



Catholic Identity Supplement *for Fully Engaged*

OFFICE OF MARRIAGE & FAMILY
DIOCESE OF SAINT CLOUD

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Penance, Confession

When Adam and Eve turned their backs on God, wanting to go their own way, they damaged the unity, or oneness, for which they had been created as a married couple. They would struggle to be obedient and faithful to God and each other. Their sin caused them to hide from God in fear, and wounded their trust in him and one another. All of us have inherited this tendency to turn inward to serving one's own interests rather than turning outward in love to another. This is so evident in today's world. The grace of marriage helps spouses overcome this tendency and become a source of hope and healing for the world. God did not leave us orphans. He

calls us to be husbands and fathers, wives and mothers and gave us a path to bring us back to the fullness of His love, to love unconditionally, striving to do good for the sake of the other. The Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation (sometimes called "going to confession") brings us healing in our relationships with God, self and others, and it allows us to begin anew to follow the Lord more faithfully. While our sinfulness can humble us, experiencing this merciful love from Jesus helps us to be more merciful to others as well.



*God "blessed" them
and said, "Be
fruitful and
multiply, and fill the
earth and subdue it;
and have dominion
over the fish of the
sea and over the
birds of the air and
over every living
thing that moves
upon the earth."*

(Genesis 1:28)

Fully Engaged Statement #142

I apologize and ask for forgiveness when I am wrong. (Yes)

In our everyday relationships, the three words “I am sorry,” can be the most powerful in restoring our love and oneness with our beloved. Uttering those three words with sincerity and humility can communicate the meaning of true regret, repentance and the desire to make amends. And since our sins tend to be against those with whom we are closest, the hurt imposed by our sins can run very deep indeed. In our wedding vows, we promised to become one “in good times and in bad,” and it is our responsibility to restore our marriage when we have wronged our spouse and to be reconciled when we have been wronged, so we

can again become one. Holding grudges, allowing resentments to build or withholding forgiveness can be just as damaging to the marriage. Forgiveness does not condone past actions or words, but it can create a new and stronger future together.

No matter how much our pride and selfishness may pull us in another direction, those three little words, “I am sorry,” along with a sincere and humble heart, have the power to transform and restore our marriage, to do what is right and pleasing to God and our spouse.



The Joy of Love, Amoris Laetitia, Pope Francis 2016, no 13. “The love of friendship unifies all aspects of marital life and helps family members to grow constantly. This love must be freely and generously expressed in words and acts. In the family, “three words need to be used. I want to repeat this! Three words: ‘Please,’ ‘Thank you,’ ‘Sorry’. Three essential words!”

Fully Engaged Statement #53

I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) at least annually. (Yes)

When we sin and hurt our spouse or others, we also hurt our relationship with God. Not only does Jesus invite each of us to repentance and new life, but he makes it possible to achieve them through His grace through the sacrament of reconciliation. So powerful is this sacrament that we are returned to the innocence of baptism and given a chance to begin anew in our following of the Risen Lord, stronger because of His gracious mercy. This door to new life is open to all who sincerely wish to “reform their lives and believe in the Gospel.”

But if we confess our sins to God, he will keep his promise and do what is right; he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing. (1 John 1:9)

The sacrament of reconciliation is about God’s forgiveness and mercy, sharing with us His unfailing love even in our sin and allowing us to begin anew. It also reminds us that our sins are never purely private matters but always involve a rupture in our relationship with God and with others. The condition of our relationship with God affects how we treat others and vice versa.

His call goes much deeper: He invites us to change our hearts, to an interior conversion. Such conversion radically reorients our whole life back to God. Without this, penitential works remain exterior, empty and lifeless. With interior conversion, however, comes the urge to express our sorrow and trust in God’s goodness and mercy through visible, concrete signs.

MAY NON-CATHOLICS GO TO CONFESSION?

While those who are not Catholic would not have a sacramental absolution, non-Catholics may certainly approach a priest for counsel, advice and prayer. This is always a ministry and service that any priest can do for any person.

How do I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation?

STEP 1:

An Examination of Conscience

One of the most important preparations for a true and fruitful celebration of the sacrament is the examination of conscience. This is a mental review of one's spiritual life so that one knows what to confess. While there are many ways to do so, the Ten Commandments make an excellent point of reference.

A healthy examination of conscience will find trends of sinfulness and distance from God. Honesty and humility are important -- we must not gloss over or lightly dismiss our sins, but neither do we need to confess unintentional errors or things which have truly happened beyond our control (for instance, missing Mass due to serious illness is not a sin). Sins of omission -- that is, failing to do the good one ought to do -- are perhaps often overlooked but also important to confess in order to grow closer to the Lord. Our goal as disciples of Christ is to become perfected in His image, not merely to avoid obvious evils. Our pilgrimage is not just away from sin (conversion and repentance), but towards the fullness of life in Christ Jesus.

Though it is not possible to make an exhaustive list of all possible sins, here is one form of an examination of conscience:

1) *I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no gods before Me.*

Have I put something or someone in my life ahead of God: money, drugs or alcohol, work, leisure activities, TV, the Internet, etc.? Have I tried to compromise my faith, thinking God should understand? Have I presumed on God's mercy in doing things I know are wrong? This commandment is a positive invitation to a relationship of faith, hope and love with God; have I been lukewarm or indifferent to God? Have I used magic or superstition? Have I committed sacrilege?

2) *You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.*

Do I use the names of God and Jesus as curse words? Do I use other improper and coarse language? Do I take my religious duties seriously and pray with reflection and devotion?

3) *Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.*

Do I participate in Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation, or have I missed Mass? Am I reverent and attentive while there? Do I refrain from truly unnecessary work or shopping on Sundays, dedicating time for family, friends and charitable works? Do I allow myself relaxation of body and mind needed for good balance in my life? Is Sunday just like every other day for me?

4) *Honor your father and your mother.*

Do I show proper respect to my parents? Do I show proper respect to those in authority, both in the Church and in society? Do I pray for my parents, whether they are alive or already deceased? Do I visit the elderly, lonely and sick? Have I fulfilled my responsibilities as a parent, looking after the welfare of my children spiritually, socially, physically, emotionally?

5) *You shall not kill.*

Besides the obvious prohibition on actually taking a life, regardless of that person's age or condition, do I show due reverence for life? Do I take risks with my life, or with others' lives at work, at home, while driving or in other activities? Am I ever violent or abusive, either in words or actions? Do I grow angry and hold grudges? Do I take reasonable care for my health and the health of those who depend on me as a gift from God?

6) *You shall not commit adultery.*

Have I abused God's gift of sexuality through adultery, fornication, masturbation or activities which naturally lead to intercourse? Have I deliberately fostered lust and impurity in thought, language, use of television, movies, the Internet, or pornographic literature? Have I used contraception? If married, have I shown proper respect for my spouse as a whole person?

7) *You shall not steal.*

Have I taken things to which I have no right? Have I failed to give a day's work for a day's pay, or in other ways chosen to ignore obligations? As an employer, have I paid a just wage? Have I been honest in paying taxes? Have I been wasteful and careless with the goods of the earth?

8) *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

Have I been guilty of lies, either to deceive another, to make myself look good or to keep myself out of trouble? Have I been guilty of rash judgments about others? Do I gossip and expose the faults (real or imagined) of others? Have I detracted from another person's reputation?

9/10) *You shall not covet your neighbor's wife/your neighbor's goods.*

Have I been jealous of the relationships and goods of others? Have I looked at others with lust or been angry at the good fortune of others? Have I complained about my life and circumstances because they are not like that of others?

STEP 2:

Going to Confession

After examining your conscience and telling God of your sorrow, go into the confessional. You may kneel at the screen or sit to talk face-to-face with the priest.

1. Begin your confession with the sign of the cross, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. My last confession was _____ weeks (months, years) ago."
2. Say the sins that you remember. Points to remember:
 - Start with the one(s) that is most difficult to say. (In order to make a good confession the faithful must confess all mortal sins, according to kind and number.)
 - Your confession is to include both sins of commission (what I have chosen to say, think or do that is contrary to God's will) and also sins of omission (good that I ought to have done but chose not to do.)
 - There is a distinction made between mortal ("serious," "grave") sin and venial sin. A sin is mortal if it meets three requirements: 1) it is done with full knowledge of the gravity of what is being chosen AND 2) it is done with full freedom and consent of the will, AND 3) it is a serious matter.
 - After confessing all the sins you remember since your last good confession, you may conclude by saying, "I am sorry for these and all the sins of my past life."
3. Listen to the words of the priest. He will assign you some penance. Points to remember:
 - Penance is what the confessor assigns to the person before granting absolution. The penance is in no way a punishment, rather, it is medicinal, a means of healing the past and beginning discipleship anew in a holy way. The penance is often prayer or a Scripture reading, though it may be a specific action, voluntary self-denial, and above all the patient acceptance of the Cross we must all bear.
 - Absolution is when the confessor extends his hand and prays a beautiful prayer of absolution. Through this prayer, Christ truly imparts his mercy through the priest, who acts in the person of Christ in this sacrament.
4. When invited, express some prayer of sorrow or Act of Contrition. "A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalms 51:19). Points to remember:
 - Contrition is sorrow for sin. Contrition arises spontaneously in us as the work of conscience. When we realize that we have made choices that are opposed to God's love for ourselves or for others, and we are sorry that we have done so because we have offended God, who loves us so much, we are contrite.
 - The penitent's Act of Contrition is a part of the celebration of this sacrament. It is to be sincere, personal expression of sorrow to God, speaking from our hearts, and not merely a memorized prayer mechanically rattled off hurriedly. This graced moment of sacramental encounter with Christ ought not to ever be hurried.



ONE EXAMPLE OF AN ACT OF CONTRITION:

*O, my God, I am
heartily sorry for
having offended you
and I detest all my
sins, because I dread
the loss of heaven
and the pains of hell.
But most of all
because I have
offended you, my
God, who are all good
and deserving of all
my love. I firmly
resolve with the help
of your grace, to
confess my sins, to do
penance and to
amend my life.*

Amen.

STEP 3:

Complete your Penance

Fully Engaged Statement #34

Sunday (or the Saturday Vigil) Mass is essential in our marriage on a weekly basis. (Yes)

Going to Mass and Belonging to a Parish

The mystery of the Eucharist is the greatest gift Jesus Christ has given to His Church. It is the perfect farewell present that allows Him to truly remain with us until the end of the world. It is the most-perfect expression of God's love we could imagine. It is in Jesus Christ that all the promises of the Old Testament, and every longing of the human heart, are fulfilled. God's own Son took on our human nature to reconcile all humanity to God. He promises us everlasting life.

As with all the sacraments, there are actions that Christ does and are living signs of His grace among us. In the Eucharist, it is Christ Himself, His own Body and Blood, truly present under the appearance of bread and wine. This nourishment is so necessary for our souls that the Church requires that we participate in Mass each week. While it is an obligation, it is also an invitation to be fed by God's Word, by the assembly joined together with us, and by the Eucharist we share. What an awesome privilege!

So His command to "Do this in memory of Me" (Luke 22:19) can also be thought of as a mission for each of us. He tells us to imitate His selfless, sacrificial, loving service to one another. When He washed His disciples' feet at the Last Super, He clearly told them, "As I have done, so must you do...Once you know all these things, blest will you be if you put them into practice..." (John 13:15-17).

So, in every parish community, the altar is a kind of "mystical geographical center" of the life of the Church in that community. From the altar we receive the grace we need to allow the life of Christ, the Servant and Redeemer to work in every facet of our lives. To the altar we bring ourselves – our successes and failures, our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears – and offer them to the Father along with Christ as members of His body. We are sent forth from the Eucharistic assembly to bring that life of Christ into our homes, families, neighborhoods and schools — in every place and aspect of human life.



"It was understood, from the first moment, by Jesus' disciples, who celebrated the Eucharistic encounter with the Lord in the day of the week that the Jews called "the first of the week" and the Romans "day of the sun," because on that day Jesus rose from the dead and He appeared to His disciples, speaking with them, eating with them, giving them the Holy Spirit (Cf. Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:9.14; Luke 24:1.13; John 20:1.19), as we heard in the biblical Reading. The great effusion of the Holy Spirit also happened on Sunday, the fiftieth day after Jesus' Resurrection. For these reasons, Sunday is a holy day for us, sanctified by the Eucharistic celebration, the Lord's living presence among us and for us. Hence, it is the Mass that makes Sunday Christian! The Christian Sunday revolves around the Mass. For a Christian, what sort of Sunday is it that lacks the encounter with the Lord?"

— Pope Francis, December 17, 2018

Fully Engaged Statement #136

I actively contribute to our Church through my time, treasure (money), and talents. (Yes)

Joining and Belonging to a Parish

Belonging to a parish is the first step to making an active and concrete contribution to a faith community. The practice of participating in weekly Eucharist helps us discover the richness and grace to live a relationship with God, your spouse and the parish community. It is important to have a sense of belonging in a faith community, to find a parish home.

Joining a parish means making a commitment to a specific community so we can share life's ups and downs, the seasons of the Church year, and the events of the community and the world in the context of faithful prayer and support.

If you are not already members of a parish, finding a parish where you can fully participate in the faith life of the community may take some exploration. Here are a few considerations:

- **Finding a parish community to join:**

1. Normally, your "proper parish" is the one in whose boundaries you live.
2. Ask other Catholics you know about the parish they belong to and if you might come to Mass with them.
3. Attend Mass at a few different parishes close to your home. How comfortable do you feel in the parish? Need help in finding a parish? Visit <https://masstimes.org/>.
4. Stay after Mass and introduce yourselves to the parish priest and/or deacon.
5. Attend Mass at a parish for several weeks before you register as new members.

- **Becoming members of a parish:** Many people think that because they attend a particular parish they automatically belong. Membership requires signing up and formally enrolling yourself in the parish. But it is also more than just filling out some forms. Registration is a commitment to a community, a way to be included in the religious, social and ministerial activities of a parish.

- **Registering as members:** There is usually information in a parish Sunday bulletin on how to register as a new member. When in doubt, talk to the priest after Mass. In most cases, you will visit the parish/cluster office and fill out a simple form. You will also receive information on the opportunities the parish has to participate and grow in your faith.

- **Being a member:** A crucial part of parish membership is participating in the faith life of the community. This can be done by volunteering your time and talent to serve the parish. Many opportunities exist, both within the liturgy (music, lector, usher, greeter, etc.) and in other programs such as faith formation, social justice and outreach, parish administration and care of the facility. Knowing your own talents and strengths will help you find a parish that can incorporate these gifts into the life of the community. Many opportunities can be done as a couple, so you can grow in your faith together.

- **Investing in your parish:** Together with your time and your talent, the parish also relies on your financial support — your treasure. Following the biblical injunction to tithe 10% of our income to the Church, Catholics are encouraged to share their financial resources with their parish, their diocese and other charities. This giving back honors the sacrifices made by our ancestors who established our parishes and passed on the faith to us, and it solidifies the future for the generations that will follow us. It also provides for current programs, ministries and the day-to-day function of the parish. Because we are literally invested in the parish when we contribute our financial and temporal resources, we grow in our sense of belonging.

Fully Engaged Statement #80

I believe the teachings of my faith tradition should inform my daily thoughts and actions. (Yes)



Living Life as a Disciple

The connection between Sunday and the rest of the week is crucial, which means our religious observance should not be limited only to church attendance. Rather discipleship means that Christians let the teachings of Christ and his Church shape their attitudes, actions and desires.

As our discipleship grows, we long to shape our human desires with the will of God. Jesus trusted that His Father's plan would result in the greatest good for the greatest glory. Even when facing crucifixion, Jesus cried out to the Father, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

And this must be our prayer, too. This prayer can lead us to learn more about the teachings of the Church, so we can put into practice good and moral decisions, even when our selfish desires are tempted to do something different. As we strive to understand the things we struggle to comprehend, the Holy Spirit will guide us so we can more closely conform our will to that of God, and the wisdom to pursue a life following God's plan. This will help us custom our daily lives – our decisions, dreams, hopes, and actions – to the love of God, so our marriage and family will become stronger, holier and healthier.

Discuss how your family of origin and past experiences have shaped your daily decisions and routines. These routines and basic attitudes of our lives are also moral matters and put our faith as disciples into practice.

Additional Resources:

How to go to confession: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJg29UG6028> (6 min)

Making a Good Confession - Fr Mike Schmitz: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCmumpsrwBE> (7 min)

Additional Resources:

Bishop Barron on the Mass <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIGXtDR2GCK> (11:24 min)

Sacraments 201: Eucharist (what we believe) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMSiHGTBdGk> (9 min)

Motivation to Go to Catholic Mass with Fr Mike Schmitz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuyxQvb9Ayw&t=1s> (9:27 min)

Getting involved in your parish with Fr. Mike Schmitz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYsBEMYkK8g&list=PLcXS0cAkuTPpJ6j3eH59WudJhJ4q1tpwH> (9:36 min)