

**The 10 Commandments &
How to Make a Good Confession**

Basic Catholic Moral Code for Christian Living

The basic moral code for Christian living is made up of the Ten Commandments and the five precepts of the Catholic Church, which are explained below.

1. The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are a summary of “the conditions of a life freed from the slavery of sin” (CCC 2057). They must be understood in relation to the “law of love”: Love of God and love of neighbour summarize all of Catholic morality. The law of love is also the first principle and source of the moral law. It contains “all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

The Ten Commandments are a description of the minimum that love requires. They express man’s fundamental duties to God and neighbour. As such, they represent grave obligations. To violate them knowingly and willingly in a significant way is to commit mortal sin. (CCC 2702-3).

It is important to note that each Commandment is simply a summary of a whole category of actions.

The First Commandment

You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.

- Did I deny or doubt God’s existence?
- Did I refuse to believe God’s revelation?
- Did I believe in horoscopes, fortune telling, dreams, good luck charms or reincarnation or other occult practices?
- Did I deny that I was a Catholic?
- Did I leave the Catholic faith?
- Was I involved in the New Age Movement, Eastern Religions, atheism or agnosticism?
- Was I guilty of apostasy?

- Did I belong to a schismatic group?
- Was I involved with the Freemasons or other secret societies?
- Did I despair of or presume on God's mercy?
- Did I receive Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin?
- Did I presume on God's mercy by committing sins and then expecting absolution by going to confession?
- Did I hate God?
- Was I guilty of simony (the buying or selling of blessed and holy items)?
- Did I fail to receive Holy Communion at least once a year, especially during Easter?
- Did I neglect prayer for a long time?

The Second Commandment

You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.

- Did I blaspheme God or take God's Name in vain, curse or break an oath or vow?
- Did I wish evil on another person?
- Have I slandered or insulted a sacred person or object?
- Did I lie or withhold a serious sin during confession?
- Have I lied under oath?

The Third Commandment

Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day.

- Did I miss Mass on Sunday or Day of Obligation through my own fault?
- Am I always reverent in the presence of Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament?
- Was I inattentive at Mass?
- Did I come to Mass late? How late?
- Did I leave Mass early?
- Did I do unnecessary physical work on Sunday?

- Did I require my employees to work on Sunday?
- Did I fail to fast or abstain on a day prescribed by the Church?
- Did I fail to confess at least once a year?
- Did I go to Holy Communion without fasting (water and medicine permitted) for one hour from food and drink?
- Did I make a bad confession?
- Did I fail to contribute to the support of the Church?

The Fourth Commandment

Honour your father and mother.

- Have I failed to care for my aged parents?
- Did I disobey or disrespect my parents or legitimate superiors?
- Did I neglect my duties to my husband, wife, or children?
- Did I fail to actively take an interest in the religious education and formation of my children?
- Have I failed to educate myself on the true teachings of the Church?
- Have I abused or been guilty of serious neglect of my children?
- Have I failed to carry out the Last Will and Testament of my deceased parent/s?

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not kill.

- Have I committed murder or manslaughter?
- Did I physically injure anyone?
- Have I had an abortion or advised someone to have an abortion?
- Regarding abortion, check with your priest to see if you were automatically excommunicated. The excommunication must be lifted first before going to confession.
- Did I knowingly vote for someone who is pro-abortion?
- Did I participate in or approve of the grave evil known as “mercy killing”?

- Did I attempt suicide?
- Did I give scandal by what I said or did, especially to the young?
- Was I the cause of anyone leaving the faith?
- Am I guilty of driving dangerously or recklessly?
- Did I give bad example, abuse drugs, drink alcohol to excess, fight or quarrel?
- Have I been engaged in unjust lawsuits?
- Have I been guilty of bigotry?

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

(This commandment encompasses the prohibition of sins against chastity – see CCC2351)

- Did I wilfully entertain impure and lustful thoughts and desires?
- Did I dress immodestly?
- Did I use impure or suggestive words?
- Did I tell impure stories?
- Did I listen to them?
- Did I deliberately look at impure things, TV, videos, plays, pictures, or movies?
- Did I deliberately read impure material?
- Did I commit an impure act by myself (masturbation) or with another (fornication or homosexual acts)?
- Did I marry or advise another to marry outside the church?
- Did I abuse my marriage rights?
- Was I unfaithful to my marriage vows?
- Have I kept impure company with someone else's spouse?
- Did I practice artificial birth control or was I or my spouse sterilized?

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

The seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbour and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labour. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity. (CCC2401)

- Did I give a full day's work in return for my full day's pay?
- Did I give a fair wage to my employee?
- Have I stolen anything?
- Have I failed to make restitution?
- Have I gambled to excess?
- Have I taken advantage of the poor, simple, inexperienced or less fortunate?
- Have I failed to help the poor or needy when I am able to do so?
- Did I steal, cheat, help or encourage others to steal, or keep stolen goods?
- Have I made restitution for stolen goods?
- Did I fulfil my contracts, give or accept bribes, pay my bills, deprive my family of necessities of life?
- Have I deliberately falsified my tax returns in order to evade or pay less tax?

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others. This moral prescription flows from the vocation of the holy people to bear witness to their God who is the truth and wills the truth. Offenses against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness: they are fundamental

infidelities to God and, in this sense, they undermine the foundations of the covenant. (CCC2464)

- Did I tell lies?
- Did I deliberately deceive others?
- Or injure others by lies?
- Did I commit perjury (lying under oath)?
- Was I uncharitable in word or deed, gossip or reveal others' faults and sins?
- Did I fail to keep secrets I should have?

The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet/desire your neighbour's wife.

- Have I looked at pornography either in books or on the screen?
- Have I dwelled on impure thoughts or fantasies for the purpose of arousal?
- Have I wilfully lusted after another?

The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet/desire your neighbour's goods.

- Have I been guilty of greed or avarice?
- Did I steal or destroy the goods belonging to another?
- Have I been envious of others' good fortune, looks, talents, etc?

2. The Five Precepts (laws) of the Catholic Church

The Precepts of the Catholic Church are the minimum requirements that a Catholic has to fulfil in living out the Catholic faith. The five precepts of the Church are found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, citations 2041-43.

The Church uses these precepts to remind us that Christian life requires a commitment to prayer and active participation in the liturgy and sacraments. If we fall below this bare-minimum level, we cannot rightly consider ourselves to be in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Each of these precepts of the Catholic Church is a requirement. Together with the Ten Commandments, they represent the minimum level of moral living. Intentional violation of the precepts or the Commandments is a grave matter, meaning a mortal sin.

Note that there are many other laws that govern the Church and they are contained in an official book called the Code of Canon Law.

The Five Precepts

a. *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labour.*

We must “sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord” (Sunday), as well as the principal feast days, known as Catholic holy days of obligation. This requires attending Mass, “and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.”

In addition to Sundays, the holy days of obligation in the Archdiocese of Singapore are:

1. Ascension of Our Lord (40th day after Easter Sunday)
2. Assumption of Our Lady (15 August)
3. All Saints Day (1 November)
4. Christmas (25 December)

b. *You shall confess your sins at least once a year.*

We must prepare for the Eucharist by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). This sacrament “continues Baptism’s work of conversion and forgiveness.”

c. *You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.*

This “guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord’s Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy.”

d. You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.

“The fourth precept ensures the times of asceticism and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart.” See below for more about fasting & abstinence.

e. You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.

“The fifth precept means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.”

Note that these precepts of the Catholic Church are required to be fulfilled, unless you have a legitimate reason for not meeting them. For example:

- If you are sick, tending to a sick child on Sunday and cannot get to Mass, it is not a grave violation to miss Mass that day.
- Children, the elderly, and pregnant or nursing women do not have to fast on normal fast days (Ash Wednesday and Good Friday).

About fasting & abstinence

One of the precepts of the Catholic Church requires fasting and abstinence as signs of repentance. Repentance means to turn away from sin and turn back to God.

Catholic spirituality traditionally includes in repentance some form of penance. Penance means some practice that lets us express sorrow for our sins and helps repair the damage that sin has caused.

Penance gives us important practice in resisting temptation, thereby strengthening us. It greatly strengthens a number of virtues, especially charity, and it greatly enriches life.

The Catholic Church has two official forms of penitential practices: fasting and abstinence. These are so important that they’re one of the precepts of the Catholic Church.

Fasting is reducing the amount of food you eat below normal levels. Specifically, on fast days you may eat one full meal and two smaller meals, but those two smaller together should not exceed the amount of the normal meal. Snacking is also prohibited on fast days.

All Catholics age 18 to 59 are required to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. You are excused from fasting if you have a legitimate need to eat a normal amount of food on fast days. This includes:

- The sick or infirm, including handicapped or mentally ill people who need the nourishment or cannot make a free choice to fast
- Pregnant or nursing women
- Some manual labourers

Abstinence means not eating meat (fish is not considered meat in this case). All Catholics 14 and older are required to observe abstinence on these days:

- Ash Wednesday, Good Friday (the Friday before Easter), and all Fridays in Lent.
- This is required on all Fridays of the year (unless a Solemnity falls on a Friday), in honour of the Passion of Jesus on Good Friday.

Note that the duty to perform the tasks of your state in life takes precedence over the law of fasting in the precepts of the Catholic Church. If fasting honestly causes you to be unable to fulfil your required tasks, it is uncharitable to fast — the law of fasting would not apply in this case. (Consult with a priest if this is a concern to you.)

Always remember: the precepts of the Catholic Church are minimum levels of participation in the life of the Church. Out of love for Christ and a desire to advance in the spiritual life, we should try to do far more than they require.

It is recommended that Catholics:

- Attend Mass at least one more time a week, if possible, daily. (Most Church parishes celebrate Mass every day of the year!)
- Go to confession at least once a month, preferably to a regular confessor.
- Find a good spiritual director to give you sound guidance for growing in the spiritual life.
- Receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at every Mass, if you meet the guidelines for reception (are free from mortal sin, etc.).
- Make a habit of practicing penitential and charitable acts beyond those required by the precepts of the Catholic Church.
- Contribute as much as possible to the material needs of the Church and the needy.

3. How to do Confession

i. Examination of Conscience

A sincere and honest examination of our conscience will help call to mind our sins and failings. We need to do this during a period of quiet and prayerful reflection before approaching the priest in Confession. In fact, it is recommended that a brief examination of conscience be done during our nightly prayers. This will help us check ourselves on where we have failed in our Christian duty during the day that has just passed and to make amends through prayer and a sincere repentance not to commit those sins again.

A Catholic examination of conscience traditionally follows the outline of the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Catholic Church. To make an examination of conscience to prepare for Confession:

- Set aside some quiet time for prayer and reflection.
- Start by praying to the Holy Spirit, asking for help in making a good examination to prepare for Confession.
- Read through the Ten Commandments and precepts of the Church and honestly reflect on your behaviour for each item.

- If necessary, make a list of sins or some brief notes and bring it with you to Confession to help you remember things.

ii. *Guide to a Good Confession*

- a. Examine your conscience thoroughly. Ask God to help you by praying the following:

Come Holy Spirit into my soul, enlighten my mind that I may know the sins I ought to confess, and grant me Your grace to confess them fully, humbly and with contrite heart. Help me to firmly resolve not to commit them again. O Blessed Virgin, Mother of my Redeemer, mirror of innocence and sanctity, and refuge of penitent sinners, intercede for me through the Passion of Your Son, that I may obtain the grace to make a good confession.

All you blessed Angels and Saints of God, pray for me, a most miserable sinner, that I may repent from my evil ways, that my heart may henceforth be forever united with yours in eternal love. Amen.

- b. Be sincerely sorry for your sins.
- c. Confess your sins to the best of your ability.
- d. If you do not know how to confess or you feel uneasy or ashamed, simply ask the priest to assist you, be assured that he will help you to make a good confession. Simply answer his questions without hiding anything out of shame or fear. Place your trust in God: He is your merciful Father and wants to forgive you.
- e. Resolve to amend your life.
- f. After your confession, do the penance the priest gives you as soon as possible.

iii. Procedure in the Confessional

- a. The priest may prompt you to begin. You respond: “Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been (mentioned the time lapse since your last confession here) since my last confession and these are my sins.”
- b. Start listing all your mortal sins first and the number of times you have committed these sins.
- c. Then proceed to mention some of your venial sins. When you are finished, you should say “For these and all the sins that I may have forgotten, I am truly sorry.”
- d. The priest may give you some advice, and then will assign your penance and ask you to say an “Act of Contrition”. You then wait for his absolution.
- e. After the absolution, thank the priest and go do your penance; preferably before the Blessed Sacrament.
- f. After your confession, if you recall some serious sin that you forgot to tell, rest assured that it has been forgiven with the others, but be sure to include it in your next Confession.

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.

