

# A PREPARATION FOR THE MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE

*A Guide to Preparing for  
Confession*

ST TIKHON ORTHODOX MISSION



# THE MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE

## INTRODUCTION

The Holy Mystery of Repentance is in truth another baptism. It is the power of God to forgive and cleanse us from all sin and to grant us the knowledge and strength to live the life into which we have been baptized, the life of Christ. It is therefore essential that we understand this mystery, inasmuch as we are able, and that we accept this great gift of God for our salvation, approaching it as often as we should. Those advanced in the spiritual life, or beginners completely committed to it, often come to this holy mystery daily or even more often. Those of us who have only the desire for growth in spiritual life should come at least once a month and more often if we experience special difficulties.

Coming to this Mystery once a month is really the minimum for anyone who is serious about the Christian life. This will provide the opportunity for us to examine our lives regularly and to open them to the examination of a spiritual guide. It will encourage us to repent and recommit ourselves to the life into which we have been baptized and gain for ourselves the benefits just mentioned. A mystery so great as this, with such wondrous blessings demands thorough preparation on our part before we come to it. We must prepare our souls and bodies for receiving the great grace that God is ready to pour out on us. We do this by prayer, fasting, and works in cooperation with Divine Grace. Fasting is a part of our preparation for any of God's blessings. This is why the Church sets fasts for all of us on earth throughout the year. We should always observe these fasts diligently, and at times we should even increase our efforts to prepare ourselves for God's grace in a special way. Fasting should make us hungry for God, and it should quiet the demands of the flesh.

This is the case, of course, only when we fast sincerely and not simply out of obligation to meet "the letter of the law." We should also perform works of charity to open our lives to God. We encounter God when we help those in need. We should read the Holy Scriptures and spiritual works to prepare our hearts.

Here is an outline of how we should prepare ourselves for this great Mystery of Repentance:

- Fast according to the Church's discipline. Consult the church calendar for the discipline for each day of the year.
- Show charity to others and read relevant passages from the Holy Scriptures and other spiritual works and attempt to be reconciled to all.
- Pray the prayers of preparation and make a thorough examination of your life.
- Repent of your sins and open your heart to God's forgiving and saving power.
- Read the Introductory prayers in the Order of the Holy-Mystery of Repentance, immediately before you make your confession.
- Confess all of your sins to the father confessor, holding back nothing from shame or fear of being exposed.
- Accept God's forgiveness and power to live the life in Christ.
- Give thanks to God for his great gifts.
- Diligently observe any penance (canon, epitimia) given by the father confessor.
- Use the grace given to you by God to live the life in Christ. 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. -- I John 1:8, 9.

## **THE HOLY FATHERS ON REPENTANCE**

### **St. John Chrysostom**

No sin is so great that it can conquer the munificence of the Master. Even if one is a fornicator, or an adulterer... the power of the gift and the love of the Master are great enough to make all these sins disappear and to make the sinner shine more brightly than the rays of the sun.... And Christ himself, addressing the whole human race, said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest...." His invitation is one of kindness; his goodness is beyond description.... And see whom he calls! Those who have spent their strength in breaking the law, those who are burdened with their sins, those who can no longer lift up their heads, those who are filled with shame, those who can no longer speak out. And why does he call them? Not to demand an accounting, nor to hold court. But why? To relieve them of their pain, to take away their heavy burden. For what could ever be a heavier burden than sin?.... I shall refresh you who are weighted down by sin, he says, and you who are bent down as if under a burden; I shall grant you remission of your sins. Only come to me!

### **St. Isaac of Syria**

Repentance is fitting at all times and for all persons, for sinners as well as for the righteous who look for salvation. There are no bounds to perfection, for even the perfection of the most perfect is nothing but imperfection. Hence, until the moment of death, neither the time nor the works of perfection can ever be complete.

### **St. John of Karpathos**

Do all in your power not to fall, for the strong athlete should not fall. But if you do fall, get up again at once and continue the contest. Even if you fall a thousand times...rise up again each time, and keep on doing this until the day of your death. For it is written, "If a righteous man falls seven times"--that is, repeatedly throughout his life--seven times "shall he rise again."

### **St. John of the Ladder**

How well these words by St. John Climacus reflect God's mercy:

It is the property of angels not to fall, and even, as some say, it is quite impossible for them to fall. It is the property of men to fall, and to rise again as often as this may happen. But it is the property of devils, and devils alone, not to rise once they have fallen.

### **Psalm 102**

The Lord is compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and of great mercy. He will not always be angry, nor will he threaten for ever. He hath not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as heaven is high above the earth, so great is the Lord's mercy to those who fear him. As far as the East is from the West, so far hath he set our sins from us. As a father hath compassion on his children, so the Lord hath compassion on those who fear him. For he knoweth our mold, he remembereth that we are dust.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE MYSTERY OF HOLY REPENTANCE**

On Self-Examination by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves (II Corinthians 13:5).*

Glory to God! We are all called Christians; we all confess the one God in Three Persons, the living and immortal God; we were all baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity of One Essence, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we all believe in him who was crucified and rose from the dead, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and, as a sign of this, sign ourselves with the Cross; we all enter the holy church, and we pray and we entreat, we sing and we praise the holy name of God; we all listen to the holy word of God; we all commune life and the Heavenly Kingdom, and we say in the holy Symbol of Faith: "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come...." Glory to God for all this and everything else. In truth, my readers, the mysteries of Christianity are most glorious and magnificent! It is great and glorious to be a Christian! But let us examine ourselves and prove ourselves--are we truly Christians!

As the Apostle exhorts us: Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith (II Corinthians 13:5). For without the faith, a Christian cannot exist. We bear the signs of Christianity, as was said above, but do we have true Christianity within us? For all external things are nothing without that which is inside, and outward signs without the actual and true thing itself are a lie and hypocrisy. We all boast of the faith, but do we do the works which correspond to faith, as the Apostle says to everyone: Show me thy faith in thy works (James 2:18)? We have the name "Christians" from Christ; but have we crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, as is proper for Christians who believe in the crucified Christ, as the Apostle says: Those that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the passions and desires (Galatians 5:24)? Do we sense within ourselves the spiritual Joy of the anointing of oil (I John 2:27)?

We believe in the Gospel, but do we live in a way that is worthy of the Gospel? We confess and we call on the true God; but do we please him with the faith and pure conscience that he requires of us? We listen to the holy word of God; but do we heed it, and do we correct ourselves according to its rules? We commune the holy and life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ; but are we renewed by Holy Communion and do we progress towards a new, spiritual personality? Let us examine these things and the rest, and let us look at how we live, how we conduct ourselves, how we think, how we talk, how we act, with what kind of heart we go about before the God who sees all things, how we treat one another. And after examining ourselves in this way, let us be Christians not in name only but in truth.

We became Christians by the grace of God; let us strive to have true Christianity within ourselves. We were baptized into the God-of-Three-Persons, and received the gift of sanctity and righteousness: let us strive to keep this heavenly treasure to the end. We believe in Jesus Christ crucified; let us strive through faith to follow him also, and to follow him after each of us has taken up his cross. We confess and we call upon the heavenly God; let us strive also to please him with heavenly ways of life. We listen to the word of God; let us strive also to live as it teaches us. We expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. When we have turned away from this vain world, let us strive only for the eternal goods.

We approach the holy and heavenly Table of the Mysteries of Christ; let us strive that this heavenly and life creating Bread might become for us life, sanctification, illumination, renewal, joy, and spiritual consolation. So, let us demonstrate our faith by our deeds; then we will be Christians not only in name, but in reality. O God... Be gracious to us and bless us, make thy face to shine upon us, and have mercy on us: that we may know thy way upon the earth, thy salvation among all the peoples (Psalms 66:2-3). Amen. Now we should diligently read the following self-examinations with compunction, offering our lives to the Physician of our souls and bodies.

### **FORMS OF SELF-EXAMINATION BEFORE CONFESSION**

Before making our confession it is imperative that we prepare by making a thorough examination of our life. We search our lives for the sins we have committed since our last confession and for sins that we may never have confessed through shame or forgetfulness. It is essential that we confess every sin we have committed, regardless of how embarrassing it is to do so. Sins that are not confessed still have power over us: they still vex us like some terrible disease and gnaw away at us like snakes that we keep swallowing again each time we do not confess them. It is just as the spiritual father says in the exhortation to the penitent: "But if you shall conceal anything from me, you shall have the greater sin; take heed, therefore, lest, having come to the physician, you depart unhealed." In confessing sins it is necessary to be specific enough to let the spiritual father know exactly what the sins are, not general enough to save ourselves from embarrassment. It is essential to remember at all times during our confession that we are confessing our own sins, not those of others. We should explain just enough about the circumstances of our sins so that the father confessor can understand better our sins, but never in this process should we attempt to justify ourselves or switch the blame for our sins onto someone else. While others do tempt us and even provoke us to sin, we are ultimately responsible if we sin as a result of temptation or provocation. We are forgiven and made holy again by the grace and mercy of God alone. We are never justified through our feeble arguments and excuses.

Following are several forms of self-examination. Use them to prepare for the victorious Mystery of Repentance. Remember that this is indeed a time of victory over sin. To gain the victory it is necessary to face the enemy and to name the sins that have held us under his sway. In this way, through our courage to face the enemy, through our sorrow for and rejection of our sins, through our desire to repent, and most of all through the power of our God over the evil one and all his deceptions, through the power of our God to forgive and destroy the power of sin over us, we will have the glorious victory and come away from this holy Mystery with the strength to live the life our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ has given us.

The purpose of these forms of self-examination is to help us discover each of our sins, so that they can be exposed through confession of them and destroyed once and for all. May God grant us the discernment to make a good and thorough examination of our lives, the courage to confess all of our sins, the wisdom to open our lives to God's forgiveness and to accept it, and the strength to work with his Divine Grace to live the life in Christ and to grow in it now and throughout all eternity.

### **SELF-EXAMINATION ACCORDING TO THE BEATITUDES**

*Based on the self-examination from Father Thomas Hopko, If We Confess Our Sins, Department of Religious Education, The Orthodox Church In America, 1975.*

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: for theirs Is the kingdom of heaven (St. Matthew 5:3)* Am I poor before God and men? Do I cultivate the attitude of poverty? Do I realize 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 they that mourn: for they shall be comforted (St. Matthew 5:4).* 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 judgment 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 in those things about which true Christians, in imitation of Christ, can only mourn?

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (St. Matthew 5:5).* 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 they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (St. Matthew 5:6).* 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 read the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, the lives of the Saints, and other spiritually profitable works? Do I do any "spiritual exercises" which train me in goodness? Do I come to Church? Do I participate in the Mysteries? 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: for they shall obtain mercy (St. Matthew 5:7).* 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 cover offenses, or do I stir things up by picking and condemning? Am I petty and small? Do I slander and shame? Am I prejudiced, making judgments and coming to conclusions without proper facts but with pre-formed opinions? Do I actually prefer strict judgment to tender mercy?

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God (St. Matthew 5:8).* Do I love purity, cleanness, and wholeness? Am I polluted by filthy thoughts and words and actions? Is my mind stained by demonic rationalizations 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: for they shall be called the sons of God (St. Matthew 5:9).* 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 anger? 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 they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their is the kingdom of heaven (St. Matthew 5: 10).* Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake (St. Matthew 5:11). 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: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (St. Matthew 5:12).* 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 field 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, 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”?

## **SELF-EXAMINATION BASED ON OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD, TO OTHERS, AND TO OURSELVES: A MEDITATION BEFORE CONFESSION**

*Based on the self-examination from The Mystery of Divine Forgiveness, published by the Ohio Deanery.*

It is important to enter into a proper frame of mind and spirit in order to prepare a meditation before confession. The right attitude is needed. Pray to the Holy Spirit the prayer, "O Heavenly King," and he will help you make ready your confession. If there is some distraction that prevents you from inner, spiritual peace, deal with it immediately. Is it a person or people who distract you? Pray for them. Are you ashamed of some evil deed? Pray that you will have the courage to confess that sin and eliminate it from your being. Are you resentful of Confession, or have you fallen from the Church and her teachings? Have you, or do you even now, deny God? Call upon him to bear with your confused state and grant you the courage to go through with the confession, so that spiritual healing will come with the process of receiving the Holy Mysteries. Once you have composed your mind, clearing it of all distraction, then ask yourself:

### **Concerning God and you:**

Is my faith as firm as it always was, or as strong as it should be?

Do I love God with all my heart, or only now and then?

Have I trusted in him, even when I did not know his plan for me?

Did I witness to my faith in the presence of non-believers?

Have I made idols of other things, such as material goods, personal success, popularity, and my closest relatives or friends?

Is there something or somebody I love more than God?

Have I attended Church every Sunday and Great Feast Day?

Have I worked unnecessarily on Feast Days and Sundays?

Do I feel the presence of Jesus Christ in all my waking hours, wherever I am and whatever I do? Have I blamed God for my misfortunes?  
Have I called upon God to curse something or somebody?  
Did I use the Name of the Lord other than in prayer or reverently in speech?  
Did I contemplate destroying myself, the very creation of God?  
Do I live in constant awareness that God, his angels, and all the saints watch over whatever I do?  
Do I resent prayer, or fail to praise God in prayer?  
Do I make my soul ready, by reading Holy Scripture, praying and meditating, so that the Holy Spirit can abide in me?  
Do I serve God by personal sacrifice and effort, or do I expect somebody else to fill me with spiritual treasures?  
Am I growing ever more fully into the Body of Christ, or have I remained on a spiritual plateau? Am I secretly accusing God for the plight and problems of the world?  
Do I blame God wrongly for sins and misdeeds that people with their freedom of will have done against me?  
Do I make demands on God as though he were my servant, rather than ask him to do what he knows to be right in each circumstance?

**Concerning other persons and you:**

Is there somebody I have hurt by my words or actions?  
Have I gossiped about anybody?  
Have I told lies?  
Did I sit passively listening to derogatory tales about another?  
Do I envy somebody else their talents and attributes?  
When I lead others, do I expect more from them than from myself?  
Do I earn the salary paid me?  
Have I been the cause of arguments?  
Have I been the reason for another's punishment?  
Was I the cause of another's unhappiness because of my bad attitude?  
Do I concern myself with my parents' well-being?  
Have I done enough for those unable to help themselves?  
Would I like to have myself for a neighbor or a friend?  
Do I contribute generously of my money and time to the Church?  
Do I donate to charitable causes willingly?  
Do I make every effort to encourage the disheartened?  
Do I look down on others, as inferior to me and my standards?  
Have I sinned through adultery, fornication, or any other impure and harmful relationship?

Am I using somebody else for my own purposes, as a stepping stone to get where I wish to go? Do I bully those too weak to withstand me?  
Can others, looking at me, learn something of the example of Jesus Christ?  
Do I like only people who praise and flatter me, or do I truly welcome criticism of my habits?  
Do I visit the sick, the shut-ins, and the hospitalized?  
Am I doing all I am able to care for and love my parents? My spouse? My children?

**Concerning yourself:**

Have I been so absorbed with my own cares that I have not looked to others?  
Do I keep the fasts of the Church?  
Am I overly concerned with my appearance?  
Am I always looking into mirrors?  
Do I spend too much time thinking about food and clothing?  
Am I obsessed with thoughts of sex?  
Have I been to obscene movies, or looked at pornographic literature?  
Have I sinned through masturbation or any other impure act?  
Have I flirted or teased?  
Do I crave what others have?  
Am I obsessed with money or the lack of it?  
Do I never have enough?  
Do I drink to excess?  
Am I hiding or denying this problem?  
Am I a coward, afraid to stand for what I believe to be true and right?  
Am I lying to myself, thinking myself more or greater than I really am?  
Do I tend to self-pity?  
Do I see myself as hopelessly unattractive and untalented, short-changed by God?  
Am I aloof, expecting others always to speak first?  
Have I given up hope in God's power to make things better?  
Am I eating too much?  
Do I spend too much on clothing, jewelry, or other material things for myself?

**A CONFESSION:** *Translated from an Athonite pamphlet*

Bless me, O Lord and Savior, to confess unto thee not only with words but with bitter tears as well. There is much to weep for. My faith in thee is shaken, O Lord! The thoughts of little faith and faithlessness crowd into my soul more often than not. And why? The spirit of the times, of course, is guilty, too; but above all, I myself am guilty in that I do not struggle with faithlessness and do not pray to thee for help.

I am incomparably more guilty if I become a scandal to others by deed, by word, or by that very cold silence whenever there are conversations concerning the Faith. I am sinful in this, Lord; forgive and have mercy and grant me faith! Love for my neighbor and even for my close relatives fails me. Their unending requests for help and their forgetfulness of how much has already been done for them arouse mutual discontent among us, but I am guilty above all in that I have the means to help them but do so grudgingly.

I am guilty in that I help them not out of pure Christian motives but out of self-love, out of desire for thanks or praise. Forgive me, O Lord! Soften my heart and teach me to look not at how people act toward me but at how I act toward them.

And if they act inimically, remind me, O Lord, to pay them back with love and good and to pray for them! I am also sinful in that seldom, very seldom, do I think about my sins. Not only during the weekdays do I not remember them, but even when preparing for confession I do not strive to bring them to mind! General praises come to mind: "I'm not guilty of anything in particular, like everyone else."

O Lord, it were as though I knew not what sin is before thee...even every "vain word" and the very desire for sin in the heart. And how many words and desires come each day, not to mention in a year! Thou alone, O Lord, dost know them. Do thou grant me to behold my sins, to be compassionate and to forgive!

Moreover, I realize that my constant sinning is the virtual absence in me of any struggle with evil. As soon as any excuse or suggestion appears, I plunge right into the abyss of sin, and only after my fall do I ask myself: What have I done? And if I feel sorrow at the same time, it comes from my wounded self-love and not from any awareness that I have offended thee, O Lord!

I do not struggle with obvious evil, not even with the most empty and harmful habits. I do not control myself and do not even try. I have sinned; forgive me! Furthermore, the sin of a short temper, which rules over me, does not leave me at all. When I hear a sharp word, I do not reply with wise silence, but act just like a pagan: an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

And enmity arises from something insignificant and continues for days and weeks and I do not think of reconciliation but rather try to be stronger, as it were, to get revenge at the first chance. I have sinned beyond reckoning, O Lord; be thou compassionate, forgive, and put my heart at peace! Apart from these principal sins, my whole life is a chain of sins; I value not the time which thou hast granted for the winning of eternal salvation. I often stand irreverently, pray mechanically, judge others as to how they pray, and do not look after myself.

At home, I sometimes pray with great effort and thoughts so scattered that often I myself do not even hear my own prayer! And there are times that I skip my prayers entirely! Such are my relations with thee, O Lord, and I can say nothing but: Forgive and have mercy! In my relations with others I sin with all my feelings...I sin with my tongue by pronouncing false, profane, provocative, and scandalous words: I sin with my eyes; I sin with my mind and heart. I judge others and harbor enmity often and for long periods of time. I sin not only against the soul but also against the body, taking food and drink without restraint.

O Lover of man, accept thou my repentance, that I may approach with peace thy holy and Life-giving Mysteries for the forgiveness of sins, for the setting aright of this world's life and for the inheriting of life eternal. Amen. "I am unworthy to ask forgiveness, O Lord," thus once exclaimed St. Ephraim the Syrian, the great teacher of repentance. "How can one restrain oneself from falling into sin? How can one block the entrance to the passions?"

St. Basil the Great once asked St. Ephraim. And his only answer was his tears. Then what can I say before thee, O Lord, I so great and habitual a sinner? By the prayers of our holy Fathers Ephraim and Basil, grant me tears and repentance, O Lord! Help me to expel from within myself, like moral poison, my evil deeds, vain words, wicked thoughts. And if I forget to mention any sin, thou knowest all and so remind me, for I wish to hide nothing.

Thou dost command me: Confess your transgressions, that you may be justified (Isaiah 43:26), and I say: My sins are multiplied, Lord, and multiply themselves without ceasing and there is no limit to them. I know and remember that even an impure thought is an abomination before thee, and yet I not only think but even do that which grieves thee. I know that I commit evil and do not turn away from it.... And so, the beginning has not yet been made for my repentance, and the end is not in sight of my lack of concern over my sins.

In truth, there is no end to the evil thoughts within me, the outbursts of self-love, vanity, pride, judgments, bearing grudges, and vengeance. I often argue and for no cause at all become angry, am cruel, jealous, lazy, and blindly stubborn. I myself am of very little significance, but I do think a great deal of myself. I do not at all want to honor those who are worthy, but do demand honor for myself without any cause. I constantly lie, but am angry at liars. I condemn slanderers and thieves, yet I myself do steal and slander. I corrupt myself with lustful thoughts and desires, but strictly judge others for lack of modesty.

I do not endure jokes about myself, and yet I love to tease others, considering neither the person nor the place, even in church. Whoever speaks the truth about me I consider my enemy. I do not want to bother myself with serving others, but if I am not served, then I do grow angry! I coldly refuse my neighbor who is in need, but when I find myself in need I make requests of him without end.

I do not like to visit the sick at all, but whenever I fall ill, then I expect somebody to care for me without my ever asking O Lord, send the radiance of thy heavenly light down into the depths of my soul that I may see my sins! My confession almost always ends with the merely external recounting of certain sins. O my God, if thou be not merciful, if thou grant not help, I perish! Innumerable are the times my conscience hath given promises to thee to begin a better life, but I have violated my promises and now do live just as before.

Without correcting myself, I am ashamed to show my face before another person to whom I have not kept my word. How then can I stand before thee, my God, without shame and self-abasement, when I have made promises so many times before thy holy Altar, before the angels and the saints, and then did not keep my word? How base am I! How guilty am I! Thine, O Lord, is righteousness, and mine is a shameful presence (Daniel 9:7). Only thine infinite goodness can endure me! Thou didst not condemn me when I sinned: condemn me not as I repent!

Teach me how to call to mind and to recount the sins of my former life, the careless sins of youth, the sins of self-loving adulthood, the sins of day and night, sins against myself, O Lord my Savior. How can I recount them in the few minutes that I stand within this holy place? I remember, Lord, that thou didst attend unto the brief words of the publican and the thief: I know that thou wilt mercifully accept even the readiness to repent, and I pray thee with all my soul, my Lord: O Lord, accept my repentance even in the daily confession of sins as is written in the prayer book.



I have far more sins than those that are mentioned there and I have nothing with which to erase them. I now offer only my striving towards thee and the desire for good, but myself do not have the strength to correct myself. O Lord and Lover of man, thou dost not drive away the sinner who cometh unto thee begging thee for forgiveness. Even before he approacheth the doors of thy mercy, thou dost already open the way for him: even before he falleth down before thee, thou dost stretch forth thy hand unto him; and even before he confesseth his sins, thou dost grant him forgiveness.

Grant this unto me as I repent, grant this according to thy great mercy; forgive all the evil I have done, said, and thought. And by granting forgiveness, send me, O Lord, the strength that henceforth I may live according to thy will and not offend thee. Help me and I will be saved; help me by the reception of thy Holy Mysteries. And for their worthy reception speak thou unto me the grace of mercy and forgiveness by the lips of the servant of thine Altar. Speak by thy Holy Spirit, not heard by the ear, but heard in a contrite heart and the peace of conscience. Amen.