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The first edition of this booklet was published in 1992 for the Fifteenth Diocesan Assembly of the Diocese of the South of the Orthodox Church in America. This second edition is offered with some corrections and the addition of the piece by St. Theophan the Recluse on confessing one's sins completely. May this second edition be blessed by the Merciful God as a help for those preparing to open themselves completely in confession to the cleansing forgiveness which our God offers and to His power to live the life He has given to all who are baptized into Him.

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 in 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 in our lives. 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 forgiveness and grace of our God to live the life He offers us.

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. Fasting can render these benefits 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. The following passages are especially helpful:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew 5-7; St. Luke 6).
2. The First Epistle of St. John.
3. I Corinthians 13.
4. Romans 12, 13, and 14.
5. The Holy Psalms, especially 6, 31 (32), 37 (38), 50 (51), 101 (102), 129 (130), 142, (143)

The following books are also recommended: Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky), *Confession: A Series of Lectures on the Mystery of Repentance*. Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N. Y., 1975. This booklet is the best single handbook on the Mystery of Repentance. It should be in every Orthodox household. The self-examination based on the Ten Commandments found in this book owes much to this work.

Father Thomas Hopko, *If We Confess Our Sins: A Practical Guide to Confession*. Department of Religious Education, The Orthodox Church in America, 1975. This is a very good introduction, especially for teenagers. Adults will also benefit from reading it and following its admonitions. The self-examination based on the Beatitudes is used in the present work with minor changes.

L. Joseph Letendre, *Preparing for Confession*. Light and Life Publishing Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1987. The third self-examination included in the present work is based on material from this source.

Finally, we prepare ourselves for the holy Mystery of Repentance by prayer and through rigorous self-examination. Prayers of preparation along with a canon of repentance by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk are included in this book. Also included are self-examinations in several formats, e.g., according to the Ten Commandments; according to the Beatitudes; and according to various passages from the Holy Scriptures. The order of the Mystery of Repentance is also included in its entirety.

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

1. Fast according to the Church's discipline. Consult the church calendar for the discipline for each day of the year.
2. Show charity to others and read relevant passages from the Holy Scriptures and other spiritual works and attempt to be reconciled to all.
3. Pray the prayers of preparation and make a thorough examination of your life.
4. Repent of your sins and open your heart to God's forgiving and saving power.
5. Read the introductory prayers in the Order of the Holy Mystery of Repentance immediately before you make your confession.
6. Confess all your sins to the father confessor, holding back nothing from shame or fear of being exposed.
7. Accept God's forgiveness and power to live the life in Christ.
8. Give thanks to God for His great gifts.
9. Diligently observe any penance (*canon*, *epitemia*) given by the father confessor.
10. 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. (1 John 1:8,9)

The Holy Fathers on Repentance

St. John Chrysostom - No sin is so great that it can conquer the beneficence 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 unto Me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, 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 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 unto Me!

St. Isaac of Syria - Repentance is always fitting 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 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 of the Ladder 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 forever. 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 remembers that we are dust.

Preparation for the Holy Mystery of Repentance

A Canon of Repentance *(Composed by St. Tikhon of Zadonsk)*

O Lord my God, save Thou the soul of Thy servant that hath been washed in Thy Blood, and open unto him the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this know we that we dwell in Him, and He is in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit (John 1: 18; I John 4:12-13).

The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is man, and who can know him? (Jeremiah 17:9).

From the morning watch until night, from the morning watch let Israel hope in the Lord. For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption; and He shall redeem Israel out of all his iniquities (Psalms 129:5-6).

O God, be merciful to me, a sinner *(3 times with prostrations)*

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

(If a priest is present, instead of "Through the prayers ..." he begins with "Blessed is our God...")

Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee!

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere and fillest all things; Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life - come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal! Have mercy on us. (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. O Lord, cleanse us from our sins. O Master, pardon our transgressions. O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto

ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil the evil one.

(If a priest is present, he makes the usual exclamation)

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us; for laying aside all excuse, we sinners offer to Thee, as to our Master, this supplication: Have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, have mercy on us, for in Thee have we put our trust. Do not be angry with us, nor remember our iniquities, but look down on us even now, since Thou art compassionate, and deliver us from our enemies. For Thou art our God, and we are Thy people; we are all the work of Thy hands, and we call on Thy name.

Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O blessed Theotokos, open the doors of compassion to us whose hope is in thee, that we may not perish but be delivered from adversity through thee, who art the salvation of the Christian people.

Lord, have mercy. *(12 times)*

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Come, let us worship God our King. Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and our God. Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ Himself, our King and our God.

Psalm 50 - Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy steadfast love; according to Thy abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified in Thy sentence and blameless in Thy judgment. Behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold Thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Fill me with joy and gladness; let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. Hide Thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation and uphold me with a willing Spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways and sinners will return to Thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of Thy deliverance. O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise. For Thou hast no delight in sacrifice, were I to give a burnt offering, Thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise. Do good to Zion in Thy good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then wilt Thou delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on Thy altar.

The Canon of Repentance (Tone 6)

Ode 1

Irmos: When Israel passed on foot over the sea as if it were dry land, and beheld their pursuer, Pharaoh, drowning in the sea, they cried aloud unto God: Let us sing a song of victory!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

When I think of the many evil things I have done, wretch that I am, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment. But trusting in Thy lovingkindness, like David I cry to Thee: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of life, for my spirit riseth early to pray towards Thy holy temple, bearing the temple of my body all-defiled. But in Thy compassion, purify me by the lovingkindness of Thy mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lord Almighty, I know how much tears can accomplish: they led Hezekiah forth from the gates of death, delivered the sinful woman from long-standing iniquities, and justified the publican beyond the pharisee; and, numbered with them, I pray: Have mercy on me.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lead me on the paths of salvation, O Theotokos, for I have profaned my soul with shameful sins, and have wasted my life in laziness. But by thine intercessions, deliver me from all impurity.

Ode3

Irmos: There is none holy but Thou, O Lord my God, Who hast exalted the power of Thy faithful, O Blessed One, and hast established us upon the rock of Thy confession.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Like the prodigal son do I also approach Thee, O Compassionate One, having

squandered all my life; in departing I have wasted the riches that Thou didst bestow upon me, O Father. Accept me that repent, O God, and have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Stretching forth Thy fatherly arms receive me now, O Lord, as Thou didst receive the prodigal, O Compassionate One, that I may thankfully glorify Thee.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Glory to Thee Who hast not thus far destroyed me! Glory to Thee Who art patient with my iniquities! Accept me who turn away from Thee, O compassionate Father, Only begotten Son, Holy Spirit, my Creator and Lord, and have mercy on me.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Having shown forth all Thy beneficence upon me, O God, through the divine entreaties of Thy Mother disregard the multitude of my transgressions, in that Thou art my Benefactor.

Ode4

Irmos: Christ is my strength, my God and Lord, with reverence singeth the holy Church, raising her voice in purity and keeping feast in the Lord.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Woe is me! What shall become of me? What shall I do? Committing sin--fool that I am! I have not feared the Master; wherefore, even before the judgment I am condemned. O good and just Judge, turning unto me, save me who have angered Thee more than all men.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned before Thee. Cleanse Thou me! For there is none among men that sin whom I have not surpassed in iniquity.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lover of man, Who desirest that all be saved, raise me up and receive me who repent, for Thou art good.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, O Lord, Whom all fear, trembling before the countenance of Thy might, before Thee do I fall prostrate, O Immortal One, Thee do I implore, O Holy One: Save Thou my soul, through the intercessions of Thy saints and of the Theotokos.

Ode5

Irmos: I entreat Thee, gracious Lord, with Thy divine light shine upon the souls of those who with love seek Thee early in the morning: May they know Thee, Word of God, as God in very truth, Who recallest them from the gloomy darkness of transgression.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Cast into the deep abyss of pleasures, I call upon the depths of Thy compassion, O Divine Helmsman: Save me!

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Wellspring of compassion, do Thou now grant me compunction and sighing, that I may lament the boundless sea of my evil deeds.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

The span of my life is short and full of pain and evil; yet accept me in repentance and call me to my senses. That I may be neither the spoils nor the sustenance of him that is alien to our race, O Savior, do Thou Thyself take pity on me.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Thou art our weapon and a wall of defense, O Virgin Theotokos; thou art a help unto them that call upon thee. And now in prayer do I move thee, that I may be delivered from mine enemies.

Ode6

Irmos: Beholding the sea of life surging with the storm of temptations and taking refuge in Thy calm haven I cry unto Thee: Raise up my life from corruption, O greatly merciful One.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Taking pity, save me, O Son of God. Have mercy, Thou Who didst heal the possessed by a word. Speak unto me with the voice of compassion, as Thou didst to the thief: "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise, when I come into My Kingdom."

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Ask not of me worthy fruits of repentance, for my strength hath failed within me. Grant me a contrite heart and poverty of spirit, that I may offer these to Thee as an acceptable sacrifice, O Thou Who alone art our Savior.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

O Lover of man, I have not the boldness to lift mine eyes and gaze unto the measureless heights, having sinned against heaven; nor can I call myself Thy prodigal son; yet take pity on me freely, O Thou Who hast boundless mercy.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Virgin Mary, at the hour of judgment do thou entreat the Judge Whom thou didst bear, that He have compassion, O Pure One, and save the condemned, O thou who alone art intercessor for man.

Ode 7

Irmos: An angel made the furnace moist with dew for the Holy Children, but the Chaldeans were consumed in flames by God's commands, so that the tyrant cried aloud: "O God of our Fathers, blessed art Thou!"

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I dare not lift mine eyes to heaven, wretch that I am, because of mine evil deeds; but like the publican, sighing I cry out to Thee: Cleanse me, a sinner, and deliver me from the hypocrisy of the pharisee, O God of our Fathers, Who alone art compassionate.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Thieves have fallen upon my soul and left it wounded by my transgressions, barely alive; but heal me, O God of our Fathers.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Perceiving the barrenness of my much-suffering soul, yet do Thou forbear, O Christ, and cut me not down like the cursed fig tree, O God of our Fathers.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O All-pure One, grant me aid by thine intercessions, repelling the attacks of grievous misfortunes.

Ode 8

Irmos: Thou hast made dew fall from the flames for the Holy Children, and Thou hast burnt up with water the sacrifice of Thy righteous servant, for Thou, O Christ, dost accomplish all things by Thy will alone, and we exalt Thee above all for evermore.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Having rolled away the stone of obstinance from my heart, O Lord, raise up my soul which hath been slain by the passions, O Good One, and vouchsafe unto me in compunction to bring Thee palms, as to the Vanquisher of hell, O Master, that I may

obtain eternal life, O Thou Who alone lovest man, hymning Thy dominion and compassion unto all the ages.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I have enriched myself with unseemly thoughts, wretch that I am. I have defiled my soul with wicked pleasures, and the darkness of despair. Shed upon me the radiance of repentance, O holy God, that I may thankfully glorify Thee unto all the ages.

Let us bless the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Lord.

Wasting away with the disease of sin, I am laid low upon the bed of despair. Wherefore, do Thou visit me in Thy love for man, O Physician of the sick, and leave me not to sleep grievously unto death, O All-compassionate One, that I may cry out to Thee, O Bestower of mercy: O Lord, glory to Thee!

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O most holy Mother of God, Rampart of Christians, deliver thy servant who am wont to cry earnestly unto thee; oppose thou my vile and prideful thoughts, that I may cry to thee: Rejoice, O Ever-virgin!

Ode9

Irmos: It is not possible for men to see God upon Whom the ranks of angels dare not gaze, but through thee, O All-pure One, was the Word Incarnate revealed unto men, Whom magnifying together with the Heavenly Hosts, we call thee blessed.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

To Thee do I flee, O Jesus, Son of God, Who didst assume the guise of a servant for my sake, wretch that I am; have mercy on me through the intercession of Thy Bodiless Hosts.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

Before Thee do I fall prostrate, O my Deliverer; through the entreaties of Thy Forerunner and of all Thy Prophets and Forebears, have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

To Thee do I sigh, O Lover of man, Thou only Refuge and Hope of sinners, Savior of all; through the prayers of Thy Disciples who preached Thee, the Savior, to us, have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

I stretch forth my hands to Thee Who suffered for sinners, O Son of God; through the supplications of Thy Martyrs, who shed their blood for Thy sake, have mercy on me.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

I am not worthy to lift mine eyes and gaze upon the heights of heaven because of the multitude of my transgressions, bound with many iron chains, so that I may not raise my head. Yet, O compassionate Lord, show forth upon me all Thy goodness, save me who am unworthy, and have mercy on me through the intercessions of Thy Saints.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

In Thy goodness, being well-pleased to be born of the most pure Virgin and to abide upon earth with men, O Word of God, do Thou have mercy upon me through her intercession and that of all the Saints who have ever been pleasing unto Thee.

We then proceed to examine our lives thoroughly so that we may expose all our sins and weaknesses to the healing power of God. We begin with this extract from the *Short Edifying Sermons* of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, one of the great spiritual writers of the Church in the eighteenth century.

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, the Son, and the 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. Amen.* (Psalms 66:2-3)

Now we should diligently read the following forms of self-examination with compunction, offering our lives to the Physician of 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 always remember 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 to 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 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 to 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 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 Ten Commandments based on the self-examination from *Confession: A Series of Lectures on the Mystery of Repentance*. Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville. N Y., 1975.

First Commandment - *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.* (Deuteronomy 5:7)

1. Have I believed in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God in Three Persons?
2. Have I acknowledged God as the Lord, the Source of all good things, the Savior of my soul and body?

3. Have I loved God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength?
4. Have I constantly had the thought of God in my mind and the fear of God in my heart?
5. Have I failed to trust in God and His mercy?
6. Has my faith in God been shaken by skepticism or doubt?
7. Have I complained against God in time of adversity?
8. Have I been thankful for God's blessings?
9. Have I questioned or doubted the holy tenets of the Orthodox Faith?
10. Have I asked God to strengthen my faith?
11. Have I despaired of God's mercy or help?
12. Have I prayed to God every day, morning and evening?
13. Have I prayed with zeal?
14. Have I always attended Divine Services whenever possible?
15. Have I missed any of them without good reason?
16. Have I tried to serve God and keep His commandments?
17. Have I preferred religious books over others?
18. Have I in fact read them?
19. Have I read atheistic or heretical books out of sinful curiosity?
20. Have I attended the meetings of heretics and schismatics from idle curiosity?
21. Have I willingly contributed to charitable causes and to the Church?
22. Have I given a sacrificial portion of my resources?
23. Have I neglected my duties to God through fear of ridicule or persecution?
24. Have I denied that I am a Christian?
25. Have I denied any teaching of the Orthodox Faith?
26. Have I given way to superstition?
27. Have I consulted astrologers, fortune-tellers or spiritualists?
28. Have I put myself before God?
29. Have I forgotten or neglected the most important thing in life, that is, preparing for eternity?
30. How will I answer God if I have given myself up to vanity, sloth, pleasure and carelessness?

Second Commandment - *Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them.*
(Deuteronomy 5:8,9a)

1. Have I made an idol of any person or thing?
2. Have I given to any one or to any thing the worship that is due to God alone?
3. Have I put God first? Or have I given first place to: accumulation of money, acquisition of property, amusement or entertainment, food and drink, clothes, self-adornment, attention to myself, eliciting praise, drinking alcohol, taking drugs, spending time in distractions, obsession with myself or with other persons or things?
4. Have I been distracted from God by a passion for watching television or movies, attending the theater or playing games of one sort or another?
5. Have I been so anxious about myself, my family or my friends that I have neglected God, failed to serve Him and not carried out what is required of me by the Church?

6. Have I given too much attention to my home and its furnishings, its decoration and repair?
7. Have I paid too much attention to a car, truck, van, boat or other vehicle of travel?
8. Have I been irreverent during Divine Services, let my attention wander or been insincere?
9. Have I neglected to receive Holy Communion regularly?
10. Have I received the Divine Gifts without due preparation?
11. Have I made an idol of myself?
12. Have I made an idol of some passion? love of money? gluttony? sexual obsession? anger?
13. Have I allowed a passion to take possession of my heart?
14. Have I read the Holy Scriptures regularly?
15. Have I read books that would be spiritually nourishing?
16. Have I set before myself the holy life of Jesus my Savior and tried to imitate Him?
17. Have I called on Him to help me? Have I read the lives of the Saints and tried to imitate their virtues, especially those of my Patron Saint?
18. Have I asked for their prayers and their strength?

Third Commandment - *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.* (Deuteronomy 5:11)

1. Have I profaned the name of God in any way?
2. Have I been thoughtless or irreverent with the name of God?
3. Have I used the name of God in a curse?
4. Have I treated something holy as a joke, or joked about holy things?
5. Have I grumbled toward God or even renounced Him at any time?
6. Have I shown due respect to the clergy and the faithful or hindered them in their work?
7. Have I shown respect for all other people? Have I prayed absent-mindedly or inattentively?
8. Have I cursed anyone or anything?
9. Have I sworn a false oath?
10. Have I broken an oath or a promise?
11. Have I entered any sinful or unlawful contract or made such a promise?
12. Have I given in to despondency?

Fourth Commandment - *Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee.* (Deuteronomy 5:12)

1. Have I failed to attend Divine Services on the Lord's Day or on a Great Feast Day without just cause?
2. Have I kept others from attending Divine Services?
3. Have I done unnecessary work on Sundays or on Great Feast Days?
4. Have I violated the sanctity of the Lord's Day or Great Feasts by unwholesome or frivolous activities?
5. Have I distracted others from keeping these days in a godly way?
6. Did I pray at home if I was unable to attend Divine Services on the Lord's Day or a Great Feast Day?

7. Did I make every effort to worship "in spirit and in truth" while I was at a Divine Service?
8. Did I allow myself to be distracted by worldly concerns at a Divine Service? to judge others? to think of unwholesome or frivolous things?
9. Did I make the effort to come to Divine Services on time?
10. Have I diligently kept the fasts of the Church?
11. Have I caused anyone else to violate the fasts or tempted anyone to do so?
12. Have I fasted properly in my heart, realizing a hunger for God and life in Him, rather than legalistically, just to fulfil the letter?

Fifth Commandment - *Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* (Deuteronomy 5:16)

1. Have I been disrespectful to my parents or inattentive to their advice and concern for me?
2. Have I been lacking in love for them?
3. Have I withheld love from them?
4. Have I disobeyed them?
5. Have I neglected them or failed to help them?
6. Have I cared for my parents in their illnesses or old age?
7. Have I deceived my parents or caused them pain by my words or actions?
8. Have I prayed for my parents and other relatives?
9. Have I prayed for the repose of my parents and other relatives who are departed?
10. Have I done my duty toward my family? *Husbands:* Have I sacrificed my life for my wife? *Wives:* Have I been obedient to my husband?
11. Have I encouraged peace and mutual respect among the members of my family?
12. Have I been responsible toward my wife (*husband*), children and others who depend on me for help, counsel, guidance or support?
13. Have I been wanting in love for my wife (*husband*) or harmed her (*him*) in any way?
14. Have I set a good example for my children? Have I tried to rear my children in godliness?
15. Have I disciplined them with patience? or in anger? Have I been overindulgent with my children?
16. Have I been stingy with any members of my family or with others?
17. Have I neglected my godparents or failed to honor them?
18. Have I neglected my godchildren or failed to instruct, guide or encourage them in the Orthodox Faith?
19. Have I worked for my employer honestly and diligently?
20. Have I treated fairly and respectfully all who worked with me or who are under my supervision?
21. Have I respected and prayed for the civil authorities?
22. Have I honored those who are older than I?
23. Have I shown respect for all others?
24. Have I mocked anyone or made fun of him?
25. Have I respected the clergy of the Church and prayed for them?
26. Have I criticized them or mocked them?

27. Have I been embittered against them, especially when they chastised or corrected me?
28. Have I honored God as my Father, the Church as my mother, and other human beings as my fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters?

Sixth Commandment - *Thou shalt not kill.* (Deuteronomy 5:17)

1. Have I killed another person, or have I contributed to the death of another person?
2. Have I had an abortion or given support or encouragement to someone else to have one?
3. Have I wanted another person to die?
4. Have I wanted any type of harm to come to another person or group of people?
5. Have I tried to kill myself or thought seriously about doing it?
6. Have I caused injury to another person?
7. Have I caused injury to myself through smoking, overindulgence, drinking too much alcohol, taking drugs or too much medicine or through evil and intemperate living?
8. Have I given way to anger?
9. Have I cursed anyone or hurt anyone with unduly harsh words?
10. Have I been cruel to anyone?
11. Have I ignored someone who needed help or failed to defend someone who was being treated unjustly or cruelly?
12. Have I failed to respond to those who are in need: to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the imprisoned, the homeless, the ill, the troubled, the afflicted, the depressed or those with other needs that I could help?
13. Have I harmed someone spiritually by leading him into temptation to commit spiritual death through heresy, schism or by some other sin?
14. Have I shown malice or hatred toward another person?
15. Do I bear any malice or resentment or hatred in my heart toward anyone else?
16. Have I failed to forgive anyone or harbored evil thoughts against anyone?
17. Have I mistreated animals or destroyed or harmed any living creature unnecessarily?

Seventh Commandment - *Neither shalt thou commit adultery.* (Deuteronomy 5:18)

1. Have I committed the sins of adultery or fornication?
2. Have I committed the sin of masturbation?
3. Have I had any sexual experiences outside of marriage?
4. Have I done anything impure alone or with any other person(s)?
5. Have I engaged in bestiality, transvestitism, sodomy or any other abnormal sexual practice?
6. Have I degraded myself or another person in any way?
7. Have I forgotten or ignored human dignity?
8. Have I been immodest?
9. Have I lived in an improper way with anyone else?
10. Have I read or looked at immoral, suggestive or pornographic books, magazines, pictures, movies, tapes, dances, plays or performances?
11. Have I entertained impure thoughts or fantasies?
12. Have I been unfaithful to my wife (*husband*) through impure thoughts or fantasies?

13. Have I looked at any person or thing in an impure way?
14. Have I spoken or listened to impure or suggestive language, dirty jokes or lewd songs?
15. Have I eaten or drunk too much?
16. Have I tempted others to do so?
17. Have I associated with bad companions?
18. Have I been to unsavory places?
19. Have I been lazy, idle or wasteful of time?
20. Have I tempted others or led them to commit sinful acts or to entertain sinful thoughts?
21. Have I tempted others through my own immodesty or through suggestive language or actions?
22. Have I been unfaithful to any trust?
23. Have I betrayed the confidence of anyone else?
24. Have I judged any other person?

Eighth Commandment - *Neither shalt thou steal.* (Deuteronomy 5:19)

1. Have I stolen anything or wished to do so?
2. Have I stolen by fraud, deception or conspiracy?
3. Have I kept anything that did not belong to me?
4. Have I stolen by not rendering service for which I was compensated?
5. Have I tried honestly to find the owner of lost articles I found, when it was reasonable to do so?
6. Have I cheated or defrauded anyone?
7. Have I accepted or purchased stolen goods?
8. Have I disposed improperly of the goods of another?
9. Have I paid my debts in a timely way?
10. Have I lived within my means?
11. Have I lived extravagantly or wastefully?
12. Have I been selfish with what is entrusted to me?
13. Have I been miserly in soul?
14. Have I shared with others?
15. Have I been stingy?
16. Have I given to those in need?
17. Have I given a sacrificial proportion of my goods to the Church for God's service?
18. Have I been honest and upright in my dealings with others?

Ninth Commandment - *Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbor.* (Deuteronomy 5:20)

1. Have I slandered anyone?
2. Have I lied?
3. Have I added to or taken away from the truth?
4. Have I made careless statements or spoken evil of anyone?
5. Have I betrayed the confidence of another person?
6. Have I criticized others?
7. Have I rejoiced in the failings or downfall of others?

8. Have I covered my brother's shame as Shem and Japheth covered their father Noah's?
9. Have I spread gossip or scandal?
10. Have I hurt the reputation of anyone else?
11. Have I concealed the truth or assisted in carrying out a lie?
12. Have I confessed to sins I have not committed?
13. Have I confessed all the sins I have committed?
14. Have I failed to come forward to defend another person when I knew he was being slandered or spoken against unjustly?
15. Have I tried to see the good in others?
16. Have I concentrated on the shortcomings of others?
17. Have I engaged in idle chatter?
18. Have I spoken unnecessarily?
19. Have I laughed or acted frivolously?
20. Have I made a real effort to be always truthful?

Tenth Commandment - *Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbor's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is thy neighbor's.* (Deuteronomy 5:21)

1. Have I envied others, their lives or their good?
2. Have I desired anything that was another's?
3. Have I damaged or destroyed the possessions or property of others?
4. Have I desired things God has not given me?
5. Have I been discontent with my life?
6. Have I held back anything due to another because I wanted it myself or for any other reason?
7. Have I hoped for the downfall of another so that I might gain by it?
8. Have I failed to be gracious and generous to anyone?
9. Have I wanted from God what I refused to give to a fellow man: forgiveness? goods? grace? physical or spiritual blessings?
10. Have I been greedy?
11. Have I been jealous of another person's goods, money, appearance, success, love, popularity, being loved by another or others?
12. Have I concentrated my time, efforts and thoughts on the things of the world rather than on the things of the spirit?

Self-examination according to the Beatitudes based on the self-examination in the book of 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)

1. Am I poor before God and men?
2. Do I cultivate the attitude of poverty?
3. Do I realize that all is God's and from God?
4. Do I use my life and everything I have as that which belongs to God?
5. Do I share the goods of the earth with others, knowing that all is God's?
6. Do I take my opinions and ideas from God?
7. Do I acknowledge my spiritual and intellectual poverty before God, accepting His wisdom and truth?
8. Am I possessive, selfish, self-satisfied, self-righteous, self-seeking?
9. Am I an idolater of my own opinions, ideas, possessions?
10. Do I lust after status, power, authority, wealth, position?
11. 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)

1. Am I a person who mourns?
2. Do I lament over the suffering of men?
3. Do I weep over the troubles in Church and state, family and society?
4. Do I suffer with all who suffer, in poverty and squalor, in misery and sin?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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)

1. Am I meek with the meekness of Jesus?
2. Am I meek in the sense that I only fight evil with good?
3. Do I accept and practice the fact that humble love and truth and courage in goodness are the only weapons available in any battle with sin and sinful people?
4. Do I lord it over others at home, at work, at church?
5. Do I love and use force, brute command, blind authority, intimidation, coercion, to accomplish my will?
6. 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?
7. Do I love my enemies and forgive those who offend me?
8. 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)

1. Do I hunger and thirst for God?
2. Do I desire to be righteous?
3. Do I work to be holy?
4. Do I read or study or make any continued effort for love and for truth, for the Spirit of God?
5. Do I pray?
6. Do I fast?
7. Do I read the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, the lives of the Saints and other spiritually profitable works?
8. Do I do any "spiritual exercises" which train me in goodness?
9. Do I come to church?
10. Do I participate in the Holy Mysteries?
11. Do I go out of my way to help, to teach, to serve in some way?
12. Do I do the things which I know bring righteousness?

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. (St. Matthew 5:7)

1. Do I show mercy to others?
2. Do I forgive those who offend me?
3. Do I try to understand those who are different?
4. Do I take pleasure in judging and condemning?
5. Do I talk about others?
6. Do I revel in gossip?
7. Do I say things, though possibly true, which need not be said but can only harm?
8. Do I rejoice in wrong?
9. Am I legalistic, loving the law more than the Spirit?
10. Do I cover offenses, or do I stir things up by picking and condemning?
11. Am I petty and small?
12. Do I slander and shame?
13. Am I prejudiced, making judgments and coming to conclusions without proper facts but with pre-formed opinions?
14. Do I prefer strict judgment to tender mercy?

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

1. Do I love purity, cleanness and wholeness?
2. Am I polluted by filthy thoughts and words and actions?
3. Is my mind stained by demonic rationalizations and prejudices? Or am I pure in my openness to all that is good?
4. Is my body corrupted by beastly sensuality and lust?
5. Are my thoughts and deeds pure, or are there always hidden motives and intentions?
6. Am I trusting and trustful, with a singleness of purpose and total integrity in everything? Or do I connive and deceive, cheat and lie?
7. Am I hypocritical and pretentious?
8. 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?

9. Is there any darkness or impurity which blinds me and holds me from freedom and wholeness in God?

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God. (St. Matthew 5:9)

1. Do I love and make peace? at home, at work, at church, in society and the whole world?
2. Am I angry and impatient?
3. Do I look for fights and arguments? Do I provoke others to anger?
4. Do I believe in "turning the other cheek"? Or do I take refuge in physical force?
5. Do I love violence?
6. Do I worship aggression and power?
7. 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 theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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 5:10-11)

1. Am I ever persecuted for what is right? Am I ready to be?
2. Am I ready to give my life, without vengeance, for what is true?
3. Do I participate in good activities which may bring criticism from others? Or do I take the easy road of noninvolvement in human affairs, in family or job or church or society at large?
4. Do I go along with things which are wrong from fear or cowardice or laziness?
5. Do I flee responsibility? Do I worship security?
6. Am I defending my own small life in contradiction to the righteousness of God?
7. Am I ashamed of Christ?

Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (St. Matthew 5: 12)

1. Is my joy and gladness in God? Or is it in this world with its passions, powers, possessions and praise?
2. Am I mean and grouchy or jealous and moody? Am I despairing and without hope?
3. Am I pessimistic and anxious?
4. Do I complain and spread darkness and irritation to others?
5. Is my faith of no consequence in my actions and attitudes to the events of life?
6. Do I really "consider the lilies of the field ... " and trust in God and rejoice in this trust?
7. Is my treasure in God or in myself?
8. Is my life "hid with Christ in God" or am I, in fact, a man of this age in body, mind and spirit?
9. Do I believe and have in truth the "joy of believing"?

Self-examination according to Passages from the Holy Scriptures based on the self-examination from the book of L. Joseph Letendre, *Preparing for Confession*. Light and Life Publishing Company, Minneapolis. Minnesota, 1987.

To help you personally prepare for the Mystery of Repentance, it is essential to find time to sit quietly, and to examine your life prayerfully. The following examination of conscience may be used as a guide.

When Jesus saw him, and knew that he had been now a long time in that condition, He saith unto him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (St. John 5:6)

1. What is my attitude to this confession? Have I prepared for it?
2. Am I sincerely willing to change aspects of my life so that they will be more in keeping with the Gospel?

Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. (St. Matthew 22:37-38)

1. Do I really love God above all things? Or are worldly things such as possessions, power or popularity more important to me?
2. Have I placed my trust in these or in such things as horoscopes, occult practices and superstitions?
3. Have I prayed on a regular and daily basis? Do I pray attentively?
4. Do I approach prayer with joy and zeal, or do I allow anything, no matter how trivial, to be an excuse to shorten prayer or avoid it entirely?
5. Do I think about God during the day and pray to Him in my heart?

The Lord said to His disciples, "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. (St. Matthew 10:32-33)

1. Am I willing to be known as a Christian in public and private life?
2. Was I embarrassed or afraid to admit my belief in Christ and His Church to others?
3. If someone said something unfair or inaccurate about Christ or the Christian Faith, did I try to speak the truth with gentleness, humility, respect and love?

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. (I Peter 3:15)

1. Do I know what the Orthodox Church teaches and believes? Did I take the time to read, study or learn more about my Faith?
2. Am I able and willing to answer questions about Christ, the Church and my Faith?
3. Do I read, study or meditate on God's word in the Bible daily?

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name: bring an offering and come before Him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. (I Chronicles 16:29)

1. Do I keep Sundays and Feast Days holy by participating as fully as possible in the Divine Services?
2. Do I observe the fasting days and seasons of the Church?
3. Do I receive the Lord's Body and Blood in Holy Communion frequently?
4. Did I prepare diligently for Holy Communion by prayer, fasting and by being at peace

with all?

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:21)

1. Have I honored and obeyed my parents, showing them love and respect and helping them with their material, emotional and spiritual needs?
2. Have I been loving, patient and understanding with my spouse? with my children?
3. Did I discipline my children appropriately?
4. Have I tried to impart my faith to them by word and example?
5. Do I contribute to the peace and well-being of my family by offering my time, service and love?
6. In my job or profession, am I an honest and hard worker?
7. Do I view the service I render my employer and others as service done to and for Christ?
8. Do I pay my employees a just wage?
9. Are my expectations of them fair and reasonable?
10. Have I fulfilled my promises, contracts and obligations?
11. Have I respected and obeyed legitimate authority?
12. Have I participated responsibly in civil affairs? Have I paid my taxes?
13. Do I work, as I am able, to promote peace, justice, morality and love in my community, my country and the world?
14. Do I use my positions of responsibility and authority for the good of others?

The Lord said to His disciples, "But I say unto you which hear, love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which spitefully use you. And unto him that smite thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. (St. Luke 6:27-29)

1. Have I caused injury to another's life, health, spiritual or emotional well-being or material possessions by violence or neglect?
2. Have I advised or helped in the obtaining of an abortion?
3. Have I quarreled, been unduly angry with, or insulted anyone? Have I been reconciled with him?
4. If I have injured or offended anyone, have I sought his forgiveness?
5. If anyone has injured or offended me, have I forgiven him? Or am I still filled with hatred or a desire for revenge?
6. Am I committed to accepting suffering rather than inflicting it?
7. Did I seek to retaliate in the face of provocation and violence of any sort?
8. Do I strive for peace within myself and work to be a peacemaker in my daily life?

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God. (I Thessalonians 4:3-5)

1. Have I been faithful to my spouse?
2. Have I exercised self-control regarding food, drink, drugs and sexual desire?
3. Have I misused my sexuality by adultery, fornication, masturbation or by thoughts and fantasies or any other impure acts?

4. Have I participated in indecent conversations or made use of pornographic entertainment, pictures or reading?
5. Have I incited others to sin by my own failures in this area?

The Lord said to the Jews, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in abundance of the things which he possesseth." (St. Luke 12: 15)

1. Have I envied or desired inordinately another's position or property?
2. Have I stolen or damaged the property of others? If so, did I restore it or make restitution?
3. Do I share my possessions with those who have less?
4. Do I give freely and generously of any time, talents and money to the Church? to those in need?

If any among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (James 1 :25)

1. Have I taken the name of the Lord in vain? Have I blasphemed or used profane language? Do I talk too much and listen too little?
2. Have I lied, or, by cowardly silence, have I avoided telling the truth?
3. Have I gossiped or spread rumors about others?
4. Have I spoken harshly, unjustly, unnecessarily or insultingly to anyone or about anyone?
5. Do I spend time in silence? Or must I always be talking or having the radio or television on?
6. Have I been boastful about myself or judgmental about others?

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. (I Corinthians 10:31)

1. Is all that I do motivated first and foremost by a desire to love and serve God and my neighbor in the way that God wills me to?
2. Do I think of myself as better than others?
3. When I pray, fast or do any good, do I try to do it secretly? Or, by word or display, do I make sure that others notice me and my works?

Cast Thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. (Psalms 54:22)

1. Am I anxious or worried about anything?
2. Is there a problem or hurt that I should bring to the Lord in confession for forgiveness, healing or guidance?

A Meditation before Confession based on the self-examination from the book, *The Mystery of Divine Forgiveness*, published by the Ohio Deanery of The Orthodox Church in America.

It is important to enter 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 itself, 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 these questions:

Concerning God and you:

1. Is my faith as firm as it always was, or as strong as it should be?
2. Do I love God with all my heart, or only now and then?
3. Have I trusted in Him, even when I did not know His plan for me?
4. Did I witness to my faith in the presence of non-believers?
5. Have I made idols of other things, such as material goods, personal success, popularity and my closest relatives or friends?
6. Is there something or somebody I love more than God?
7. Have I attended church every Sunday and Great Feast Day?
8. Have I worked unnecessarily on Feast Days and Sundays?
9. Do I discern the presence of Jesus Christ in all my waking hours, wherever I am and whatever I do?
10. Have I blamed God for my misfortunes?
11. Have I called upon God to curse something or somebody?
12. Did I use the name of the Lord other than in prayer or reverently in speech?
13. Did I contemplate destroying myself, the very creation of God?
14. Do I live in constant awareness that God, His angels and all the Saints watch over whatever I do?
15. Do I resent prayer, or fail to praise God in prayer?
16. Do I make my soul ready by reading Holy Scripture, praying and meditating, so that the Holy Spirit can abide in me?
17. Do I serve God by personal sacrifice and effort, or do I expect somebody else to fill me with spiritual treasures?
18. Am I growing ever more fully into the Body of Christ, or have I remained on a spiritual plateau?
19. Am I secretly accusing God for the plight and problems of the world?
20. Do I blame God wrongly for the sins and misdeeds that people with their freedom of will have done against me?
21. 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:

1. Is there somebody I have hurt by my words or actions?
2. Have I gossiped about anybody? Have I told lies?
3. Did I sit passively listening to derogatory tales about another?

4. Do I envy somebody else their talents and attributes?
5. When I lead others, do I expect more from them than from myself?
6. Do I earn the salary paid me?
7. Have I been the cause of arguments?
8. Have I been the reason of another's punishment?
9. Was I the cause of another's unhappiness because of my bad attitude?
10. Do I concern myself with my parents' well-being?
11. Have I done enough for those unable to help themselves?
12. Would I like to have myself for a neighbor or a friend?
13. Do I contribute generously of my money and time to the Church?
14. Do I donate to charitable causes willingly?
15. Do I make every effort to encourage the disheartened?
16. Do I look down on others, as inferior to me and my standards?
17. Have I sinned through adultery, fornication or any other impure and harmful relationship?
18. Am I using somebody else for my own purposes, as a steppingstone to get where I wish to go?
19. Do I bully those too weak to withstand me?
20. Can others, looking at me, learn something of the example of Jesus Christ?
21. Do I like only people who praise and flatter me, or do I truly welcome criticism of my habits?
22. Do I visit the sick, the shut-ins and the hospitalized?
23. Am I doing all that I can do to care for and love my parents? my spouse? my children?

Concerning yourself:

1. Have I been so absorbed with my own cares that I have not looked to others?
2. Do I keep the fasts of the Church?
3. Am I overly concerned with my appearance? Am I always looking into mirrors?
4. Do I spend too much time thinking about food and clothing?
5. Am I obsessed with thoughts about sexual things?
6. Have I been to obscene movies or looked at or read pornographic literature?
7. Have I sinned through masturbation or any other impure act?
8. Have I flirted or teased?
9. Do I crave what others have?
10. Am I obsessed with money or the lack of it?
11. Do I never have enough?
12. Do I drink to excess? Am I hiding or denying this problem?
13. Am I a coward, afraid to stand for what I believe to be true and right?
14. Am I anxious about life: about having enough? about illness? about relationships with others? about work? about school? about dangers or perceived dangers?
15. Am I lying to myself, thinking myself more or greater than I really am?
16. Do I indulge in self-pity?
17. Do I see myself as hopelessly unattractive and untalented, shortchanged by God?
18. Am I aloof, expecting others always to speak first or to act first?
19. Have I given up hope in God's power to make things right and better?

20. Am I eating too much?

21. Do I spend too much on clothing, jewelry or other material things for myself?

Making a Good Confession by *St. Theophan the Recluse*

Repentance is a simple matter--just a sigh and a few words, "I have sinned, and shall not sin again." But this sigh must have passed through the heavens in order to become an intercession at the throne of Truth, and these words must erase from the book of life all the marks representing our sins. Where can they obtain such power? From pitiless self-judgment and in fervent contrition. This is the path of our repentance: make your heart softer and more humble, and then, at Confession, don't be ashamed to reveal all that shames you in the eyes of the Lord and of the people.

In the matter of preparing for Communion, the greatest difficulty for us is to go to Confession and to reveal ourselves to our spiritual father. This should be a most gratifying experience. Is it not a comfort for him who is covered with wounds to be healed? For him who is covered with soil to be cleansed. Or for him who is chained to regain his freedom? This is precisely the spiritual power of absolution at Confession. We come with our injuries and leave healed; we come unclean and leave cleansed; we come in bonds and leave free. That is the promise of the Lord: first tell of your transgressions and then you will be forgiven.

Undoubtedly you will be forgiven, but first you must confess your transgressions without concealment. Know that only an open wound can be treated, only exposed dirt can be cleansed, only those bonds that are shown can be untied. Beware, lest you leave unhealed, uncleaned and enslaved. The action comes from the Lord. The spiritual father speaks and acts for Him. The Lord knows your sin, and even in your thoughts you cannot conceal it from Him, but the Lord wants to know whether you are prepared to confess your sins in His presence, if He Himself were standing before you, or whether you would try to conceal them like your forebears, Adam and Eve, in Paradise. That is why He appears to you in the person of your spiritual father to whom you confess and who in His name gives you absolution, which by the very fact of having been uttered by weak mortals on earth, becomes impressed in heaven by the Lord's power. Your spiritual father also represents all mankind. He who is ashamed to reveal himself should banish this shame with the thought that here, in front of his spiritual father, the shame that he feels is lesser than that to come. This shame can bring salvation instead of joylessness and hopelessness. There will come the day when all our bad deeds will be revealed to all mankind, and then the shame we will feel will be such that we should rather be buried under mountains than experience it. Therefore, the Lord instituted this experiencing of shame before a single person, so you may be spared experiencing it before all mankind.

But there is one great evil in our hearts--at times we are quite ready to reveal all our sins but the main one, the one that shames us the most. Most often this is a carnal sin, but there are others that can be in this category. He who is burdened with such a weakness is ready to perform any good deed just to leave this sin hidden, but the Lord has a rule: give Me no alms if you are unchaste; don't fast if you are suffering from

greed; don't offer prayers if you are filled with vanity. Open your wound, so you may be healed and imbued with goodness. Be inspired to overcome within yourselves precisely that which resists the most.

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 phrases 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 didst 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 vile 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 get 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. (*Editor's note: I have*

also committed these sins of the flesh:) 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 prayerbook. 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.

Completion of the Prayers of Preparation for the Holy Mystery of Repentance

When we have diligently examined our lives, we then complete the Prayers in Preparation for the Holy Mystery of Repentance:

It is truly meet to bless thee, O Theotokos, ever-blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without corruption thou gavest birth to God the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify thee. (*prostration*)

Prayer after the Canon of Repentance

Lord Christ our God, Who hast healed my passions through Thy Passion, and hast cured my wounds through Thy Wounds, grant me who have sinned greatly against Thee tears of compunction. Transform my body with the fragrance of Thy life-giving Body and sweeten my soul with Thy Holy Blood from the bitterness with which the foe hath fed me. Lift up my downward-looking mind to Thee, and take it out of the pit of perdition, for I have no repentance; I have no compunction; I have no consoling tears which uplift children to their heritage. My mind hath been darkened through the earthly passions. I cannot look up to Thee in pain. I cannot warm myself with tears of love for Thee. But, O Lord Jesus Christ, Treasury of good gifts, give me thorough repentance and a diligent heart to seek Thee. Grant me Thy grace and renew in me the lineaments of Thine image. I have forsaken Thee; do not forsake me! Come out to seek me; lead me up to Thy pasturage and number me among the lambs of Thy chosen flock. Nourish me with them on the grass of Thy Holy Mysteries, by the prayers of Thy most pure Mother and all Thy Saints. Amen.

The Trisagion Prayers

Holy God! Holy Mighty! Holy Immortal! Have mercy on us. (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. O Lord, cleanse us from our sins. O Master, pardon our transgressions. O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for Thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. (3x)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil the evil one.

(If a priest is present, he makes the usual exclamation)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (*3 times*)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without corruption thou gavest birth to God the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.