

Guide to self-examination prior to confession

Pastor of Saint Demian's church - Wayli, Egypt



Publication of the Coptic Orthodox Church



Pope Shenouda III

*117th pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the
see of St Mark*

Preface

Confession, in the Coptic Orthodox Church, is the only pronounced part of the whole process of repentance. The confessor repents first in private before God, then exposes his sins before an anointed priest¹. Before confessing, the confessor has to pass through the following:

1. Self-examination, during which the person identifies his failures and successes.
2. Self-blaming for distorting the image of man whom God has created upon HIS likeness.

¹A priest whom God has appointed to manage the sacrament of confession

3. Confessing and repenting before God, asking His forgiveness and grace to support him further in his spiritual strife.
4. Heading towards the church while recalling: «I have sinned against heaven and before you». Finally exposing his/her sins and iniquities before the priest, asking for guidance.

May the Lord Compensate the beloved father Elijah Shoukri for preparing that booklet to guide the confessor and aid him in offering a true repentance and a truthful confession, for many are those who confess without repenting and those who do not know how to confess. The Lord blesses each and every work for the glory of His Name.

Makarios, the general Bishop

Sins of Hearing

1. Listening to sexual talks:
 - a) Taking pleasure in listening to talks on sexual aspects that could excite at once or be stored in the passive memory to cause sexual arousal at a later time.
 - b) Taking pleasure in hearing voices that could stir fleshly desires.
2. Eavesdropping and spying: concentrating on what others say, do, need and think of.

3. Listening to, or spreading, denunciations and gossips irrespective of whether they are true or not.
4. Listening to condemnations: taking pleasure in listening to the condemnations of someone else even if you have not participated in these conversations.
5. Listening to music that can excite your sexual desires or cause spiritual coldness.
6. Taking pleasure in listening to others' praise.
7. Growing sorrowful when listening to words of criticism or insult.
8. Ignoring the voice of God and listening to the world's voice.
9. Listening to evil counseling.
10. Do you concentrate on each and every word of the holy liturgy? or you are never keep attentive?
11. Have you ever blocked your ears from the cry of the poor?

12. Have you ever blocked your ears from the cry of the Holy Spirit that calls you for repentance?

Sins of speech

«Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips» - Psalms 141:3.

1. Insulting: the Lord Christ said: «whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement» how much more if you insulted your brother?
2. Lying: there is nothing such as kind lies; all those who lie break God's commandment.
 - a) Some lie to people and others lie to God and the latter is worse than the former.

- b) The sin of lying is the seed for other sins such as: fear, greed, hypocrisy, pride, etc...
 - c) Christ the Lord said to the Jews: «You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it».
 - d) Lying leads to swearing; which is another sin of speech.
3. Swearing: whether truthful or not, «do not swear at all».
 4. Gossiping: Quoting someone's else offensive words before another with the aim of creating adversaries ... this is not love.
 5. Condemning: taking pleasure in mentioning people's own matters and expressing disapproval.

6. Scoffing: Making ridicule of others; «the scoffer is an abomination to men».
7. Speaking with ill jokes and words of ill humor, this includes:
 - a) Joking outside the limits of respect and decency.
 - b) Taking someone as a subject of mockery.
8. Getting involved in foolish disputes.
9. Speaking with offensive words without taking into account people's own emotions and feelings.
10. Continuously reciting music lyrics: this denotes that the heart is attached to the earth.
11. Speaking with words of hypocrisy, deceit and malice.
12. Overrating one issue with the aim of receiving praise.
13. Faith denying which includes:

- a) Not declaring your faith clearly.
 - b) Concealing your first/last name that explicitly identifies your Christian identity.
 - c) Complaining God or blaspheming His name.
14. Talking excessively: taking pleasure in dominating a conversation without listening to others.
15. Talking loudly:
- a) Taking pleasure in raising your voice over others' (e.g. as in a choir).
 - b) Taking pleasure in teaching and reproaching others even if they were older than you.
16. Praying that evil befalls someone.
17. Giving false testimony.
18. Revealing your righteousness which includes:
- a) Talking too much about yourself.

- b) Talking too much about your accomplishments.
 - c) Revealing your pros and concealing your cons.
 - d) Never accepting others' advices
 - e) Never confessing with your wrongdoings
 - f) Taking pride in earthly matters
19. Laughing and/or speaking during liturgies or meetings inside the church. «Who is acquainted with speaking in the church, has thus proven that the fear of God is not inside him» - Saint Moses the Great.

Sins of sight

1. Looking at stumbling or morally inappropriate scenes.
2. Desiring what is others' from possessions, clothes, jewelry etc...
3. Judging from the appearance or despising poor and appraising the rich and the wise.

Sinful thoughts

«As for us we must have the thought of Christ».

1. Impure thoughts

- a) Storing sexual matters in the mind, remembering, and taking pleasure in, them.
- b) Thinking of falling in sin.

2. Thoughts of hatred

- a) Growing sorrowful when hearing of others' success.

- b) Taking delight in evil that befalls others.
3. Thoughts of mistrust: Twisting people's innocent words to convey evil meanings.
 4. Unrealistic thoughts
 - a) Thinking of being great or in a position that can never be attained.
 - b) Thinking of taking revenge of others
 - c) Desiring doing miracles.
 5. Unclear thoughts: being unclear with God or people.
 6. Worshiping verbally and not with your thoughts for instance, when the priest cries during the mass saying: «where are your hearts (thoughts)?», do you give a truthful answer or you just repeat behind the congregation «they are with the Lord»?
 7. Do you keep record of all your evil deeds or you drink iniquity as you drink water?

8. Do you have any desires (being rich for example)?
9. Do you have thoughts of pride? Have you ever been proud of yours deeds?
10. Have you ever thought lowly of, condemned or judged someone?
11. Did you ever cut your relation with someone whom you have felt has not praised you?

Sinful deeds

1. Did you ever commit adultery?
2. Have you ever stolen, or taken without permission, any of the church's possessions (i.e. candles, books, communion handkerchiefs, incense)? Have you ever stolen the money of the church?
3. Have you ever stolen historical writings, saints' relics or paintings?
4. Have you ever robbed God? Have you ever not offered the tithes of your salary or your first monthly salary? Did you ever steal God's time (i.e. instead of spending the

time for or with God you have spent it in comforting your flesh or doing another work to increase your income)?

5. Have you ever robbed your family?
 - a) Stealing others' food.
 - b) Concealing facts regarding your income from your wife.
 - c) Concealing facts regarding your expenses from your husband or giving money to your family without informing him.

6. Did you ever steal at your work?
 - a) Have you ever stolen, for example, papers, pens or even used the telephone for personal use.
 - b) Have you ever not paid a public transport ticket or pass.

7. Have you ever stolen something by forgetting to return them back to their owner(s)?

8. Have you cheated or deceived someone while selling your goods? Have you ever raised the price tag of your commodity? Have you ever sold something that has already expired?
9. Have you ever given or received a bribe?
10. Are you always honest with your work?
 - a) Have you ever misused the time devoted to work?
 - b) Have you ever done your work carelessly?
11. Did you ever overspend?
12. Have you ever used your authority to perform illegal acts?
13. Have you ever been a false witness?
14. Have you ever denied possession of a deposit or something while having it?
15. Have you ever gambled?

16. Have you ever covered a crime or a theft scene?
17. Have you ever cheated during examinations?
18. Have you ever stolen others' secrets? Have you ever read others' diaries behind their back?
19. Have you ever mislead the souls through cults and heresies?
20. Have you ever killed through abortion?
21. Have you ever killed through hatred?
22. Have you ever spread rumors regarding someone's reputation or social position?
23. Have you ever transgressed someone by beating or scourging him/her?
24. Have you ever insulted someone?
25. Have you ever vexed or provoked someone?
26. Have you ever been the cause behind cutting someone's else source of income?

27. Have you ever participated or been the cause behind a fight by words or otherwise between two parties?
28. Have you ever been addicted to drugs or alcohols?
29. Have you ever submitted yourself to smoking cigarettes or drugs in general?
30. Have you ever been careless?
31. Have you ever been disobedient or complaining?
32. Have you ever taken wine during the eves of feasts?
33. Have you ever danced in weddings or other events?
34. Have you ever been to the cinema to watch a morally inappropriate movie?
35. Do you believe in good omen and bad omen?
36. Do you believe in jinni?

37. Do you believe in magic?
38. Do you believe in fortune telling?
39. Do you believe in the power of envy (in a sense that it can harm you)?
40. Do you believe in fortune-tellers (for if you do so, then you have no faith in God's power)?
41. Have you ever despised any blessing?
42. Have you ever despised God's words and (or) commandments?
43. Have you ever despised the poor, the ignorant and the uneducated?
44. Have you ever despised your father and (or) mother?
45. Have you ever despised God's men?
46. Have you ever been tough in dealing with others?
47. Have you ever paid good for bad?

48. Have you ever deceived someone?

Your relation with God and others

1. Are you honest in all your prayers?
2. Do you pray with a burning heart?
3. Do you stray while praying?
4. Do you stand in fear while praying?
5. Do you start your day with praying?
6. Do you walk respectfully inside the church?
7. Do you talk inside the church?

8. Do you laugh inside the church?
9. Do you check out other people inside the church?
10. Do you criticize the priest(s), the deacon(s) and (or) the congregation?
11. Do you attend the mass early or late?
12. Do you frequently confess and participate in the communion?
13. Do you fast all of the church's fasts?
14. Do you fast Wednesdays and Fridays?
15. How much are you concerned with food?
16. Do you read the Holy Bible?
17. Do you read it in respect or disregard?
18. Do you read it standing, bowing or sitting?
19. Do you just read the bible or more than that, you live it?

20. Do you give God your first income, the first hours of yours days etc...
21. Do you give God the tithes (income, time and health)?
22. Do you pay your vows?
23. Are you honest in your service ?
24. Are you honest with others?
25. Have you ever blocked your ears from the cry of the poor?
26. Have you ever broken someone else's heart?
27. Do you remember your brothers and sisters the sick, the sorrowful, the widows and the orphans?
28. Do you help the poor from your own need?
29. Do you just live for yourself? or you share others their tribulations?
30. Do you love all?
31. Do you setup plans to trap others?

32. Do you make relations with others just for timely purposes?
33. Are you greedy? Do you love the bigger portion?

Confession rites

1. Make sure to be always attentive while confessing.
2. Mention your sins on a one-by-one basis unless the priest asks you to give more details on a certain sin.
3. Do not justify yourself by mentioning that others compelled you to sin?
4. Bear in mind the priest's limited time and health, and others appointments. Therefore, do not prolong the talk for no good reason.

5. Make sure not to build a relationship with the priest during confession.
6. Your confession is confidential and so are all the advices that your father has given you.
7. You have to pray before confessing. Ask God to talk to you through your father and provide you with guidance that benefits your spiritual life.
8. After confession, it is well and good if you can return directly to your home, preserving your self-tranquility, continuing your day in prayer and meditation.

Prayer of repentance

My Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, treasure of mercy and spring of salvation, I come to You confessing my sins. I confess that, insolently, I dared to defile Your Holy Sanctuary with my sins. Now I seek Your mercy and love, for Your mercies are boundless; You never turn back a sinner who comes back to You. I confess that my mind is burdened with sin and that I have no strength left. Do not turn away from me, do not rebuke me in Your anger nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. I am worn out, have compassion upon me, O' Lord do not judge me in Your justice, but according to Your mercy. Remember Your creation, do not put me on trial,

because none of Your servants can justify his deeds. Dress me in a new attire that befits Your glory. Forgive my sins and I shall sing; “Blessed is he whose sins are forgiven.” When I confess my sins, and reveal my iniquities, You cleanse them. Amen.