

The differences in sins

There are two major kinds of sin: original and actual.

Actual sin is sin which people commit. There are two kinds of actual sin, mortal and venial.

Mortal sin is a horrible offense against God, so horrible that it destroys the life of grace in the soul. Three simultaneous conditions must be fulfilled for mortal sin: (1) the act must be something very serious; (2) the person must have sufficient understanding of what is being done; (3) the person must have sufficient freedom of will. So I cannot commit a mortal sin if the matter is not serious (e.g., if I stole a small amount of money from my employer), or if I did not know what I was doing (e.g., if I were to hurt someone accidentally or unthinkingly), or if I did not act with full freedom (e.g., I was under great physical or emotional pressure).

A Catholic should know well the difference between mortal and venial sins and, if mortal sins have been committed since the last Confession, should identify them as mortal when confessing.

*Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness;
In the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me of my guilt.
And of my sin cleanse me...
A clean heart create for me, O God,
And a steadfast spirit renew within me.
(PSALM 51: 3-4, 12)*

*Nihil Obstat
David Q. Liptak, S.T.D.
Censor deputatus*

*Imprimatur
+John F. Whealon
Archbishop of Hartford
August 14, 1990*

Examination of conscience

Before going to Confession you should make a review of mortal and venial sins committed since your last forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance, and should express sorrow to God for all those sins, hatred for sins and a firm resolution not to sin again.

A helpful pattern for examination of conscience is to review the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church:

1. Have God and the pursuit of sanctity in Christ been the goal of my life?
2. Have I avoided the profane use of God's name in my speech?
3. Have I honored every Sunday by avoiding unnecessary work, celebrating the Mass, re-creating myself?
4. Have I shown Christ like respect to parents, spouse and family members?
5. Have I cared for the bodily health and safety of myself and all others?
6. Have I been chaste in thought and word? Have I used sex only within marriage and while open to procreating new life?
7. Have I stolen anything from another, from your employer, from government? If so, am I ready to repay it?
8. Have I spoken ill of any other person? Have I always told the truth?
9. Have I permitted sexual thoughts about someone to whom I am not married?
10. Have I desired what belongs to other people?
11. Have I been faithful to sacramental living (Communion and Penance)?
12. Have I help make my parish community stronger and holier?
13. Have I done penance by abstaining and fasting or obligatory days?
14. Have I been mindful of the poor?

Confessing my sins

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

When you speak, use words such as these:

*I confess to Almighty God and to you, Father, that I have sinned.
My last Confession was _____ weeks (months, years) ago.
Since then I know of no mortal sins (or) Since then my mortal
sins are these (and tell the sins, number of times and important
circumstances). My venial sins are these: (Tell the sins and
number of times) or; Since then I know of no venial sins. My
main fault is _____ and I am working to overcome it. In my
past life there were sins of _____ for which I am still sorry.
For these and all the sins of my past life, I am deeply sorry.*

Listen to the words of the priest. When invited, make an Act of Contrition such as:

*O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest
all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of
hell. But most of all because they offend you, my God, who are
all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the
help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the occasions of
sin.*

Listen to the words of forgiveness, making the sign of the cross with the priest. If he closes by saying,

*Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, answer: For his mercy
endures forever.*

Then say your assigned penance.

How to receive the Sacrament of Penance

*You, O Lord, according to your gentle grace,
Promised forgiveness to those who repent of their sins,*

*And in your many mercies
Established penance for sinners as the way to salvation...
And now behold I am bending the knees of my heart before you;
And I am beseeching your kindness.
I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned,
And I certainly know my sins.
I beseech you: Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me.
(The Prayer of Manasseh)*

Sin in my life

Modern society has lost a sense of sin. As a Catholic follower of Christ, you need to make an effort to recognize sin in your daily actions, words and omissions.

The Gospels show how important is the forgiveness of our sins. Lives of saints prove that the person who grows in holiness has a stronger sense of sin, or sorrow for sins, and a need for the Sacrament of Penance or Confession.

A helpful check on spiritual growth is how Christlike you are in having no enemies, forgiving others, loving and serving others and carrying your cross. Another helpful check is how you are handling the Seven Capital Sins. These are: (1) Pride (Am I self-centered?); (2) Greed (Are money and things my real goals in life?); (3) Lust (Am I pure in act, speech and thinking?); (4) Anger (Do I control my temper and tongue?); (5) Gluttony (Do I control my appetites and addictions?); (6) Envy (Am I jealous of what others have or are?); and (7) Laziness (Am I lazy? Am I apathetic?).

We Catholics are fortunate to have the Sacrament of Penance. It is the ordinary way for us to get our sins forgiven. This sacrament is a powerful help to getting rid of our weaknesses, grow in holiness, and lead a balanced life.

The serious Catholic, living in the state of grace, celebrates this sacrament every month...or every three months...and certainly before Christmas and the Easter Triduum every year.