

## Thoughts before Confession

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Confession is one of the seven sacraments of the Church. It's the application of the Lord's words to His disciples: 'Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'.

So this is the greatest benefaction of God to people, because it gives us the assurance and certainty that at the day of judgement all our confessed sins won't exist.

Unfortunately, however, lots of the faithful- mostly out of ignorance- undervalue this great sacrament or misinterpret it. Since we know that when people decide to go to confession they'll encounter a variety of impediments and temptations, we'd like to offer our meagre advice to help overcome the difficulties, so that we come prepared to the sacrament.

Before you set out for confession, pray fervently to the Lord to help you overcome any obstacles that might arise and, particularly, to recognize your actions by

enlightening the depths of your soul and your conscience, so that you can examine yourself profoundly- your works, your words, your thoughts- and then confess them with contrition before your spiritual guide.



‘Confess’ means ‘to say out loud what I have inside me’. The confessional isn’t a court of law, but a doctor’s surgery. The spiritual guide ‘opens’ the soul of the person confessing, prevents the formation of complexes and liberates from guilt, while the Grace of God brings rest to the soul and constructs the spiritual and moral constitution of the person concerned.

You should bear in mind that your spiritual guide is a father. He listens with love, he suffers with you and encourages you. He doesn’t become angry or disenchanted. All he does is help you to recognize your sinfulness, to understand your weakness, so that you’ll be able to take the ‘dowry’ of divine Grace. What he hears in confession is known only to him and God. It’s the most confidential of confidentialities.

Get over shame. Say no to the machinations of the evil one. Don’t question God’s love for us. Confess your sins with sincerity, individually, without coating or explaining them, because this leads to justification. Only in this way will you find inner peace.

Elder [now Saint] Païsius advises: When soldiers are wounded in battle, they go straight to the doctor, they bind up their wounds and continue to fight. At the same time, they become more experienced and look after themselves more carefully, so as not to be wounded again. So we, too, injured in our spiritual battle, mustn't be cowardly, but must go straight to the doctor/spiritual guide and show him our wound, so that we can be healed spiritually and can continue the good fight.

The spiritual guide may impose a penance. You should know that that's the 'medicine' which aims at your spiritual progress. It's a therapeutic means for correction and prevention. Unfortunately, there are Christians who prefer a 'clever' confession: 'I'll speak to an icon'. What a great delusion. Because no icon has the authority to hear and forgive people's sins. And who will advise us with our spiritual problems? Who'll show us the way to avoid our everyday traps which the evil one sets? Who'll give us the assurance that our sins have been forgiven? And the most fundamental thing of all, how will we feel the Grace of the Holy Spirit in our heart?

Bear in mind the words of Saint Kosmas Aitolos: 'Confession seems a very burdensome thing, but in fact it's very light. It's like picking up four hairs. So light. First hair: forgive your enemies; second, find a good, virtuous spiritual guide and tell him all your sins; third, in confession, don't put the blame for your sins on anybody else. Say humbly 'I'm to blame, my bad disposition, my love for evil and sin'; fourth, after confession, let's say 'From now on I won't allow myself to fall into the same sins'.

Don't put confession off. Don't say, 'I've got time. Later'. Postponement's a great trap. It sends the conscience to sleep and disorientates people. Apart from that, we don't govern time, and we don't know when we'll leave this world. So why deprive yourself of such a great benefit, why put off your repentance and why not experience the joy and elation of being freed from sins which is given to you through the sacrament of confession? Once the heavy burden of your sins and guilt has been lifted from you, you feel as if you're living the joy of the return to the Source of Life, of the return to the Father.

'Paradise blossomed in my heart from the moment I made my confession, wrote Dostoevsky in the 'Brothers Karamazov'.

I pray that this joy will blossom in the hearts of all of us.

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