should take our Bibles and read and think and question ourselves in terms of the Sermon, not merely in respect of our general attitudes, but in respect to our most real and concrete thoughts and words and actions. We should do this not merely in consideration of the whole spectrum of our existence on this earth: at home with our families, on the job, in our professional organizations and unions, in our social and political actions, in our business activities, in the conduct of our private affairs, in how we form our opinions and make our decision and execute our actions. All these areas must enter our self examination before we can come to the Lord.

The following questions placed in the light of the beatitudes are offered as a help toward the achievement of the most limited self-knowledge. They are given more as a general indication of what our approach should be, than as an exhaustive "examination of conscience." Before proceeding, however, we must ask ourselves the most fundamental question upon which everything else stands and falls: 1) Do we really believe that the teachings of Christ are practical and applicable to our lives in the world? and; 2) Do we really believe that the Holy Spirit is in us making "all things possible," including the keeping of the commandments of Christ?

**If we do not, then there is no reason to go further, either to confession, or to the Church in general.**

Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .

Am I poor before God and men? Do I cultivate the attitude of poverty? Do I realize that all is God's and from God? Do I use my life and everything I have as that which belongs to God? Do I share the goods of the earth with others, knowing that all is God's? Do I take my opinions and ideas from God? Do I acknowledge my spiritual and intellectual poverty before God, accepting His Wisdom and Truth? Am I possessive, selfish, self-satisfied, self-righteous, self-seeking? Am I an idolater of my own opinions, ideas, possessions? Do I lust after status, power, authority, wealth, position? Do I really love and value poverty as the perfect ideal?

Blessed are those who mourn . . .
Am I a person who mourns? Do I lament over the suffering of men? Do I weep over the troubles in church and state, family and society? Do I suffer with all who suffer, in poverty and squalor, in misery and sin? Do I weep over sickness, disease, tragedy and death? Or do I simply “take it as it is” passing off as courage what is really hardheartedness and lack of sympathetic concern? Do I have compassion on the lowly, the lustful, the addicted, the selfish, the wretched, the evil and sinful of the world without judgement or condemnation? Am I sad over the sins and faults of others? Or do I in fact laugh and gloat and mock and take perverse pleasure over that about which true Christians, in imitation of Christ, can only mourn?

Blessed are the meek . . .

Am I meek with the meekness of Jesus? Am I meek in the sense that I only fight evil with good? Do I accept and practice the fact that humble love and truth and courage in goodness is the only weapon available in any battle with sin and sinful people? Do I lord it over others, at home, at work, at church? Do I love and actually use force, brute command, blind authority, intimidation, coercion, to accomplish my will? Do I bless those who curse me, pray for those who abuse me, do good to those who hate me, serve those who misuse me, speak to those who shun me? Do I love my enemies and forgive my offenders? Do I believe in the method of the meekness of Christ as the only way for genuine achievement?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . .

Do I hunger and thirst for God? Do I desire to be righteous? Do I work to be holy? Do I read or study or make any continued effort for Love and for Truth, for the Spirit of God? Do I pray? Do I fast? Do I do any “spiritual exercises” which train me in goodness? Do I come to Church? Do I participate in the sacraments? Do I go out of my way to help, to teach, to serve in some way? Do I do the things which I know bring righteousness?

Blessed are the merciful . . .

Do I show mercy to others? Do I forgive those who offend me? Do I try to understand those who are different? Do I take pleasure in judging and condemning? Do I talk about others? Do I revel in gossip? Do I say things, though possibly true, which need not be said but only can harm? Do I rejoice in wrong? Am I legalistic, loving the law more than the Spirit? Do I smooth things over and cover offences, or do I stir things up by picking and condemning? Am I petty and small? Do I slander and shame? Am I prejudiced, making judgements and coming to conclusions without proper facts but with pre-formed opinions? Do I actually prefer strict judgement to tender mercy?

Blessed are the pure in heart . . .

Do I love purity, cleanness and wholeness? Am I polluted by filthy thoughts and words and actions? Is my mind stained by demonic rationalizations and prejudices? Or am I pure in my openness to all that is good? Is my body corrupted by beastly sensuality and lust? Are my thoughts and deeds pure, or are there always hidden motives and intentions? Am I trusting and trustful, with a singleness of purpose and total integrity in everything? Or do I connive and deceive, cheat and lie? Am I hypocritical and pretentious? Am I caught by some passion: eating, drinking, smoking, working, playing, sleeping, or something else which has more control over me than I have over it? Is there any darkness or impurity which blinds me and holds me from freedom and wholeness with God?

Blessed are the peacemakers . . .

Do I love and make peace? At home, at work, at church, in society and the whole world? Am I angry and impatient? Do I look for fights and arguments? Do I provoke others to be angry? Do I believe in “turning the other cheek”? Or do I take refuge in physical force? Do I love violence? Do I worship aggression and power? Do I seek inner peace and quiet which is the basic condition for peace in the world?

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake . . .
Am I ever persecuted for what is right? Am I ready to be? Am I ready to give my life without vengeance, for what is true? Do I participate in good activities which may bring criticism from others? Or do I take the easy road of non-involvement in human affairs, in family or job or church or society at large? Do I go along with things which are wrong from fear or cowardice or laziness? Do I flee responsibility? Do I worship security? Am I defending my own small life in contradiction to the righteousness of God? Am I in fact ashamed of Christ?

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven . . .

Is my joy and gladness in God? Or is it in this world with its passions, powers, possessions and praise? Am I mean and grouchy or jealous and moody? Am I despairing and without hope? Am I pessimistic and anxious? Do I complain and spread darkness and irritation to others? Is my faith of no consequence in my actions and attitudes to the events of life? Do I really “consider the lilies of the fields . . .” and trust in God and rejoice in this trust? Is my treasure in God or in myself? Is my life “hid with Christ in God in heaven” or am I in fact a man of this age in body, mind and spirit? Do I believe and have in truth the “joy of believing”?

General Confession

I have sinned, O Lord, forgive me. O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I, a sinner, confess to Almighty God, the Lord, One in the Holy Trinity, to the pure Virgin Mary the Theotokos, to all the Saints, and to you, Father, all my sins: (Mention to God whatever sins are on your heart) For these and for all my other sins which I cannot now remember, whether voluntary or involuntary, I am heartily sorry and I sincerely repent, and I promise with the help of God to better my way of life; therefore I humbly ask you, Father, saving penance and absolution.

Priest: May God Who pardoned David through Nathan the Prophet when he confessed his sins, Peter who wept bitterly for his denial, the Harlot weeping at his feet, the Publican and the Prodigal, May God forgive you all things, through me a sinner, both in this world and the in the world to come, and set you uncondemned before His terrible Judgement Seat. Now having no further care for the sins which you have confessed, depart in peace. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and throughout all ages. Amen.