



LET US

EXAMINE

OUR WAYS

HOW TO PREPARE FOR  
THE MYSTERY OF  
REPENTANCE & CONFESSION



GRAIN & VINE  
COPTIC ORTHODOX EDUCATION



IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.  
ONE GOD. AMEN.



THROUGH THE INTERCESSIONS OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS, ST. MARY,  
ARCHANGEL RAPHAEL, ST. JOHN AND ST. MARK, AND THE PRAYERS OF  
OUR PATRIARCH HIS HOLINESS POPE TAWADROS II, MAY THE LORD  
GRANT US THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS. AMEN.

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OH MY LORD  
**JESUS**  
**CHRIST**  
SON OF THE LIVING GOD  
**HAVE MERCY**  
ON ME, A SINNER

elle

CREATE IN ME A  
CLEAN  
HEART  
OH MY GOD  
AND RENEW A  
RIGHT  
SPIRIT  
WITHIN ME

elle

# LET US Examine OUR WAYS

## HOW DO WE EXAMINE OURSELVES?

"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." 2 Corinthians 10:12

When we look only inside us to examine our ways, we make a mistake. The thought "it is okay; everybody thinks this way" or "everybody does it" is unwise to use as a self-examination standard.

God called us "His children" and appointed us to be like His beloved Son. In the old times, God gave us an image of His Son in the commandments. In the perfect time, God sent His Son for us to see Him and know Him. Our Lord said: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". When examining our ways, we look at our Lord as the Model for life. The Ten Commandments are the basic description of who Christ is. Our Lord started His mission by giving us the Christian standards in the "Sermon on the Mount". The Sermon on the Mount is a description of Himself. The apostles described Christ to us in their letters when they wrote commandments of love, humility and unity.

A person cleaning a house needs ample light to see what to clean up in the house. The Word of God is the light that examines our ways. The commandments are a mirror by which we see how God meant us to be, and how we've fallen short of His plan for us.

When we turn our attention to Christ in prayer, we can start to feel the gentle rebuke for our sins. The rebuke is the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM  
OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND!  
+ MATTHEW 3:2 +

# WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

The appropriate response to discovering our sinfulness and weaknesses is repentance. In Coptic:

**METANOIA** = *Repentance*

The literal meaning of the word is returning, changing direction, a **U-turn**, a *conversion*. Repentance is both holy sorrow in the heart for disobeying God, and the determination of the will to return from the wrong direction.

Repentance also includes correcting the wrong that was done. In the Orthodox Church, every member is expected to have a **repentant heart**.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican showed us how we ought to pray and the attitude that we should take.

"The tax collector standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying,

**"God, be merciful to me a sinner!"**

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

+ *Luke 8:13-14* +

Our Lord taught us this parable as an image of our overall attitude towards God.

The parable of the Prodigal Son tells us that God awaits the return of the sinner to Him with eagerness.

God and heaven REJOICE at the return of a sinner. God asks His church to rejoice with Him over the return of a sinner.

# PRAYER AFTER CONFESSION

I thank Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind because You did not desire that I perish, but have awakened me from my slumber and guided me to Your path. You saved me from the valley of destruction and brought me to the safety of Your bosom. Fill me with hope and faith, for I have come to You as the sick one to his Physician, and as the hungry to the Spring of living water, as the poor to the Source of riches, as the sinner to the Savior, and as the dead to the Fountain of Life; for You are my salvation, my healer, my life, my strength, my comfort, and my joy, and my rest is in you. Help me, protect me, and teach me to put my will in Your hands that I may live according to Your will. Remove my weakness that I may be firm and continue to be faithful to You to the end. **Amen**.



PRAYER  
**BEFORE**  
CONFESSION

O Holy Father, who desires the repentance of sinners, promising to accept them back. Look now, O Lord, at my sinful soul for I have erred and lost my way in the valleys of transgressions for many years, and I am embittered and wretched for being removed from the fountain of my salvation. Yet, now I come to You, asking to be cleansed from all defilement and filth. Do not reject but accept me. Look at me with compassion and deal with me mercifully and I will be cleansed and saved. Do not neglect me lest I perish. Grant me grace that I may approach You with faith and hope, to confess my trespasses and my sins. Enlighten my heart that I may realize my sins, my mistakes and my straying. Grant me determination to forsake evil that I may be established in Your commandments and live for the glory of Your Holy Name. **Amen.**

The story of Zacchaeus shows that we recognize our sinfulness when we seek to see Christ. The return of Zacchaeus started by his **EAGERNESS TO SEE OUR LORD.**

Coming closer to our Lord changed his heart. We need to correct for the wrong we did, as Zacchaeus made corrections for the wrongs he did. Apologizing to others for the hurt we caused; returning the stolen material; uncovering a lie we told are all examples of corrections of wrongdoings and are signs of strong repentance.

Christ has told us of the Final Judgment as a 'day' when we are to be judged according to our actions,

*"Judge the whole world in righteousness and give everyone according to his deeds."*

*- The Divine Liturgy according to Saint Basil -*

We ought to examine our hearts to keep a clean source of our words and actions because out of the heart come all good and all evil.

# WHAT IS CONFESSION?

IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND  
JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE  
US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.  
+1 JOHN 1:9+

When we finish examining ourselves, we are ready to confess our sins. Confession is one of the Mysteries of the Orthodox Church. Mysteries are the way we, as the members of Christ's Body, experience the living Christ. We begin confession by a prayer of repentance to God, like the prodigal son: "I have sinned against heaven and before You and I am no longer worthy to be called your son." Then I go to the Priest to confess before the church and receive the absolution. I confess to the Priest trusting in Christ's words: "So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.**" (John 20:21-23)

Confession is an act of faith in the promise and the gift of forgiveness of our Lord to His church. The gifts of Christ seem beyond human logic. In the story of the sinful woman, the Pharisee responded with unbelief, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." And again, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" She showed faith in God's forgiveness through Christ. "Then He said to the woman, **Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.**"

The prodigal son, after meeting his father, returned to the house of the father, which represents the church. The father asks the servants (Priests) to take care of his returning son.

Confession is a *cleansing process* that takes courage.

It is also an offering made to God on His Altar.

## PRAYER <sup>of</sup> Repentance

My Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, treasure of mercy and spring of salvation, I come to You confessing my sins. I confess that with boldness I dared to defile Your Holy Sanctuary with my sins. Now I seek Your mercy and love, for Your mercies are boundless; You never turn back a sinner who comes back to You. I confess that my mind is burdened with sin and that I have no strength left. Do not turn away from me; do not rebuke me in Your anger nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. I am worn out; have compassion upon me, O Lord. Do not judge me according to Your justice, but according to Your mercy. Remember Your creation; do not put me on trial, because none of Your servants can justify their deeds. Dress me in a new attire that befits Your glory. Forgive my sins and I shall sing; "Blessed is he whose sins are forgiven." When I confess my sins and reveal my iniquities, You cleanse me. **Amen.**

**HOLY  
HOLY  
HOLY**

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory and honor. Have mercy on us, O God the Father, the Pantocrator.

O Holy Trinity, have mercy upon us. O Lord, God of hosts, be with us. For we have no helper in our hardships and tribulations but You.

Absolve, forgive, and remit, O God, our transgressions; those which we have committed willingly and those which we have committed unwillingly, those which we committed knowingly and those which we have committed unknowingly, the hidden and the manifest, O Lord forgive us, for the sake of Your Holy Name which is called upon us. Let us be according to Your mercy, O Lord, and not according to our sins.

**"Our Father, who art in heaven ..."**

**YOUR  
FAITH  
HAS  
SAVED  
YOU**

# HOW TO PREPARE FOR CONFESSION

## 1. COMING BACK TO ONESELF

Set a regular time for self-examination. Some resources to help in preparing are the *Ten Commandments*, the *Sermon on the Mount* and *1 Corinthians 13*. Self-Examination is the regular practice of comparing oneself to the commandments with the intent to do The Commandments which get us to know Christ closely:

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was."

+James 1:22-24+

It is useful to write one's findings from the self-examination, to keep a record for confession and follow-up. It is also a great tool in advancing the knowledge of oneself.

## 2. COMING BACK TO GOD IN REPENTANCE

After I get a clearer image of myself and the situation as a whole, I should speak to God privately. If I do not have words of my own, I can use one of the prayers of the church, i.e., psalm 50, Holy Holy Holy, or the Prayer Before Confession, etc.

# PSALM 50

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your great mercy; and according to the multitude of your compassions blot out my iniquity, Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my from my sin, For I am conscious of my iniquity; and my sin is at all times before me. Against You only I have sinned, and done evil before You, that You might be just in your sayings, and might overcome when You are judged, For, behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins my mother conceived me. For, behold, You have loved the truth; You have manifested to me the hidden and unrevealed things of your wisdom. You shall sprinkle me with your hyssop, and I shall be purified. You shall wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. You shall make me to hear gladness and joy; I the humbled bones shall rejoice. Turn away Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in my inward parts. Do not case me away from Your face; and do not remove Your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a directing spirit, hen I shall teach the transgressors Your ways; and the ungodly men shall turn to You. Deliver me from blood, O God, the God of my salvation, and my tongue shall rejoice in Your righteousness. O Lord, You shall open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise. For if You desired sacrifice, I would have given it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit; a broken and humbled heart God shall not despise. Do good, O Lord, in Your good pleasure to Zion; And let the walls of Jerusalem be built. Then You shall be pleased with sacrifices of righteousness, offering, and burnt sacrifices; then they shall offer calves upon Your altar. **Alleluia.**



LET  
US  
PRAY

### 3. COMING BACK TO CHURCH FOR ABSOLUTION

Now I am ready to confess to the Priest. Confession is traditionally done in the church. The Priest would pray with me, "Our Father," then I begin confessing my sins. I should not make excuses for my sins, nor say "*the usual sins*"; sins should never become "*usual*." I should not speak of others in my confession nor blame anyone or circumstances. I should only blame myself. Confession is seeking reconciliation with God's church, which loves us and knows us. The parables of Christ teach us that God's church consists of many members, in both heaven and earth, including our families, friends, the saints and angels. When I sit with the Priest for confession, I should trust that I will be reconciled with all the members of God's Church. But if I have a defensive attitude in confession because I am afraid to be judged, then I do not trust in forgiveness and reconciliation, and the love of the Church. At the end of confession, the Priest prays the "**Absolution**" to ask for Christ's pardon, which is promised to the church.

### 4. THANKSGIVING AFTER CONFESSION

When I finish confessing, I offer a thanksgiving prayer for Christ's gift of loving forgiveness. The Mystery of Confession prepares me for receiving Holy Communion. Confession should be regular (monthly). In some Orthodox Churches, the faithful would confess before every Holy Communion.

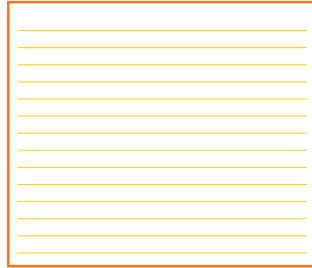






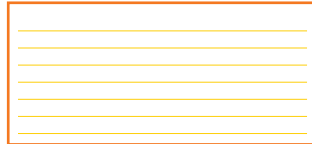
## BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

- Do I feel that I need God?
- Do I think I am better than others or that I know better than others?
- Do I feel a need to acquire power and control?
- Do I have a spiritual guide or do I feel self sufficient?
- Do I murmur about my life?



## BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

- Am I sad when I am far away from God?
- Do I feel sad when someone is away from God, sick or in trouble?
- Do I feel Godly sorrow when I sin?



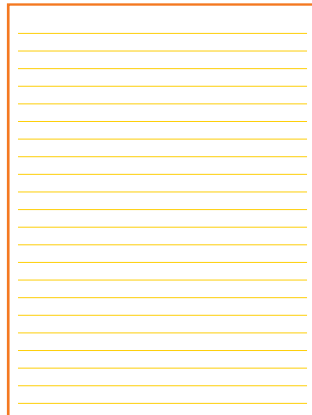
## BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

- Do I use a gentle voice?
- Do I use my inside voice?
- Am I kind and caring to others? Do
- I pray for others?



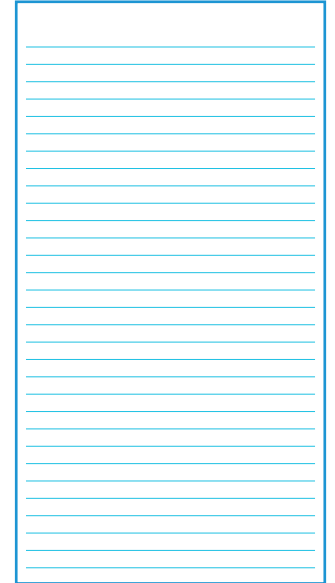
## BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

- Do I want to learn about God and do I want to get to know God?
- Do I want to have a real relationship with God?
- Do I just put on a show on Sundays that I am a good Christian and ignore God throughout the week?
- Do I fast with the church or do I follow my own mind?
- Do I want to have a real relationship with God?
- Do I just put on a show on Sundays that I am a good Christian and ignore God throughout the week?
- Am I a hypocrite in any way?



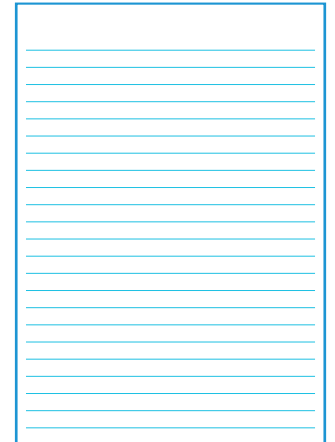
## 7. YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY

- Do I respect my body? Do I wear inappropriate clothing that is revealing (short, transparent or tight)?
- Do I use inappropriate language in describing others?
- Am I unfaithful in my relationships?
- Am I using people to fulfill my desires and wants under pretense of friendship?
- Do I have an inappropriate relationship (physical or emotional) with anyone?
- Do I lust after other people?
- Have I sinned in regards to images on TV or the Internet?
- Have I had impure thoughts?
- Have I committed sins of physical impurity?



## 8. YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

- Do I take what is not mine?
- Do I cheat or copy other people's work or homework?
- Do I gossip (stealing reputation)?
- Do I respect other people's property by not abusing it?
- Do I transmit bad comments from one person to another?
- Do I give my tithes?
- Do I take supplies that are not mine?



## 9. YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR

- Do I lie?
- Do I tell half truths?
- Do I tell "white lies"?
- What is my motive to lie?
- Is it fear of false pretense?


## 10. YOU SHALL NOT COVET

- Do I want what my neighbor (friend or classmate) has when I know that I don't need it?


If you love Me **KEEP MY**  
**COMMANDMENTS**  
John 14:15

# THE SERMON ON THE Mount

## SELF EXAMINATION QUESTIONNAIRE

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell.

And great was its fall."

+Matthew 7:21-27+