



Precepts #3: Confess Sins Once a Year

Introduction:



Catholics are bound to observe the laws of the Church, in addition to the Ten Commandments. Many of these additional laws have been long established and observed by the Faithful for centuries. Altogether, the Deposit of Faith, that which a Catholic must believe in order to truly be a Catholic, requires Catholics to observe the Precepts of the Church.

The Precepts of the Church are not all inclusive in terms of the rules for living a Catholic life. There are other laws that Catholics are bound to observe that are not listed in the Precepts of the Church. These additional laws include:

1. Catholics are forbidden to maintain membership in Masonic or other anti-Catholic associations
2. Catholics are not to send their children to non-Catholic schools
3. Catholics are not to read or possess any bad books, magazines, or publications.
4. And more!

The Precepts of the Church are the six principal ones, that is, the six ones with which Catholics should ordinarily be concerned since they ordinarily occur in a person's life. The last of the six precepts that we will mention, is often included separately on some lists. For that reason, some lists of the Precepts maintain only five in number. Some lists also include a seventh precept: To participate in the Church's mission of Evangelization of Souls.



The Principal Six Precepts of the Church include:

1. To assist at Holy Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation
2. To fast and abstain on all days appointed
3. To confess our sins at least once a year
4. To receive Holy Communion during the Easter Season
5. To contribute to the support of the Church
6. To observe the laws of the Church concerning Holy Matrimony

In this lesson, **we will study the third precept of the Church: To confess our sins at least once a year.**

Before we begin our lesson, [please click here to study the life of the saint who we celebrate today.](#)

Opening Prayer:



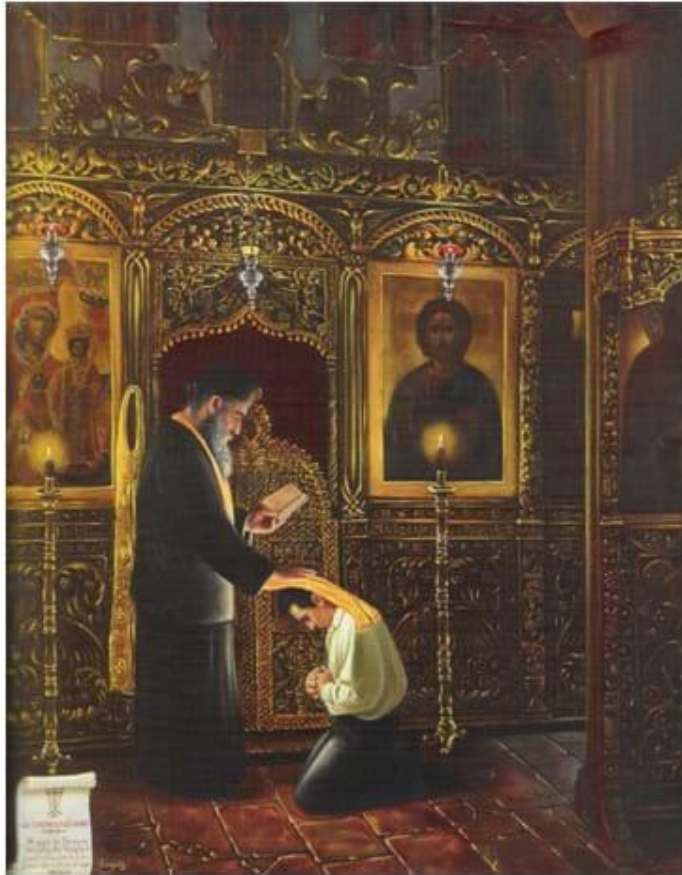
We begin this lesson in prayer, as all of our daily actions should begin in prayer. And, no prayer is more fitting for us at this time than the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Rosary has been rightfully called the second greatest of all prayers, second only to the sublime Sacrifice of the Mass, instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, in which the Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary takes place.



Let us pray the 3rd Glorious Mystery, the Descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary at Pentecost. Let us pray for the gift of Charity from God.

As we pray the Holy Rosary at the onset of this lesson, let us attempt to pray it in the language of the Church, the Latin Language. [You may listen to these mysteries prayed in Latin by clicking here.](#)

OTHER PRAYERS FOR THIS LESSON:



In the Eastern Catholic Tradition, Confession is not done behind a screen. Instead, the penitent stands or kneel before an icon and confesses sins to a priest. The priest will place his stole over the head of the penitent.

PRAYER FOR A GOOD CONFESSION

O my God, by my grievous sins I have crucified again Thy Divine Son and made Him a mockery. For this I have deserved Thy wrath and made myself fit for the fires of hell. How ungrateful have I been to Thee as well, my heavenly Father, Who created me out of nothing, redeemed me by the precious blood of Thy Son and sanctified me by Thy holy sacraments and by the Holy Ghost. But Thou hast spared me by Thy mercy, to make this confession. Receive me back as Thy prodigal son and grant me to confess well, that I may begin anew to love Thee with my whole heart and soul, and henceforth to keep Thy commandments and suffer patiently whatever temporal punishment may remain. I hope by Thy goodness and power to obtain everlasting life in Paradise. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



PRAYER BEFORE CONFESSION

O my God, without You I can do nothing. You have told me, "Ask and you shall receive." In full confidence in Your promise, therefore, I beg You to accept the confession I am about to make and grant me true contrition for my many offenses. Saviour of the world who gave Yourself to the death of the cross to save sinners, look with mercy on me, a sinner. Regard not my wickedness in such a manner to forget Your pardon. For my offenses I deserve condemnation, but presuming upon the ransom of Your blood, I ask forgiveness. Heal my wounds, Lord Jesus. Send the light of Your truth into my soul so that I may worthily confess my shortcomings. Give me a contrite heart and a true sorrow for my offenses. Although I am unworthy of Your love, because of it I come to You for forgiveness. Have mercy on me, O Lord, have mercy!

Scripture:



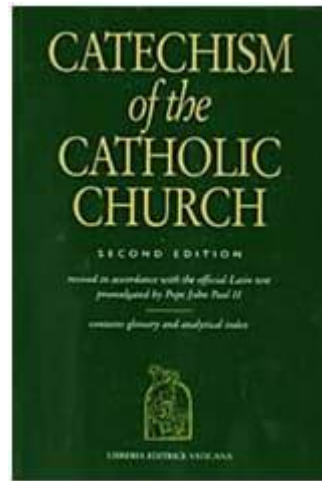
He said therefore to them again: Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you. When he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.

John 20:21-23



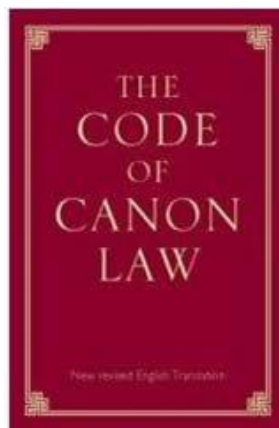
Catechism References:

References in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:



1457 According to the Church's command, "after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year." Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive Holy Communion, even if he experiences deep contrition, without having first received sacramental absolution, unless he has a grave reason for receiving Communion and there is no possibility of going to confession. Children must go to the sacrament of Penance before receiving Holy Communion for the first time.

References in the Code of Canon Law:



1983 Code of Canon Law:

Can. 988 §1. A member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and number all grave sins committed after baptism and not yet remitted directly through the keys of the Church nor acknowledged in individual confession, of which the person has knowledge after diligent examination of conscience.



§2. It is recommended to the Christian faithful that they also confess venial sins.

Can. 989 After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.

1917 Code of Canon Law:

Can. 906 All the faithful of both sexes who have reached the age of discretion, that is, to the use of reason, are bound faithfully to confess all their sins at least once a year.

References in the Baltimore Catechism #3



Q. 1349. What is meant by the command of confessing at least once a year?

A. By the command of confessing at least once a year is meant that we are obliged, under pain of mortal sin, to go to confession within the year.

Q. 1350. Should we confess only once a year?

A. We should confess frequently if we wish to lead a good life.

Q. 1351. Should we go to confession at our usual time even if we think we have not committed sin since our last confession?

A. We should go to confession at our usual time even if we think we have not committed sin since our last confession because the Sacrament of Penance has for its object not only to forgive sins but also to bestow grace and strengthen the soul against temptation.

Q. 1352. Should children go to confession?

A. Children should go to confession when they are old enough to commit sin, which is commonly about the age of seven years.



Lesson:



The third precept of the Church is to confess our sins at least once a year. While we are only required under the penalty of mortal sin to confess our sins sacramentally once a year, we are encouraged (and most of us need) to go much more frequently. It is most highly recommended for the Faithful to go to Confession every two weeks. Frequent Confession restores sanctifying grace in our souls (if we were in a state of mortal sin before our Confession), absolves all sin (venial and mortal), and strengthens our resolve and encourages us in virtue.

While the value and necessity of Confession is outlined in our lesson on Confession, this lesson focuses instead on the third precept: to confess our sins at least once a year.

Pope St. Pius X, in *Quam singulari*, explicits states the importance of Confession for even children. After all, everyone older than the age of reason is bound to observe this precept of the Church:

I. The age of discretion for both Confession and Communion is the time when a child begins to exercise his reason. This is normally around the seventh year, more or less. From this time also begins the duty of keeping the precept of Confession and Communion.

II. For first Confession and first Communion it is not necessary to have a fully complete knowledge of Christian doctrine. Afterwards, however, the child should gradually learn the whole catechism according to his mental capacity.



III. The religious knowledge required of a child for suitable preparation before first Communion is the following. He should understand, according to his ability, the mysteries of faith necessary for salvation, and be sufficiently able to distinguish the Eucharistic from ordinary corporeal bread, to approach the most holy Eucharist with such devotion as can be expected at his age.

IV. The preceptive duty, affecting the child, to receive Confession and Communion, mainly falls on those responsible for his care. This means the parents, the confessor, teachers and the pastor. It is the father's right, or of those who take his place, and the confessor's — according to the Roman Catechism — to admit a child to first Communion.

VI. Those who have charge of children are most urgently to insure that, after their first Communion, these children often approach the Holy Table. If possible, they should receive even daily, as Christ Jesus and mother Church desire; and that they do so with such devotion of spirit as corresponds to their age.

VII. The custom of not admitting children to Confession or of never absolving them, once they have reached the age of reason, is absolutely condemned (*omnino reprobanda*). Consequently local ordinaries are to make sure, even using juridical means, that this abuse is completely rooted out.

Some may falsely think that the precepts are relatively new for the Church — or at least that the precept for annual Confession is new. In fact, it is not. As stated in the Catholic Encyclopedia found on New Advent:

They came to be regarded as special Commandments of the Church. Thus in a book of tracts of the thirteenth century attributed to Celestine V (though the authenticity of this work has been denied) a separate tractate is given to the precepts of the Church and is divided into four chapters, the first of which treats of fasting, the second of confession and paschal Communion, the third of interdicts on marriage, and the fourth of tithes.

In the fourteenth century Ernest von Parduvitz, Archbishop of Prague, instructed his priests to explain in popular sermons the principal points of the catechism, the Our Father, the Creed, the Commandments of God and of the Church (Hafner, loc. cit., 115).

A century later (1470) the catechism of Dietrick Coelde, the first, it is said, to be written in German, explicitly set forth that there were five Commandments of the Church. In his "Summa Theologica" (part I, tit. xvii, p. 12) St. Antoninus of Florence (1439) enumerates ten precepts of the Church universally binding on the faithful.

*These are: to observe certain feasts, to keep the prescribed fasts, to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, to confess once a year, to receive Holy Communion during paschal time, to pay tithes, to abstain from any act upon which an interdict has been placed entailing excommunication, to refrain also from any act interdicted under pain of excommunication *latæ sententiæ*, to avoid association with the excommunicated, finally not to attend Mass or other religious functions celebrated by a priest living in open concubinage.*



In the sixteenth century the Spanish canonist, Martin Aspilcueta (1586), gives a list of five principal precepts of obligation, to fast at certain prescribed times, to pay tithes, to go to confession once a year and to receive Holy Communion at Easter (Enchiridion, sive manuale confessoriorum et poenitentium, Rome, 1588, ch. xxi, n. 1).

At this time, owing to the prevalence of heresy, there appeared many popular works in defence of the authority of the Church and setting forth in a special manner her precepts. Such among others were the "Summa Doctrinae Christianae" (1555) of St. Peter Canisius and the "Doctrina Christiana" of Bellarmine (1589).

It is plain, however, that the precepts of the Church, as a particular and distinct body of laws were recognized long before the sixteenth century; the contention that they were first definitely formulated by St. Peter Canisius is unwarranted.

Fr. John Flader in an article for *The Catholic Weekly* stated in part the following, that is a wise source of meditation:

The Code of Canon Law places the obligation of confessing mortal sins once a year in relation with the general obligation to confess these sins. The preceding canon states: "The faithful are bound to confess, in kind and number, all grave sins committed after baptism, of which after careful examination of conscience they are aware, which have not yet been directly pardoned by the keys of the Church, and which have not been confessed in an individual confession" (Can. 988 §1).

Thus the Code is indicating that someone with mortal sins on their soul should confess those sins at least within a year. But considering the harm to the soul of being in the state of mortal sin, it is always advisable to confess such sins as soon as possible after committing them.

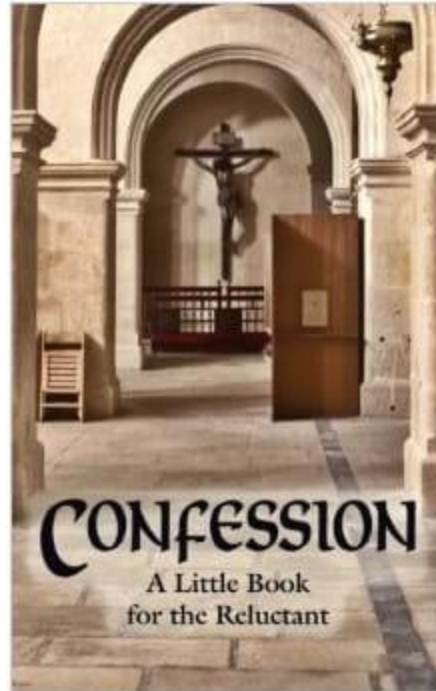
Thirdly, the precept of annual confession in itself has nothing to do with Lent and Easter. Unlike the [other] precept — "You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season" (CCC 2042) — th[is] precept can be fulfilled at any time of the year. Nonetheless, it is good to fulfil it as a preparation for Easter, even if one does not have mortal sins on one's soul.

Finally, it would be foolish to excuse oneself from fulfilling the second precept on the grounds that one has no mortal sins to confess, since the sacrament of Penance brings so many benefits to the soul.

The Catechism mentions that the precepts are meant to ensure the bare minimum in the spiritual life: "The precepts of the Church are set in the context of a moral life bound to and nourished by liturgical life. The obligatory character of these positive laws decreed by the pastoral authorities is meant to guarantee to the faithful the very necessary minimum in the spirit of prayer and moral effort, in the growth in love of God and neighbour" (CCC 2041).



Activity:



It is a holy action to encourage those who have been long away from the Sacraments to return. Suggest to your family members or friends, who may have drifted away from the Sacrament of Confession, to return to it. Afraid of what they might say or how they might react? Why not post something on Facebook to encourage Confession in general. Or [buy a few inexpensive guides](#) to Confession and pass them out to those who may need the encouragement.

You may listen to an insightful [sermon on the importance of Making a Good Confession, by clicking here.](#)

Closing Prayer:

We will close all of our lessons with a very special prayer. This prayer is actually *Liturgy*, which means it forms part of the official, public prayers of the Church. Because it is liturgy, we must approach it with respect and reverence, and follow the proper postures and guidelines, just as if we were attending the Liturgy of the Holy Mass.

This prayer is called the Divine Office which is contained in a series of books called the Breviary. At certain points throughout the day, all of the Church prays the same liturgy to God, and we are all united in this wonderful prayer. The purpose of the Divine Office is to sanctify time and our day, making us constantly in prayer before the Father.

We here at CatechismClass.com highly encourage all students to learn to pray the Hours, because this truly brings you into the life of the Church, as it is praying with the Church as the Church prays. Priests, deacons, monks, and nuns are required to pray these hours throughout the day.



However, everyone is invited to pray these. Holy Mother Church encourages all of her faithful to regularly pray the Hours, especially in common (Code of Canon Law, Canon 1174.2).



The Divine Office is immensely helpful to a life of grace, and it is a great grace to be able to enter into the prayer of the Church before God. The main hours to pray are Lauds, Vespers, and Compline are the major hours. Prime, Terce, Sext, and None are the little hours. Matins, the first hour, is often prayed very early in the morning or night and usually immediately precedes Lauds. As a layman, you don't need to pray the Office perfectly. But it would be very worthwhile for you to unite your prayers to the Church's official Liturgy.

[You may pray the Divine Office online at Divinum Officium for free now by clicking here.](#)