

## For the Sake of the Kingdom: **The Sacrament of Reconciliation and Priests and Religious**

Priests and religious dedicate their lives to the service of the Gospel for the sake of the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 19:12). Despite their sinfulness and human frailty, God has honored them with a high calling. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is immensely important in the lives of priests and religious for it helps sustain and nourish their calling and commitment. It holds them accountable for the vocation and graces the Lord has given them. Also, through this sacrament, priests and religious take responsibility for their lives before God and his Church.

### **The Temptations of Priests and Religious**

For the most part, priests and religious meet the standard temptations that every adult encounters. They are not immune from anger, impatience, pride, and resentment. However, because of the position they hold within the Church and among God's people, they are held more accountable, for their witness is more public and of greater intensity. The sinful actions (even venial) of priests and religious can give grace scandal, just as their deeds of virtue and zeal can give great testimony.

Nonetheless, there are temptations and sins that priests and religious must especially confront and avoid. Those sins against their promises and vows are of special importance.

Priests and religious have promised before God and his Church to be obedient to their ecclesial superiors and to be loyal to the Gospel. Unwarranted disobedience and dissent not only undermine the integrity of priests and religious, but also jeopardize the authority of the Gospel itself.

Priests and religious have also committed themselves to lives of celibacy and chastity. They are to be pure in thought, word, and deed. They must not only refrain from sexual actions, but from suggestive speech and offensive, distasteful humor. Words reveal the state of one's heart.

Religious likewise vow themselves to poverty, but all who are dedicated to God should strive to lead simple lives unencumbered by the things of this world. In today's materialistic world, witness to Gospel poverty is especially meaningful.

Priests and religious must also stand guard against cynicism toward the Church and the people they care for. Confronted with immense problems and concerns, priests and religious can become sarcastic and resentful. This breeds hardness, anger and disaffection. Moreover, they must not allow gossip to undermine their relationships. Gossip can tear apart a religious community or a parish. It can devastate the body of Christ. Lastly, priests and religious must be especially vigilant of their life of prayer. Without it the life of the Gospel and their loyalty to it drains away.

## **An Examination of Conscience for Priests and Religious**

### **Responsibilities to God:**

Have I participated at Mass or have I daydreamed or been present with a blank mind? If a priest, have I said Mass with reverence and attention?

Have I been faithful in praying the Liturgy of the Hours? Have I participated in community prayer and been faithful to daily personal prayer and meditation?

Have I read the Bible? Have I studied the truths of our faith and allowed them to become more part of the way I think and act? Have I read any spiritual books or religious literature?

Have I told God that I want to love him with my whole heart, mind, and strength? Do I hold any resentments toward God?

Have I recognized my need for Jesus and his salvation? Have I asked the Holy Spirit to empower me to live the Christian life?

Have I held resentments toward the Church or Church authorities? Have I forgiven them?

Have I participated in anything that is of the occult (New Age): Ouija boards, fortune tellers, séances, channeling, astrology?

### **Responsibilities to promises and vows:**

Have I been faithful to the promises and vows I have made to God?

Have I been rebellious, disobedient or disrespectful to those authority over me—the Pope, bishops, superiors? Have I caused others to be disrespectful to those in authority?

Have I been faithful to the truth of the Gospel and the teaching of the magisterium? Have I preached and witnessed to the Gospel, or have I compromised it in some manner?

Have I engaged in sexual fantasies? Have I looked at others lustfully?

Have I read pornographic literature or looked at pornographic pictures, shows or movies?

Have I masturbated?

Have I flirted with anyone? Have I lustfully kissed or sexually touched someone? Have I had sexual intercourse?

Have I allowed the things of this world to captivate my heart and mind? Have I used things or spent money not in keeping with Gospel poverty?

Have I witnessed to Gospel poverty in my ministry? Have I desired to identify with the rich rather than with the poor?

Does my life—how I think, speak and act—bear witness to the reality and primacy of heaven and eternal life?

### **Responsibilities to my ministry**

Have I fulfilled my pastoral responsibilities with attention and care? Have I been half-hearted, lazy or cynical in my ministry?

Have I been sarcastic and negative toward those with whom I work or with those that I serve?

Have I been loving, patient, kind, gentle, and self-controlled? Do I have a real care for God's people, desiring their salvation and eternal life?

When my conscience told me to do something in relationship to my ministry, did I do it or did I ignore it?

Have I allowed business to control my life? Have I overworked, not taking time for exercise, relaxation, prayer, and reading?

**Responsibilities to others:**

Have I lied to or deceived others?  
Have I been arrogant and stubborn?  
Have I gotten angry, nurtured and held grudges and resentments? Have I refused to forgive others? Have I cultivated hatred?  
Have I gossiped about others—in my religious community or parish? Have I slandered anyone? Have I told lies about others?  
Have I mocked or made fun of others?  
Have I lied or cheated?  
Have I stolen anything? Have I paid it back?  
Have I been selfish or spiteful toward others?  
Have I been jealous?  
Have I gotten drunk or taken drugs?

**Responsibilities to society:**

Have I born witness, in word and deed, to the social implications of the Gospel?  
Have I allowed the Gospel to influence my political and social opinions?  
Have I had a proper Christian concern for the poor and needy?  
Have I been unethical in my business dealings? Have I stolen or lied?  
Have I paid my taxes?

Have I fostered or nurtured hatred toward my social or political enemies either local, national or international?  
Have I been prejudiced toward others because of race, color, religious or social status?

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