

EXAMINE YOUR CONSCIENCE

“Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield... your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13).

Because it is not always clear to us when we fall into sin, by way of reminder, we offer a comprehensive way to examine our conscience assisting us to identify our sins, so that we can make a thorough confession, and receive help on how to control our passions, how to address our weaknesses, and, with God’s grace, how to acquire the good habits (virtues) to no longer sin. We will center our questions on the Ten Commandments and, for the more perfect, on the Nine Beatitudes.

The Ten Commandments

1. The First Commandment:

I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me (Ex. 20:2.3).

Do I really love God above all things? Do I believe in “a god,” or in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Do I say that what matters is to be good and that what god you believe in doesn’t matter? Do I believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, the only way to God and to salvation? Do I believe in the Orthodox Church as the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church?

Do I know my faith? Do I make an effort to learn my faith? Do I study the Holy Scripture and other Orthodox books? Have I criticized any of the Church’s teachings? Do I believe in life eternal? Do I trust in myself or in God? Is God a part of my everyday life? Have I murmured, grumbled or complained against God’s Providence in the difficult times in my life? Have I doubted God’s mercy, forgiveness and love towards me? Do I thank God and acknowledge Him as the Giver of all blessings? Is the most important goal in my life the pursuit of holiness?

Am I superstitious? Do I believe in luck or in bad omens? Do I believe in psychics, card readers, palm readers, coffee readers, astrologers, horoscopes and other fortune-tellers? Do I engage in such activities, participate or encourage others to participate in such activities-even “for fun”?

Do I pray every day? Do I talk to God as if I were standing in front of Him? Do I pray attentively and with fervor? Do I think of God throughout my day? Have I participated in prayer services or other meetings of non-Orthodox? Am I embarrassed to cross myself in public and pray before meals, even in restaurants? Am I timid in expressing my belief in Christ and His Orthodox Church?

2. The Second Commandment

You shall not make for yourself a graven image (in order to worship it) (Ex. 20:4).

Is the image of Christ that I worship is that of the historic Christ, the one used in the Church, which bears the form and the symbols of the true God? Or do I display images

that are artistic conceptions, figment's of an artist's imagination, not suitable for veneration?

Do I worship Christ as our God? Do I prostrate before His holy icon, paying honor to Him depicted on it? Do I venerate the icons of Christ, of the holy Mother of God and of the Saints, prostrating before them, kissing them, lighting candles before them and offering incense to them, thus honoring those who have been living images of Christ?

Do I abstain from venerating the holy icons and avoid kissing them, because I consider them mistakenly to be idols?

Do I idolize myself, power, prestige, looks, ideology, spouse, children, possessions, education, position, work, loving them more than God? Do I value them above God? Have I given to anyone or anything the worship, praise and honor that belong to God alone?

3. The Third Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Ex. 20:7).

Have I taken the name of the Lord in vain? Have I brought God's name in my lips without cause, as to indicate surprise, admiration, etc? Have I profaned or blasphemed God's holy name in any way?

Have I sworn with no reason? Have I taken a false oath? Have I broken any solemn vow, pledge or promise? Have I entered into an agreement, promise or contract against God's law?

Have I blasphemed the name of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary or the Saints?

Have I cursed anyone or anything or used foul language? Have I cursed anyone in my heart?

Have I failed to give proper reverence to holy persons and things? Have I shown proper respect to the clergy?

4. The Fourth Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Ex. 20:8).

Sabbath day for us Christians is the Lord's Day, Sunday. Have I worshiped regularly on Sundays and major feast days? Have I helped others to do the same? If I could not go to church because of illness or other serious cause, have I prayed at home?

Have I attended the Divine Liturgy from beginning to end, or have I gotten there late?

Have I left before it was finished? Have I participated in the prayers? Have I been receiving Holy Communion regularly? Have I been receiving Holy Communion properly prepared, after going to Confession and after praying and fasting? Did I go to church dressed modestly? Have I been careful not to laugh or talk or let my thoughts wander?

Have I worked unnecessarily on Sundays or major feast days? Have I caused others to do so? Do I keep the whole day holy, spending it in edifying ways? Have I engaged in harmful amusements? Have I allowed recreation to take priority over the Lord's commandment?

5. The Fifth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother (Ex. 20:12).

Have I honored my parents? Have I loved and respected them, as I should? Have I been obedient to them? Have I neglected them or failed to help them in their time of need? Have I deceived them or caused them pain by my words or deeds? Have I abandoned them in time of sickness and old age? Have I put up with their ways and elderly weaknesses?

Have I treated all my family members with patience, kindness and love? Have I harmed them or abused them physically, verbally or mentally? Have I disciplined them with patience and not with anger? Have I raised my family in the fear of God? Have I set a good example for them? Have I spoiled them?

Have I been harsh and severe in my criticism of my family members? Have I punished my children unjustly? Have I favored one child over another? Have I neglected my children's spiritual life or their religious education?

Have I respected and obeyed the legitimate religious and civil authority? Have I voted responsibly and knowledgeably? Have I paid my taxes? Have I worked, as I am able, to promote peace, justice, morality and love in my community, my country and the world?

6. The Sixth Commandment

You shall not murder (Ex. 20:13).

Have I committed murder? Have I killed anyone accidentally or in self-defense? Have I committed abortion, consented to it, performed it or advised others to do it? Have I attempted or contemplated suicide? Have I wished or caused death to anyone? Have I destroyed any life unnecessarily?

Have I stricken someone in anger? Have I harmed others with words or actions? Have I been cruel to anyone? Have I neglected my health or injured the health of others?

Have I insulted anyone? Have I harbored hatred and evil thoughts against anyone? Am I filled with desire to revenge? Have I quarreled with others?

Have I been reconciled with others and sought their forgiveness, regardless of who was at fault? Do I hold grudges? Have I failed to stand up for those unjustly treated?

7. The Seventh Commandment

You shall not commit adultery (Ex. 20:14).

Have I committed adultery (had extramarital relations) or, if not married, have I committed fornication? Have I committed any immoral acts with others? Have I masturbated? Have I aroused myself or others sexually? Have I led others to commit sinful acts?

Have I had any kind of a relationship that was impure? Have I maintained my purity till marriage? Have I avoided intimacy within marriage in time of fasting and the

day before receiving Holy Communion? Have I refused parenthood by immoral means? Have I demanded sex without consideration? Have I used my spouse for my own sexual gratification? Have I treated my spouse with honor and respect?

Have I made any obscene gestures? Have I danced lasciviously or have watched others dance lasciviously? Have I made any obscene phone calls? Have I used profane language? Have I used indecent jokes? Have I delighted in obscenities?

Have I dressed immodestly, especially in church? Have I worn provocative clothing? Have I caused scandal by my appearance? Have I flirted with other people? Do I control my eyes, ears and tongue?

Have I committed any demeaning and unworthy actions? Have I degraded myself? Have I forgotten human dignity?

Have I read immoral books or magazines or looked at impure pictures? Have I watched any “adult” (immoral) movies, videos, TV shows or Internet sites? Have I sung or listened to immoral songs?

Have I committed immoral acts in my heart? Have I entertained impure thoughts? Have I fantasized?

Have I associated with bad company or frequented unsavory places?

Have I avoided circumstances that have led me to temptation and fall?

8. The Eighth Commandment

You shall not steal (Ex. 20:15).

Have I stolen anything? Have I received any stolen goods knowingly? Have I appropriated anything that was not mine? Have I kept anything that did not belong to me? Do I possess something that is not mine? Have I tried honestly to find owners of lost articles that I have found? Have I contracted debts I knew I could not pay?

Have I written bad checks? Have I caused others to steal or cheat? Have I suggested stealing to others or have helped them do it? Have I covered up for a thief?

Have I cheated anyone: in school, in business, at games? Have I called in sick when I was not? Have I defrauded anyone? Have I paid my debts? Have I damaged or destroyed anything that belonged to others?

Have I committed forgery? Have I borrowed money or other objects and failed to return them? Have I taken advantage of the generosity of others?

Have I worked dishonestly? Have I cheated at work? Have I not worked hard to earn my wages? Have I not compensated others properly for their work?

Have I taken advantage of the ignorant in buying from or selling to them? Have I bribed anyone? Have I forged anyone’s signature or other data in a document?

Have I gambled, especially what I could not afford? Have I cheated playing cards or other games? Have I filed improper income tax returns? Do I keep proper records?

In my everyday transactions with my spouse, co-workers and customers have I been honest, straightforward, sincere and upright? Have I lived within my means, and not wastefully and extravagantly?

Have I played dangerously the stock market or entered into potentially hazardous transactions? Have I lent money with interest?

Have I not given generously and from the heart to the poor, the orphans, the elderly, to my church and to charitable causes in proportion to my means? Have I been unmoved in the presence of my neighbor's misfortune and need?

Have I let others pay my way most of the time? Do I expect others to take care of me? Do I worry about money matters?

9. The Ninth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness (Ex. 20:16).

Have I given false and unjust testimony against anyone? Have I added to or subtracted from the truth? Have I concealed the truth? Have I advised others to bear false witness?

Have I spoken evil of anyone? Have I slandered or accused anyone? Have I told lies or spread rumors about anyone? Have I assisted in carrying out a lie? Have I excused myself for telling small or "white" lies?

Have I falsely accused anyone? Have I wronged others by harboring suspicions against them? Have I bent or overlooked the truth by accepting gifts? Have I been partial to others?

Have I disclosed to anyone the sins and faults of another? Have I revealed to others confidential information? Have I told any secrets entrusted to me? Have I betrayed the trust of anyone?

Have I passed judgment on the behavior, deeds, mistakes, or other shortcomings of others when they are absent, even though they may be true? Have I made careless statements or done anything else to harm anyone's name and reputation?

Have I flattered or praised falsely and hypocritically someone?

Have I engaged in idle gossip? Have I listened to gossip and encouraged it? Have I failed to speak up for others being criticized?

Have I laughed at the physical defects of others? Have I tried to see the shortcomings in others rather than their good?

10. The Tenth Commandment

You Shall Not Covet (Ex. 20:17).

Have I looked with envy, jealousy or hatred toward the possessions, talents or achievements of others? Have I desired the downfall or loss of others out of evil intent that I might benefit? Have I grieved that God has bestowed greater blessings on others than on me?

Have I wished for anything that belonged to someone else? 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 failed to be gracious and generous to anyone? Have I expected God to give me that which I would refuse someone else?

Have I desired and loved glory, honors, money and pleasures of this world?

The Nine Beatitudes

1. The First Beatitude

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:3).

Have I set as the goal of my life to imitate the Lord, who became poor, humble and lowly for me? Have I realized that everything I possess, including my very existence, life, intelligence and goodness, are not my own, but gifts from God? Have I truly recognized my complete dependence on God? Do I ask God's help in every task?

Have I detached myself from anything visible and subject to corruption: pleasures of this world, wealth, fame and bodily enjoyment? Do I realize my poverty in spiritual gifts?

Do my possessions possess me? As my income grows do I share it with the poor or do my needs increase with it?

Have I been proud, arrogant and self-righteous in my ways? Have I been selfish, possessive and self-seeking? Have I laid off especially my passions? Do I think highly of myself? Do I consider myself worthless? Have I sought after status, power and esteem? Am I too sensitive to criticism?

2. The Second Beatitude

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Mt. 5:4).

Do I lament over the condition of the world? Does the plight of the world and its sinful ways cause sorrow in my heart? Do I lament when I reflect on the dire consequences of our wonton living?

Does the suffering of my fellow human beings move me to sorrow or do I remain cold and indifferent? Do I feel sorrowful for the suffering of the poor, the hungry, the sick and the lonely of the world?

Do I live as if it were no Day of reckoning? Is that fearful Day continuously present in my life? Do I grieve over my sinful thoughts and actions, my unrepentant soul, my weak will power, my lack of fervor? Do I realize my unworthiness always, but especially when I approach to receive Holy Communion?

Does it cause sorrow in my heart when I reflect on God's love for us and on the ungratefulness on our part? Does the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross move me to tears? Do I feel His great love for us—and me, in particular—and do I cry in thankfulness?

2. The Third Beatitude

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Mt. 5:5).

Have I lost my cool? Have I become upset, irritable? Have I raised my voice, have I argued? Have I failed to restrain my anger? Have I lost my patience? Have I upset others through my unseemly behavior?

Have I failed to patiently endure suffering, hardship? Did I react violently when abused, wronged, ignored, or dishonored? Do I have a hard time forgetting the wrongs inflicted on me? Have I protested for having being treated unjustly? Have I sought revenge in any way?

Have I stopped to do good because of having received reproach by others? Have I avoided people who have wronged me or who might upset me? Have I failed to pray sincerely for those who cause me harm?

Am I sorry for not having kept silence at a specific circumstance? Have I wished ill to those who harmed me?

Have I failed to reconcile myself with those I have offended? Have I received Holy Communion having enmity in my heart and harboring ill feelings for anyone?

Have I tried to dominate or to serve others at home, school, work, office, church and elsewhere?

Have I nursed hatred in my heart or desired revenge against anyone? Have I been resentful, bitter, unforgiving or insulting and abusive to others? Have I loved my enemies?

4. The Fourth Beatitude

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Mt. 5:6).

Have I set as a goal in my life the constant quest for God, to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him and to do His will in all things? Have I been satiated by the “daily bread,” that is Christ and His grace?

Have I called upon God to give me the grace and strength to do His work every day of my life? Have I prayed ardently that the judgments of God will prevail in the world? Have I truly yearned for God’s will to be done in all things? Have I continuously craved for God’s justice, as parched land craves for rain?

Have I really strived and labored to acquire the virtues? Have I thirsted to acquire them fully? Have I recognized my spiritual poverty? Have I recognized my spiritual nakedness and indigence?

Have I tried to cultivate a righteous life through prayer, fasting, worship, Holy Communion and deeds of love toward others? Have I sought to help others in whatever manner I can?

Have I suffered quietly and patiently for God’s justice, hoping in His righteous judgment, at His time and in His way, or have I demanded retribution and punishment on the ungodly? Have I sought revenge against my enemies? Have I refrained from harming others?

5. The Fifth Beatitude

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy (Mt. 5:7).

Have I shown mercy, kindness, care, and goodness to others in their need? Have I been indifferent, detached, unkind, strict, cruel or judgmental to others?

Have I been eager to understand, and to sympathize, and to forgive?

Have I shown mercy or shun mercy? Have I gone out of my way to help others or to avoid helping others?

Have I shown compassion on the souls of others and help them? Have I pitied the ignorant and instruct them? Have I comforted the sick and those in sorrow or mourning? Have I furnished those in want?

Have I shown true sympathy for others? Have I felt deeply involved in the suffering and plight of my fellow human being?

Have I really tried to identify with the other person, in order to see things with his eyes, think with his mind and feel with his feelings?

Have I shown compassion and help toward the poor, hungry, lonely and needy around me? Have I tried to understand and forgive others?

Have I felt sorrow for the suffering of others? Have I displayed a charitable and compassionate attitude toward those who needed my sympathy?

Have I shown a loving disposition towards those who suffer distress?

Have I given to others what I have received from God, i.e. money, food, strength, a helpful word, a prayer, through which I have shown my compassion for others?

Have I regarded the misfortunes of others as my own? Have I shared the pain of those who suffer? Have I desired it to be my own?

Have I, in imitation of my Lord, appropriated the pains and evils of others, and transferred them to myself—not in wish and thought, but in deed?

Have I responded mercifully to others who are ignorant of Christ, imparting spiritual knowledge to them?

6. The Sixth Beatitude

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mt. 5:8).

Is my heart pure, that is free from sin, evil desires and bad inclinations that pollute and corrupt it? Is my heart purified from every creature and all unruly affections? Have my motives and actions been completely unmingled of evil?

Have I loved goodness, purity and holiness? Or have I succumbed to evil motives and intentions and given way to impure thoughts, words or deeds?

Have I cleansed my heart from every stain of sin through the tears of repentance and through the holy mysteries of confession and communion?

Have I been guilty of bias and prejudice? Have I been hypocritical, pretentious or self-indulgent to sinful passions?

Has my devotion to God led me to surrendering myself wholly to God's love and mercy?

Have I yielded absolutely my whole life to God, possessing Him and being possessed by Him, thus coming to know Him intimately?

Have I abandoned completely all evil thoughts and occupied myself with how to cleanse my heart and exercise my soul for sanctification, striving in my life to obtain them?

7. The Seventh Beatitude

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God (Mt. 5:9).

Have I had a loving disposition towards my neighbor? Have I harbored the passions of hatred, wrath, envy, jealousy, bitterness and resentment in my heart? Have I been unfairly angry, aggressive or impatient? Have I been irritable, polemical or divisive? Have I been involved in quarrels or been the cause of quarrels between others? Have I been a peacemaker or a troublemaker? Have I divided men or united men?

Have I tried to bring peace among men, while I was at war with God? Have I tried to counsel and instruct others and reconcile them with God while I was an enemy of God? Have I realized that my efforts to bring peace while I am not at peace are not pleasing to God?

Have I pacified perfectly the discord between flesh and spirit in myself, so that the law of the body no longer wars against the law of the mind? Have I set my soul and body at peace by subjecting the flesh to the spirit? Does my flesh no longer rise against the spirit? Does the grace of the Holy Spirit reign in my soul and lead it where it will?

Have I endured vilification, maltreatment, calumny, even persecution “for righteousness sake,” rejoicing, without losing my interior peace? Have I faithfully and urgently pursued the peace of God by repentance and reconciliation through our Lord Jesus Christ?

Have I had God’s peace in my heart? Have I set Christ’s peace before everything else? Have I striven for peace at all circumstances? Have I led others to this peace, becoming an agent of reconciliation?

Have I avoided taking any action in threatening and dangerous situations thinking I was doing it for love of peace, whereas the situations demanded to face them? Have I avoided trouble or have I actively made peace, even when the way to peace might have been through struggle?

Have I struggled to make this world a better place for all people to live in? Have “I always pulled up a weed and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow”?

8. The Eighth Beatitude

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:10).

Have I complained when persecuted for God’s sake? Have I prayed for my persecutors? Have I failed to defend myself or anyone else in the truth for fear of humiliation or persecution? Have I had the courage to stand up for what is right despite criticism, ridicule or persecution?

Have I loved Christ so much that I have endured persecutions, bore all kinds of insults and have been the object of the most horrible accusations, and suffered them gladly, rejoicing over them, because of the heavenly reward? Have I placed my trust in Christ for the sake of His promise, although I have received no reward in this life? Have I had constant hope in the present for that which is to come? Can I make mine the words of

St. Paul, “For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”? (Phil. 3:8)

Have I had the same disposition displayed by St. Paul, who stated, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:35.38-39)

Have I imitated the Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors and Saints of the Church who, in imitation of Christ, were persecuted, and were led to the slaughter like lambs, without uttering a word? Has Christ’s promise given me strength, courage, patience, to endure mistreatment and abuse for Christ’s sake, while maintaining my inner peace? Have I followed the Apostle’s advice, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them”? (Rom. 12:14)

Have I sought the pleasures of life, the honors and the approval of people that draw me to the earth, or the suffering, the rejection and the condemnation for Christ’s sake, which draw me to heaven? Have I accepted the discipline of the Lord joyfully, knowing that “discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”? (Heb. 12:11)

9. The Ninth Beatitude

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven (Mt. 5:11-12).

Is the joy of Christ in my heart even in trying moments? Have I been pessimistic, despondent or despairing? Have I truly delighted in the promise of God’s treasures in heaven?

Do I love the glory and the honor that come from people, or do I imitate the Lord who said, “I do not receive glory from man” (John 5:41)? Do I love the praise of men more than the praise of God? (Cf. John 12:43)

Am I possessed by vainglory and self-conceit, or do I regard myself the last and the most worthless of all people?

Have I tried to hide or minimize my Orthodox faith because of shame, fear, or avoidance of ridicule? Have I had the incessant prayer of the heart to sustain me in times of test and trial?

Have I been disappointed, disheartened, saddened, become impatient when people have not shown appreciation for my services? Have I reacted to their criticism as not deserving it, claiming innocence?

Have I kept the words of the prophet in my mind, “do not fear the reproach of others, and do not be dismayed when they revile you”? (Is. 51:7)

Have I truly spiritual felt joy when people hated me, excluded me from their company, reviled me, and defamed me for my faith in Christ? (Cf. Lk. 6:22)

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