

How to Make a Good First Confession

Before the Confession

1. Prepare yourself for confession by going over an examination of conscience that is rooted in either the Ten Commandments (most popular), the Seven Deadly Sins (not as popular, but if you are a fan of the movie 7, it's helpful), or the Virtues (which tend to focus more on living life than on rules/laws, giving a more organic approach, but also can be somewhat less specific).
2. Pray and ask Christ to send his Holy Spirit upon you to make a worthy and diligent examination
3. You may write down your sins on a piece of paper to help you. Make sure you rip that puppy up where no one can find it after your confession. One time I left my list in the back of my mom's car. Not a pretty picture afterwards...
4. When you walk into the Confessional remember that you are walking to the foot of Christ's cross. You confess to a priest who stands *in personae Christi*, in the person of Christ. Meaning, this is self-accusation to lead to life-transformation all done through a spirit of PRAYER.
5. Anxiety is normal your first time. Keep it centered on prayer and on the freedom Christ died and rose to give you.
6. Confession is not the Church's torture chamber for guilt complexes. It is literally the remedy for guilt purchased for you by the blood of Jesus Christ.
7. You are **obliged** to confess all of your mortal sins. You are **encouraged** to confess your venial sins, but not required. For a sin to be Mortal, it has to be gravely wrong, you have to know it was, and you had to freely chose it anyways. A "white" lie is not gravely wrong, whereas perjury, lying under oath, is gravely wrong, as is spreading a lie to destroy someone's reputation. "Grave matter" is the "moral gravity of the situation".

When Making a Confession

1. Tell the priest this is your first time and you are preparing to enter the Church formally in a week or two. He will help you at each step of the way. Don't be nervous about "not doing it right."
2. Avoid generalities. Be specific. Your anxiety and natural embarrassment may drive you away from admitting certain sins to the priest. Saying them out loud makes it doubly difficult, but it brings a greater sense of freedom when you can declare: "I hid from nothing. I faced my failures. I gave my sins to Christ. I am free."
3. Being specific means not just the specific sin, but, as close as you realistically can, to the number of times you committed that sin. Yup. "Kind and Number". This only applies to the confession of your Mortal sins.
4. If you feel like you may be emotional about it all, it is actually better to sit down in front of the priest instead of going behind the screen. The sympathetic look goes far in helping the healing.
5. The priest will offer you advice and some words for the pastoral needs of your life. Listen to them and take them to prayer.
6. The Act of Contrition is all over our confessionals, taped on the wall next to the screen, or on a table next to your chair. No need to freak out over memorizing the prayer. But it is an excellent prayer that you should take to heart and pray with your whole heart. After all, the third word is "heartily"...
7. How can the physician heal the wounds you refuse to show him? Find freedom by going big. Confess the sins that are holding you back the most first. Grab that liberty!