

# AN ACT OF CONTRITION

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**THE FIVE FIRST SATURDAYS IS A DEVOTION NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER! FIND OUT MORE [HERE](#)**

**[THE SAINT MICHAEL PRAYER AND THE ROSARY](#) ARE ALSO POWERFUL PRAYERS TO HELP US THROUGH VERY TURBULENT TIMES!**

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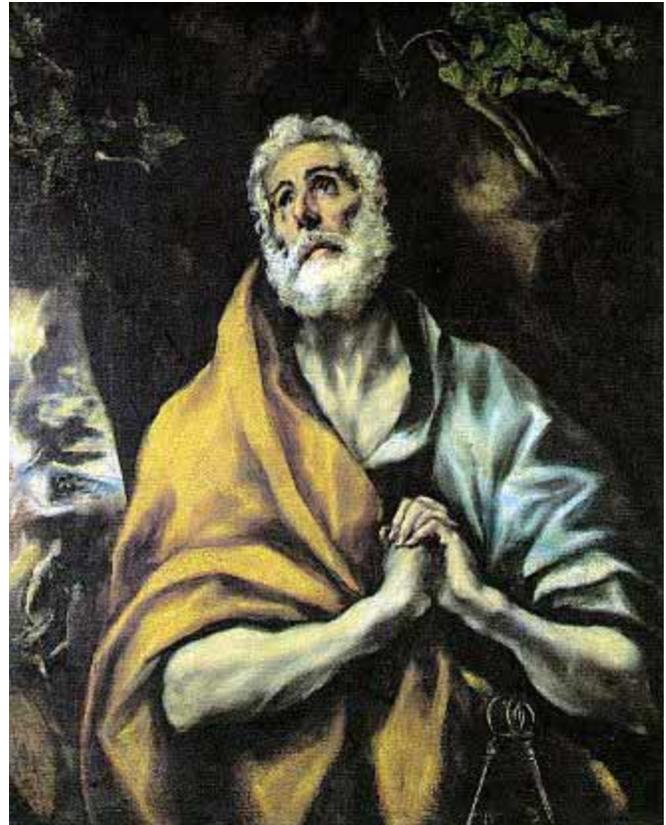
Does sorry seem to be your hardest word? It shouldn't be! The Act of Contrition is a prayer in which we ask God to forgive our sins. We say it in the sacrament of reconciliation, or penance (otherwise known as confession).

Our Lord thought so much of this sacrament he made it one of seven He instituted to give us grace! The Act of Contrition acknowledges our need to stay close to God for His help in dealing with our sinful nature.

There are two types of contrition: perfect (where we are truly sorry for our sins out of our love for God) and imperfect (where our sorrow comes more out of fear of God's punishments or perhaps from the dreadful nature of the sin itself). Both are reflected in this version of the Act of Contrition:

**O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace to confess my sins, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen.**

Note that there are several other versions of this prayer. The one above is perhaps best known, however. You can say the Act of Contrition any time. (It is often used in night prayers, for example.)



There are two main types of sin, venial and mortal. Venial sins can weaken our relationship with God while mortal sins can kill it, if they are not absolved in confession! (Hence the name.) Note there are three main conditions for a sin to be mortal: the sin itself must be grave, we must know it is so, and yet still freely consent to committing it anyway. A mortal sin, if not forgiven through confession, can lead to our eternal separation from God (that is to say, our damnation) for eternity!

When we sin we turn away from God and His will for us. However, when we recite the Act of Contrition, especially after confession, we turn *back* to Him acknowledging our need for His healing power in our lives. His mercy is there for us as long as we approach him with humility and make a sincere effort not to repeat our sins.

Many non-Catholics ask why we need to confess our sins to a priest. Why not just to God alone? Because our Lord *wanted* us to do so! The priest is acting, as they say, *in persona Christi* (in the person of Christ).

Jesus set the tone when told His apostles “Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained” (John 20:23). He meant for their successors, namely the priests of His church, to forgive sins in *His* name.

Jesus, working through the priest, rejoices when we make a humble and *sincere* confession much like the father who rejoiced at the return of the Prodigal Son in Luke’s famous gospel passage (in Chapter 15).

Don’t ever feel that your sins are too embarrassing or shameful to confess to a priest! He is there to absolve you from your sins, to wipe the slate clean, as it were. And he is obligated under Canon law to keep whatever you tell him *completely* confidential. He can be excommunicated if he reveals anything you’ve said to anyone else.

Also, the priest can give you valuable advice and feedback you might not get just praying to God for forgiveness by yourself. In addition, having to go to a priest for absolution, and doing the penance he gives us afterwards, reminds us to take our sins seriously and to make our best efforts to avoid repeating them.

While our faith doesn’t require us to be killjoys, we nonetheless must be careful to “avoid the near occasions of sin,” as another version of the act of contrition puts it.

One drink won’t kill you, but going on a bender might, especially if this becomes a habit and you have alcoholic tendencies. Lust in your heart for a co-worker might lead to adulterous thoughts or actions. Festering anger or resentments can cause profound alienation within families and communities, and even lead to violence.

Jesus warned us all to be on guard against “evil thoughts, adulteries, immorality, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, shamelessness, jealousy, blasphemy, pride, [and] foolishness” (Mk 7:21-22). This makes a pretty good catalogue of sins!

It has often been noted that our society today has lost its sense of sin. People ask, isn't the notion of sin just a “guilt trip”? We live in a relativistic world where “if it feels good, do it, as long as you're not hurting anybody.”

In such a murky atmosphere we can easily lose track of just how much even little sins can damage the fabric of our lives and our relationship with our Creator.

Rock star Billy Joel sang “the sinners have much more fun” in one of his hit songs. Yet people trying to kick bad habits, such as dependencies on drugs, alcohol, pornography, or other such “victimless” vices, might beg to differ! As President Reagan once told some high school students “Don't fall for that stuff about ‘life in the fast lane’. That's where all the accidents take place.”

Speaking of “guilt trips” mentioned above, confession can help fight against the neuroses we might otherwise develop in trying to suppress a guilty conscience from sin. While psychiatry may be necessary for some people, regular confession can work as well as years of therapy in helping us with the weaknesses and stresses in our daily lives.

It helps to “check in” with God in examining our consciences as in [this example](#) and then going to confession as needed afterwards, hopefully as soon as possible if we find we are committing mortal rather than venial sins! (Here are [some distinctions](#) between the two types.)

Keep in mind that Christ knows very well that we will slip and fall on our earthly journey to Heaven. The important thing is to ask for His help in getting back up and staying on the right path.

We can be grateful knowing that He is a God of Mercy as well as of Justice. He's always listening when we say the Act of Contrition with humility and sincerity. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus doesn't want to lose *any* of us in his flock.

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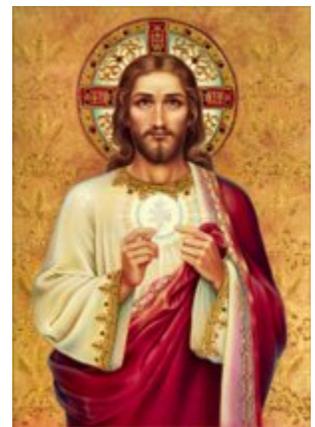
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