

Self Examination Before Confession

He who is accustomed to give account of his life at confession here will not fear to give an answer at the terrible judgment-seat of Christ. It is for this purpose that the mild tribunal of penitence was here instituted, in order that we, being cleansed and amended through penitence here below, may give an answer without shame at the terrible judgment-seat of Christ. This is the first motive for sincere confession, and, moreover, it must absolutely be made every year. The longer we remain without confessing, the worse it is for us, the more entangled we become in the bonds of sin, and therefore the more difficult it is to give an account. The second motive is tranquility: the more sincere has been our confession, the more tranquil will the soul be afterwards. Sins are secret serpents, gnawing at the heart of a man and all his being; they do not let him rest, they continually suck his heart; sins are prickly thorns, constantly goring the soul; sins are spiritual darkness. Those who repent must bring forth the fruits of repentance.

Consciousness, memory, imagination, feeling, and will are helps to penitence. As we sin with all the powers of our soul, so penitence must be from our whole soul. Penitence in words only, without the intention of amendment and without the feeling of contrition, may be called hypocritical. Should the consciousness of sins be obscured, it must be cleared up; should the feeling be smothered and dulled, it must be roused; should the will become blunt and too weak for amendment, it must be forced; “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” (St. Matt. 11:12) Confession must be sincere, deep, and full.

—St John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ, p. 280)

Table of Contents

Questions Based on the Ten Commandments.....	1
Questions Based on the Beatitudes.....	3
The Whole Armour of Truth by St. Nicolas Varzhansky (martyred by the Bolsheviks)	4
A Lament for Sin by St. Basil the Great	8

Questions Based on the Ten Commandments

First Commandment

- Have I believed in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?
- Have I failed to trust in God and his mercy?
- Have I complained against God in adversity?
- Have I been thankful for God's blessings?
- Have I doubted the Christian faith and the teachings of the Church?
- Have I tried to serve God and keep His Commandments?
- Have I given way to superstition?
- Have I frequented the religious meetings of heretics and schismatics?
- Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or persecution?
- Have I failed to pray to God faithfully?
- Have I put myself before God?

Second Commandment

- Have I made an idol of any person or thing?
- Have I given to anyone or anything the worship that is due to God alone?
- Have I set before myself the holy life of Jesus and tried to imitate Him?
- Have I read the Holy Scriptures regularly?
- Have I been irreverent during Church Services, let my attention wander, or been insincere?
- Have I neglected to receive Holy Communion regularly or without due preparation?

Third Commandment

- Have I profaned the holy name of God in any way?
- Have I cursed anyone or anything, or sworn a false oath?
- Have I failed to give proper reverence to holy persons and things?
- Have I had due respect for the clergy of the Church, or hindered them in performing God's work?
- Have I broken any solemn vow or promise?
- Have I entered into any unlawful contract or made an unlawful promise?

Fourth Commandment

- Have I stayed away from Church on Sundays or prevented others from going?
- Have I done unnecessary work on Sundays?
- Have I spent the day in unwholesome fashion or profaned it by improper conduct?
- If I could not go to Church because of illness or other grave cause, have I prayed at home?
- Have I caused anyone else to profane the Lord's Day?
- Have I kept the Fasts and Festivals prescribed by the Church?

Fifth Commandment

- Have I respected my parents and been obedient to them?
- Have I been guilty of deception, or caused them pain by my words or actions?

Have I neglected them or failed to help them?
Have I done my duty towards my family?
Have I been wanting in love or kindness towards my husband (or wife), or harmed him (or her) in any way?
Have I set my children a good example and tried to bring them up properly?
Have I corrected their faults with patience and not with anger?
Have I over-indulged or spoiled them?
Have I neglected my god-children and failed in my obligations towards them?
Have I worked for my employers honestly and diligently?
Have I treated fairly all those who have worked for me?
Have I honored God as my Heavenly Father by treating others as my brothers, and have I honored the Church as my spiritual Mother by honoring and practicing my religion in accordance with her teachings?

Sixth Commandment

Have I caused the injury or death of any one, or wished that I were dead?
Have I done anything to shorten my own life or that of someone else by injuring health, or through evil and intemperate living?
Have I given way to anger, or harmed others with words or actions?
Have I defamed others who needed help, or failed to stand up for those unjustly treated?
Have I been cruel to anyone? Have I mistreated animals or destroyed any life unnecessarily?
Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against them?

Seventh Commandment

Have I given way to impure thoughts, words, or deeds?
Have I committed any unworthy actions alone or with others?
Have I degraded myself in any way, or forgotten human dignity?
Have I read immoral books or magazines, or delighted in obscenity of any kind?
Have I associated with bad companions or frequented unsavory places?
Have I eaten or drunk or smoked too much?
Have I been lazy, idle, or wasted my time?
Have I led others to commit sinful acts?
Have I been unfaithful to any trust confided in me?

Eighth Commandment

Have I stolen anything or wished to do so?
Have I kept anything that did not belong to me?
Have I tried honestly to find owners of lost articles I have found?
Have I paid my debts?
Have I lived within my income, and not wastefully and extravagantly?
Have I given to charitable causes in proportion to my means?
Have I been honest and upright?

Ninth Commandment

Have I told lies, or added to or subtracted from the truth?
Have I made careless statements or spoken evil of anyone?
Have I told any secrets entrusted to me, or betrayed anyone?
Have I gossiped about anyone or harmed their reputation?
Have I concealed the truth, assisted in carrying out a lie, or pretended to commit a sin of which I was not guilty?
Have I tried to see the good in others rather than their shortcomings?

Tenth Commandment

Have I envied anything good that has come to others?
Have I been jealous of another's good fortune?
Have I wished for anything that was another's?
Have I damaged or destroyed the property of others?
Have I wished for things God has not given me, or been discontented with my lot?
Have I been stingy?
Have I held back anything due another?
Have I hoped for the downfall of anyone so that I might gain by it?
Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone?
Have I expected God to give me that which I would refuse one of my fellow men?

Questions Based on the Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

Do I recognize my complete dependence on God?
Am I proud, arrogant, or self-righteous?
Have I been selfish and possessive?
Do I seek status, power, and wealth?

Blessed are those who mourn...

Have I endured difficulties and afflictions with faith and patience?
Have I felt sadness for the sufferings of others?
Am I truly sorrowful for my sins and faults, and am I prepared to voice them before an Orthodox priest in Confession?

Blessed are the meek....

Do I try to serve others at home, school, work, Church, etc., or rather to dominate them?
Have I been resentful, bitter, unforgiving, or insulting and abusive to others?
Have I loved my enemies?

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

Do I truly yearn for God's will to be done in all things?

Have I tried to cultivate a righteous life through prayer, fasting, worship, receiving Holy Communion and deeds of love toward others?

Blessed are the merciful...

Have I shown compassion and helped the poor, hungry, and needy?
Have I tried to understand and forgive others, or have I been indifferent and judgmental?

Blessed are the pure in heart...

Do I love goodness, purity and holiness, or do I instead succumb to evil?
Have I given way to impure thoughts, words or deeds?
Have I been hypocritical, pretentious or indulgent to sinful passions?

Blessed are the peacemakers...

Do I have God's peace in my heart?
Have I been unfairly aggressive, irritable, impatient, polemical, or divisive?
Have I worked for peace at home, work, Church and in society?

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake...

Have I complained when persecuted?
Do I pray for my persecutors?
Have I had the courage to stand up for what is right despite criticism, ridicule or persecution?

Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you...rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

Is the joy of Christ in my heart even in trying moments?
Have I been pessimistic or despondent?
Do I delight in the promise of God's treasures in heaven?

The Whole Armour of Truth by St. Nicolas Varzhansky (martyred by the Bolsheviks)

Sins Against God

Do you pray to God in the morning and evening, before and after meals?

During prayer have you allowed your thoughts to wander?

Have you rushed or gabbled your prayers? or when reading in church?

Do you read the Scriptures daily? Do you read other spiritual writings regularly?

Have you read books whose content is not Orthodox or even anti-Orthodox, or is spiritually damaging?

Have you pronounced the name of God without reverence, joking? Have you asked God's help before starting every activity?

Have you made the sign of the Cross carelessly, thoughtlessly? Have you sworn? Have you murmured against God?

Have you sinned by forgetting God?

Have you been slack in attending church?

Have you consecrated even part of the feast days, particularly Sundays and the Twelve Great Feasts, to God?

Have you tried your best to attend church on these days? or have you spent them more sinfully than ordinary days?

If unable to attend church for some reason, have you nonetheless tried to devote some part of these days to prayer and spiritual reading?

Have you joined with people not of the Faith in prayer, or attended their worship services?

Have you kept the fasts?

Have you behaved irreverently in church, or before the clergy and monastics?

Have you laughed or talked in church, or moved about unnecessarily, thus also distracting other people from prayer?

Have dressed modestly and in a becoming manner when in church?

Have you tried to pay reverent attention to the readings, hymns, and prayers in church?

Have you striven to pray with the service, crossing yourself, etc., or have you rather simply stood and day-dreamed?

Have you prepared for the services beforehand, looking up the Scriptural readings, making sure you have the texts to follow the service etc., especially if the service will be in a language you do not readily understand?

Have you ever left church after the Divine Services, and particularly after receiving the Holy Mysteries and immediately engaged in light talk and thus forgotten the blessings and graces you have received?

Have you been ashamed of your Faith or the sign of the Cross in the presence of others?

Have you made a show of your piety?

Have you used your Orthodox Faith or its teachings merely to browbeat others or belittle them?

Have you used it as a shield or excuse for your own inadequacies rather than humbling yourself?

Have you believed in dreams, fortune telling, astrology, signs and other superstitions?

Do you give thanks to the Lord for all things?

Have you ever doubted God's providence concerning yourself?

Do you at least try to perceive His purpose in all the things that come upon you?

Sins Against Your Neighbours

Do you respect and obey your parents?

Have you offended them by rudeness or contradiction?

(These two apply also to priests, superiors, teachers and elders.)

Have you insulted anyone?

Have you quarreled or fought with anyone? Have you hit anyone?

Are you always respectful to old people?

Are you ever angry, bad tempered or irritable?

Have you called anyone names? Do you use foul language?

Have you derided any that are disabled, poor, old or in some way disadvantaged?

Have you entertained bad feelings, ill will or hatred against anyone?

Have you forgiven those who have offended you?

Have you asked forgiveness from those whom you have offended?

Are you at peace with everyone?

Have you left the needy without help when you could have helped?

Have you attended the sick or elderly when they have asked you to do so?

Have you shown kindness and attention to all, remembering that God is expecting just such an attitude from you?

Have you hit animals without a cause or been cruel to them, or neglectful of those in your care?

Have you stolen anything?

Have you taken or used other people's things without asking?

Have you kept money or things that were lent you without returning them?

Have you wasted your employers' time or resources? Have you taken things from work for your own use, used the firm's phone or other facilities for your own purposes without permission or repayment?

Are you obstinate, and do you always try to have your own way?

Have you been inconsiderate of other people's feelings?

Have you tried to have your revenge against those who have offended you?

Have you harboured resentment? Have you deceived people?

Have you gossiped?

Have you told untruths?

Have you judged and condemned others?

Have you taken pains before approaching for confession to be reconciled with all?

Sins Against Yourself

Have you been proud? Do you boast of your abilities, achievements, family, connections or riches?

Do you consider yourself worthy before God?

Are you vain, ambitious? Do you try to win praise and glory?

Do you bear it easily when you are blamed, scolded or treated unjustly? Do you think too much about your looks, outward appearance and the impression you make?

Have you sinned in thought, word or deed, by a look or glance, or in any other way against the seventh commandment? (Adultery, fornication, all extra-marital sexual relationships with others, masturbation, engaging in unnatural sexual acts, fantasizing, pornography, etc.)

Have you envied anyone anything? Have you been over-sensitive?

Have you been lazy? Have you done your duties heartily?

Have you wasted your time, energy or abilities in things that do not profit the soul?

Have you become obsessive about anything? Have you been despondent or listless?

Have you had thoughts of committing suicide?

Have you brought a curse on yourself or others or ill-wished them, being impatient?

Have you a weakness for alcohol? Have you drunk too much, or become dependent on drink?

Have you taken drugs, other than necessary medicines? Have you smoked?

Have you watched television too much or indiscriminately? Have you given yourself up to any other similar pastime which wastes your time and energy and might have harmed you?

Have you been greedy, either with regard to food or to possessions?

Have you indulged in comfort-eating? Have you become accustomed to eating between meals?

Have you been picky about your food, or wasteful of foods, forgetting that so many people are without proper nourishment? Have you been extravagant? Have you been wasteful?

Do you care for and seek first the salvation of your soul, the spiritual life and the kingdom of God, or have you put earthly considerations in the first place?

Is there any other sin, which burdens your conscience, or which you are ashamed to tell?

A Lament for Sin by St. Basil the Great

Weep over your sin: it is a spiritual ailment; it is death to your immortal soul; it deserves ceaseless, unending weeping and crying; let all tears flow for it, and sighing come forth without ceasing from the depths of your heart.

In profound humility I weep for all my sins, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, covert and overt, great and little, committed by word and deed, in thought and intention, day and night, at every hour and minute of my life.

I weep over my pride and my ambition, my self love and my boastfulness; I weep over my fits of anger, irritation, excessive shouting, swearing, quarreling and cursing;

I weep for having criticized, censured, gossiped, slandered, and defamed, for my wrath, enmity, hatred, envy, jealousy, vengeance and rancor;

I weep over my indulgences in lust, impure thoughts and evil inclinations; covetousness, gluttony, drunkenness, and sloth;

I weep for having talked idly, used foul language, blasphemed, derided, joked, ridiculed, mocked, enjoyed empty gaiety, singing, dancing and every pleasure to excess;

I weep over my self indulgence, cupidity, love of money and miserliness, unmercifulness and cruelty;

I weep over my laziness, indolence, negligence, love of comfort, weakness, idleness, absent-mindedness, irresponsibility, inattention, love of sleep, for hours spent in idle pursuits, and for my lack of concentration in prayer and in Church, for not observing fasts and not doing charitable works.

I weep over my lack of faith, my doubting, my perplexity, my coldness, my indifference, my weakness and unfeelingness in what concerns the Holy Orthodox Faith, and over all my foul, cunning and reviling thoughts;

I weep over my exaggerated sorrow and grief, depression and despair, and over sins committed willingly.

I weep, but what tears can I find for a worthy and fitting way to weep for all the actions of my ill fated life; for my immeasurable and profound worthlessness? How can I reveal and expose in all its nakedness each one of my sins, great and small, voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, overt and covert, every hour and minute of sin?

When and where shall I begin my penitential lament that will bear fitting fruit? Perhaps soon I may have to face the last hour of my life; my soul will be painfully sundered from my sinful and vile body; I shall have to stand before terrible demons and radiant angels, who will reveal and torment me with my sins; and I, in fear and trembling, will be unprepared and unable to give them an answer; the sight and sound of wailing demons, their violent and bold desire to drag me into the bottomless pit of Hell will fill my soul with confusion and terror. And then the angels of God will lead my poor soul to stand before God's fearful seat of judgment. How will I answer the Immortal King, or how will I dare, sinner that I am, to look upon My Judge? Woe is me! have no good answer to make, for I have spent all my life in indolence and sin, all my hours and minutes in vain thoughts, desires and yearnings!

And how many times have I taken the Name of God in vain?

How often, lightly and freely, at times even boldly, insolently and shamelessly have I slandered others in anger; offended, irritated, mocked them!

How often have I been proud and vainglorious and boasted of good qualities that I do not possess and of deeds that I have not done!

How many times have I lied, deceived, been cunning or flattered, or been insincere and deceptive; how often have I been angry, intolerant and mean!

How many times have I ridiculed the sins of my brother, caused him grief overtly and covertly, mocked or gloated over his misdeeds, his faults or his misfortunes; how many times have I been hostile to him, in anger, hatred or envy!

How often have I laughed stupidly, mocked and derided, spoke without weighing my words, ignorantly and senselessly, and uttered a numberless quantity of cutting, poisonous, insolent, frivolous, vulgar, coarse, brazen words!

How often, affected by beauty, have I fed my mind, my imagination and my heart with voluptuous sensations, and unnaturally satisfied the lusts of the flesh in fantasy! How often has my tongue uttered shameful, vulgar and blasphemous things about the desires of the flesh!

How often have I yearned for power and been gluttonous, satiating myself on delicacies, on tasty, varied and diverse foods and wines; because of intemperance and lack of self-control how often

have I been filled past the point of satiety, lacked sobriety and been drunken, intemperate in food and drink, and broken the Holy Fasts!

How often, through selfishness, pride or false modesty, have I refused help and attention to those in need, been uncharitable, miserly, unsympathetic, mercenary and grasped at attention!

How often have I entered the House of God without fear and trembling, stood there in prayer, frivolous and absent-minded, and left it in the same spirit and disposition! And in prayer at home I have been just as cold and indifferent, praying little, lazily, and indolently, inattentively and impiously, and even completely omitting the appointed prayers!

And in general, how slothful I have been, weakened by indolence and inaction; how many hours of each day have I spent in sleep, how often have I enjoyed voluptuous thoughts in bed and defiled my flesh! How many hours have I spent in empty and futile pastimes and pleasures, in frivolous talk and speech, jokes and laughter, games and fun, and how much time have I wasted conclusively in chatter, and gossip, in criticizing others and reproaching them; how many hours have I spent in time-wasting and emptiness! What shall I answer to the Lord God for every hour and every minute of lost time? In truth, I have wasted my entire life in laziness.

How many times have I lost heart and despaired of my salvation and of God's mercy or through stupid habit, insensitivity, ignorance, insolence, shamelessness, and hardness sinned deliberately, willingly, in my right mind, in full awareness, in all goodwill, in both thought and intention, and in deed, and in this fashion trampled the blood of God's covenant and crucified anew within myself the Son of God and cursed Him!

O how terrible the punishment that I have drawn upon myself!

How is it that my eyes are not streaming with constant tears?.. If only my tears flowed from the cradle to the grave, at every hour and every minute of my tortured life! Who will now cool my head with water and fill the well of my tears and help me weep over my soul that I have cast into perdition?

My God, my God! Why hast Thou forsaken me? Be it unto me according to Thy will, O Lord! If Thou wouldst grant me light, be Thou blessed; if Thou wouldst grant me darkness, be Thou equally blessed. If Thou wouldst destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy righteous judgment; and if Thou wouldst not destroy me together with my lawlessness, glory to Thy boundless mercy!