



An Examination of Conscience

THROUGH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Take these slowly. The point is not to answer every question but to let the ones that land, land. You are not assembling evidence against yourself. You are looking honestly at your life in the presence of someone who already knows it and loves you anyway.

Search me, O God, and know my heart.

PSALM 139:23

I FIRST COMMANDMENT

You shall have no other gods before me.

- ☐ Have I given God real time in prayer?
- ☐ Have I put money, work, achievement, or the good opinion of others where God belongs?
- ☐ In difficulty, do I turn toward God or away?

II SECOND COMMANDMENT

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- ☐ Have I used God's name carelessly, in anger, or as a joke?
- ☐ Have I kept the promises I made before God?
- ☐ Do I speak of holy things with reverence?

III THIRD COMMANDMENT

Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- ☐ Have I attended Mass on Sundays and holy days?
- ☐ Was I present there, or only in attendance?
- ☐ Have I let Sunday become another working day?

IV FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and your mother.

- ☐ Do I speak to and about my parents with respect?
- ☐ Have I cared for aging family members, or left it to others?
- ☐ Do I fulfill my responsibilities to those in my charge?

V FIFTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not kill.

- ☐ Have I harmed anyone through anger, violence, or words meant to wound?
- ☐ Do I hold grudges or take satisfaction in someone's misfortune?
- ☐ Have I cared for my own life and health as something entrusted to me?

VI

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not commit adultery.

- ☐ Have I been faithful to my spouse in body, word, and thought?
- ☐ Have I treated others as persons rather than as objects?
- ☐ Have I been careful about what I look at and what I let occupy my imagination?

VII

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.

- ☐ Have I taken what is not mine, including time and attention I owe an employer?
- ☐ Have I been honest in debts, taxes, and business dealings?
- ☐ Am I generous, or do I hold tightly to what I have?

VIII

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- ☐ Have I lied?
- ☐ Have I damaged someone's reputation through gossip, even accurate gossip?
- ☐ Have I kept confidences? Have I told the truth when it cost me something?

IX

NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

- ☐ Have I entertained desire for someone who is not my spouse?
- ☐ Do I guard my imagination, or feed it?
- ☐ Am I investing in my own marriage rather than an imagined one?

X

TENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

- ☐ Am I envious of what others have?
- ☐ Does comparison drive my decisions and sour my contentment?
- ☐ Am I grateful for what I have actually been given?



The Five Steps

AN IGNATIAN WAY TO PREPARE

The order matters, because starting with gratitude changes what you are able to see. Ten minutes or an afternoon, depending on how long it has been.

1	BEGIN WITH GRATITUDE	Name what you are thankful for since your last Confession. You are looking at your life as a gift rather than as a problem to be solved.
2	ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR LIGHT	Pray to see honestly. Left to ourselves we tend to either excuse everything or condemn everything, and neither is the truth.
3	REVIEW SINCE YOUR LAST CONFESSION	Walk through it: chronologically, by relationship, or through the Ten Commandments overleaf. Notice what surfaces rather than hunting for it.
4	EXPRESS SORROW	Not performance and not despair. A clear-eyed acknowledgment of harm done, joined to confidence that mercy is real.
5	RESOLVE, AND ASK FOR GRACE	Name one concrete thing you intend to change, and ask for the help to do it. A resolution without grace is a New Year's resolution.

WHAT TO CONFESS

Mortal sins are confessed by kind and by number. A sin is mortal only when all three are true together (CCC 1857):

- 1 The matter is grave.
- 2 You knew it was gravely wrong.
- 3 You chose it freely and deliberately.

Unsure? Bring it, say you are unsure, and let the priest help you sort it.

HONESTY, NOT SCRUPULOSITY

An honest examination ends in relief, because you have told the truth and been met with mercy. If it reliably produces dread instead, do not try harder.

Find one regular confessor, tell him honestly what is happening, and follow his guidance rather than your own anxiety.

IN THE CONFESSIONAL

- 1 Make the Sign of the Cross.
- 2 "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been ____ since my last confession."
- 3 Confess your sins. If you cannot remember, say so and ask for help.
- 4 Listen to the priest's counsel and receive your penance.
- 5 Pray the Act of Contrition, then receive absolution.

ACT OF CONTRITION

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

Find an hour of quiet. Then go.

For unhurried space to prepare, Heritage offers silent retreats in Crawfordville, Georgia.