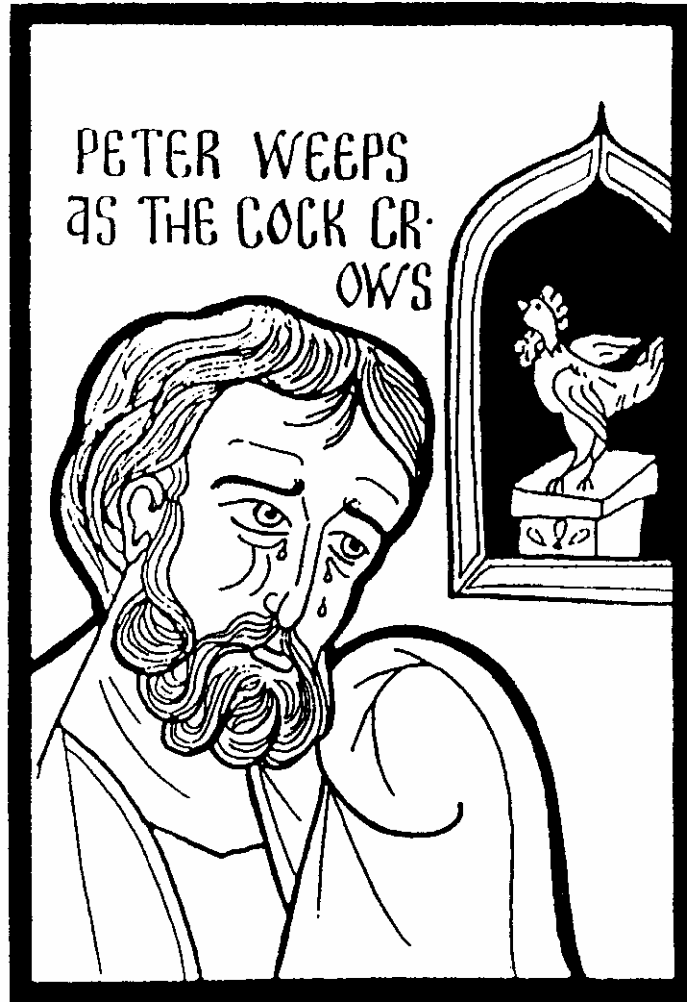


IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS



An Orthodox Explanation of the
Mystery of Confession



NOTICE FROM THE EDITOR

This booklet is adapted from the one produced by Fr Thomas Hopko, “If we confess our sins”, OCA, (1975).

May this Booklet be of use to all of the faithful within our Archdiocese in sharing the common joy, love and peace of the All-Holy Trinity. Glory be to Our Lord, and Saviour Jesus Christ forever, Amen.

Fr John Vesic
National Youth Director
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of
Australia & New Zealand

25 Feb 2001
Cheese Fare Sunday

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 at 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 not 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 ever 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:

- Do we really believe that the teachings of Christ are practical and applicable to our lives in the world?
- 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 realise 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 hard-heartedness 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 rationalisations 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.