

Appendix: Examinations of Conscience

Introduction to an Examination of Conscience

An examination of conscience is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins (see John 16:8). If that sounds dangerous, keep reading.

All of us have sinned and fallen short (see Romans 3:23). At some level, we all know it, and we aren't overly eager to face that reality. There is something inside us that wants to run and hide from the gaze of God the Father. It's been like this from the very beginning, all the way back to the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3).

Our tendency to avoid the gaze of God the Father ties back to the original temptation and to the original lie that is at the root of human sinfulness. It is the lie that God is a controlling tyrant rather than a loving Father. Adam believed that lie, and he hid. Then, he made excuses and blamed everyone but himself.

The Devil thrives on this lie because he is the Great Accuser. He tempts, exploits, and solicits us to excuse, blame, deny, and hide. Then, he condemns us. He seeks to cut us off from the Father's love by instilling a false sense of God's identity and our identity.

It is important for us to remember our constant battle with the Devil, but more importantly, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit *convicts*. This is very different from being condemned. When we open our hearts in an examination of conscience, the Holy Spirit shines a light on our hearts and into our memories so that we can see our sins and be separated from them "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

Making a good examination of conscience is a chance to open ourselves to God's mercy, receive healing, and prepare for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is important to take time to focus and be brave in the face of what we have done and what we have failed to do. Below are two specific examinations. One is for fathers, and the other is for mothers. These are NOT the only acceptable versions of an examination of conscience, but they were designed specifically for mothers and fathers whose children are preparing to receive God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What a great time for parents to bravely search their own hearts and be renewed by the merciful love of God!

Examination of Conscience for Parents

This examination will focus on who you are as a father or mother. It is NOT designed to belittle or discourage you. It is designed to open a path in your heart for the Holy Spirit to convict, heal, and empower you to be more authentically who you were made to be. St. John Paul II reminds us, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father's love for us."¹ You have a heavenly Father who sees, knows, and loves you. He is pleased to invite you into the ultimate heart of your vocation as a father or mother, and repentance is a part of receiving that love. Here are some questions to ask as you seek forgiveness and strive to grow in your identity and mission.

1. John Paul II, World Youth Day homily, Toronto, Canada (July 28, 2002), 5, vatican.va.

Examination of Conscience for Fathers

First Commandment

- Have I made idols in my life?
- Have I put work, sports, leisure, myself, or anything else above God?
- What example have I set for my children in honoring God above all things?

Second Commandment

- Have I disrespected God through my language, whether in cursing his name or in using profanity?
- Have I set a bad example in my family through my use of words?
- How have I set a standard for God's name to be honored and sacred in our family?

Third Commandment

- Have I led my family into a proper worship of God on Sundays and Holy Days?
- Have I ensured that Mass is a priority above other activities?
- How have I invited my family into Sabbath observance?

Fourth Commandment

- How have I honored my own parents, even now, as an adult?
- How do I treat my spouse to set a standard for her to be honored by our children?
- How have I respected legitimate authority and set an example for our children?

Fifth Commandment

- Are there ways that I have harmed others or disrespected the dignity of others in my thoughts, words, or actions?
- How have I honored the dignity of each member of my family?
- Have I exercised discipline lovingly in my relationship with my child(ren)?

Sixth Commandment

- Have I been a faithful husband in my thoughts, words, and actions?
- Have I neglected my vows to love and honor my wife freely, totally, and faithfully?
- How have I been an image of Christ's love to her?
- How have I set an example of faithful love for my children?

Seventh Commandment

- Have I taken, grabbed, or grasped things that are not mine, whether property, ideas, or credit?
- How have I taught my children about respect for the property of others?
- Has ingratitude infected my attitude toward life?

Eighth Commandment

- Have I been honest in my speech and actions, or has lying crept into my habits?
- Are there particular lies that come to mind and for which I am in need of repentance?

Ninth and Tenth Commandments

- Have I looked lustfully at women or lusted after the lives, blessings, and situations of other families?

The Call of Fatherhood

- Have I taken seriously the call to spiritual leadership and accountability in my family?
- How have I reflected the image of God's fatherhood?

Examination of Conscience for Mothers

First Commandment

Have I made idols in my life?

Have I put work, sports, leisure, myself, or anything else above God?

What example have I set for my children in honoring God above all things?

Second Commandment

Have I disrespected God through my language, whether in cursing his name or in using profanity?

Have I set a bad example in my family through my use of words?

How have I set a standard for God's name to be honored and sacred in our family?

Third Commandment

Have I led my family into a proper worship of God on Sundays and Holy Days?

Have I ensured that Mass is a priority above other activities?

How have I invited my family into Sabbath observance?

Fourth Commandment

How have I honored my own parents, even now, as an adult?

How do I treat my spouse to set a standard for him to be honored by our children?

How have I respected legitimate authority and set an example for our children?

Fifth Commandment

Are there ways that I have harmed others or disrespected the dignity of others in my thoughts, words, or actions?

How have I honored the dignity of each member of my family?

Have I exercised discipline lovingly in my relationship with my child(ren)?

Sixth Commandment

Have I been a faithful wife in my thoughts, words, and actions?

Have I neglected my vows to love and honor my husband freely, totally, and faithfully?

How have I been an image of love to him?

How have I set an example of faithful love for my children?

Seventh Commandment

Have I taken, grabbed, or grasped things that are not mine, whether property, ideas, or credit?

How have I taught my children about respect for the property of others?

Has ingratitude infected my attitude toward life?

Eighth Commandment

Have I been honest in my speech and actions, or has lying crept into my habits?

Are there particular lies that come to mind and for which I am in need of repentance?

Ninth and Tenth Commandments

Have I looked lustfully at men or lusted after the lives, blessings, and situations of other families?

The Call of Motherhood

Have I taken seriously the call to spiritual leadership and nurturing in my family?

How have I reflected the image of the Church as a mother?