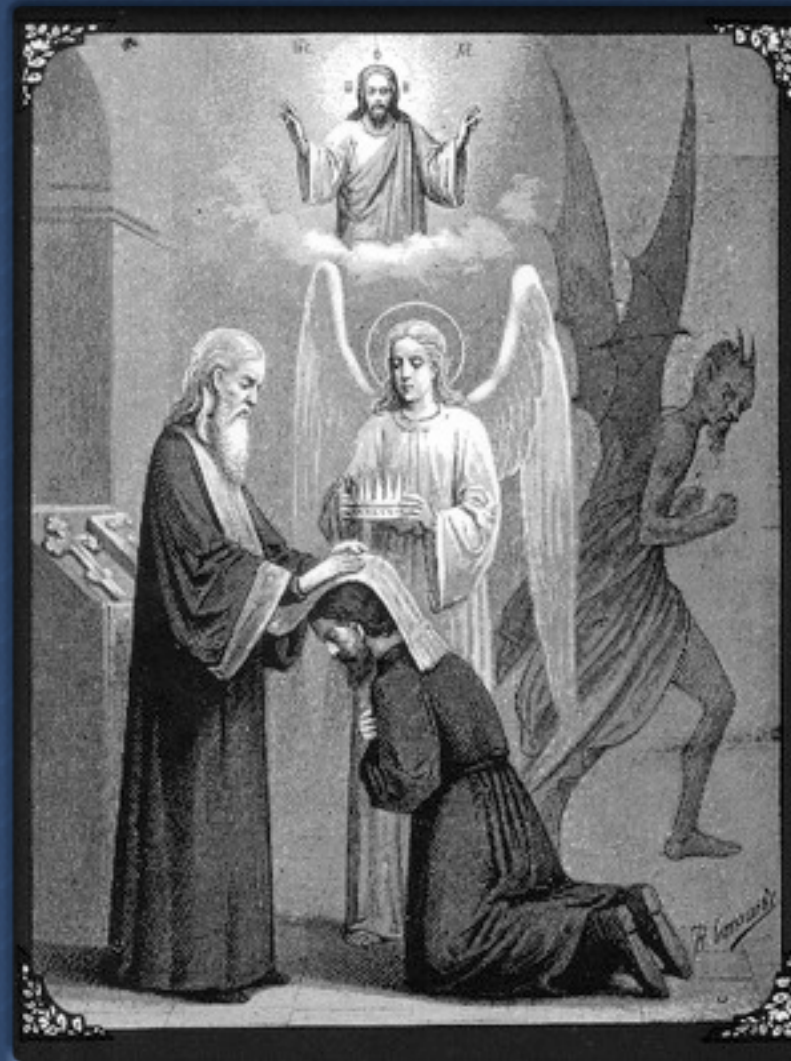


Repentance & Confession

Be perfect as God is perfect.



ARCH. NEKTARIOS ANTONOPOULOS

RETURN

*Repentance and confession
Return to God and to His Church*



AKRITAS PUBLICATIONS

The Forgotten Medicine

THE MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE



ARCHIMANDRITE DECAPHIOTIS ALEXANDER

A Christian

- ✦ **Why are we a Christian?**

- ✦ To be saved, to have eternal life in His kingdom

- ✦ **How are we saved?**

- ✦ Faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

- ✦ **What is faith?**

- ✦ Desire, Zeal, Love of God

- ✦ **What does one do when he/she loves God?**

- ✦ Follows His teachings and strives out of love to carry out His commandments and become like Him.

- ✦ **What is the reality of our lives?**

- ✦ Imperfect - missing the mark

Spiritual Warfare

- ✿ *Paul: Romans 7:15-24*



Saint Paul



*Saint George
A warrior slays the dragon*

Life of Repentance

- ✿ Christian Life is a continual struggle.
Even Paul struggled.
- ✿ A life lived in love of God is a life of repentance.
- ✿ What is repentance?

Prodigal Son

- ✦ *“If all the Gospels were lost and only the **parable of the prodigal son** were to remain this alone would be sufficient to reveal God’s infinite love for mankind.”*

Archimandrite Necktarios

- ✦ Luke 15:11-32





Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

Prodigal Son

- ✦ Main message from this parable?
- ✦ Repent!
When we seek forgiveness God is merciful - joyous.
Does not punish but throws a banquet.



Sin



- ✿ What is sin?
- ✿ ***‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me... [He then] journeyed to a far country...***
 - ✿ Sin is taking for granted all His gifts of life and then ignoring Him, fleeing.
 - ✿ Sin is separation from God.

Can we sin with God awareness in our hearts?
- ✿ ***Wasted his possessions with prodigal living.***
 - ✿ When separated we waste gifts God has give to us.

Why?
 - ✿ Sin is not like breaking a law. It’s a separation, lack of a loving relationship with God.

Fruits of Sin



- ✿ *But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and **he began to be in want.** Then he went, and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*
- ✿ Without God we suffer in many ways.
- ✿ God outlines a way to live in harmony if we choose to stay in close relationship with Him and follow as He teaches.

Fruits of Sin

- ✿ What does God do when we separate from Him?
Does He have anger? Does He try and punish us?
 - ✿ God is not affected by our sins.
We are the ones affected.
We torture ourselves.
We cause our own death, separation from God.
- ✿ Paul says, “*wages of sin are death.*”
- ✿ We do not suffer because of God’s wrath, but as a result of our own free choice.

Way of Repentance



- ✿ *But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, **I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy** to be called your son. **Make me like one of your hired servants.**” And he arose and came to his father.*
- ✿ What does this say about Repentance?
- ✿ **“I have sinned”** - admitting sin
“I am not worthy” - repenting
“Make me one of your hired servants” - promise to work and serve Him.

Way of Repentance

- ✿ Not like getting a parking ticket or committing a crime.
- ✿ It's missing the mark. Not being what God intended for us to be.
- ✿ Metanoia implies a complete change of life.

A return - to join with God in His household.

Renewal of our baptism

- ✿ It about desire, zeal, love and relationship.



Way of Repentance

- ✧ Repentance must be **reflected in action**.
What kind of action?
 - ✧ Time, work, ascetic effort, struggle supported by God's grace to practice virtue.
 - ✧ Requires work of **divine grace** - Divine love pulsing in one's heart.
 - ✧ What is Grace?
Illumination of our inner being by Holy Spirit that allows us see our separation, our spiritual desolation, our sinfulness in eyes of God.
 - ✧ What do we need to do with this illumination?
 - ✧ We must use our free-will in cooperation with grace - Synergia - to do His will.



Way of Repentance

- ✿ Which comes first, repentance or Confession?
 - ✿ 1st comes Repentance and **then** Confession.
- ✿ Confession comes when we know our sinfulness and are prepared to confess with our spiritual father as our witness.

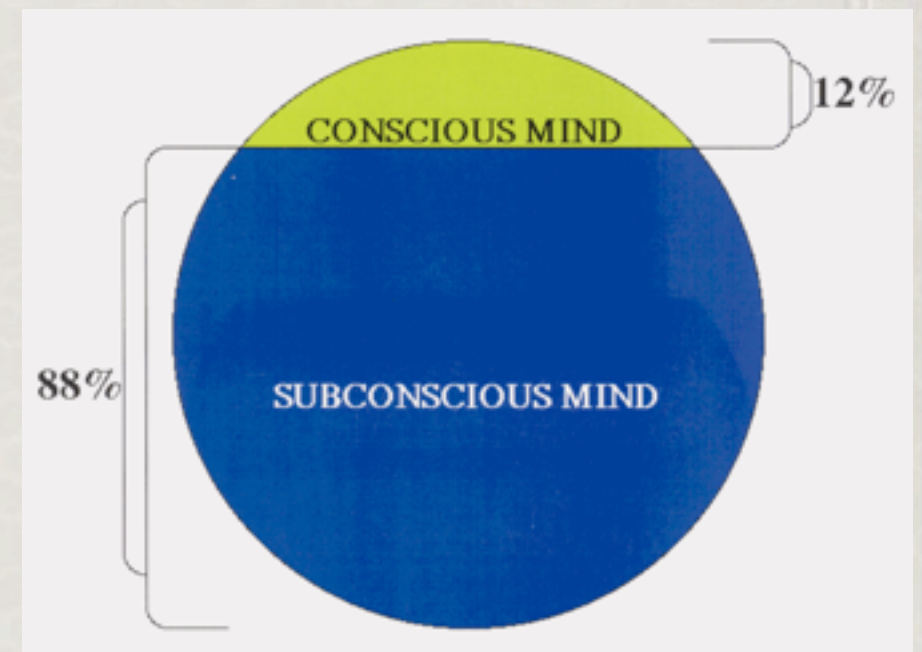
Way of Repentance

- ✿ Confession is **NOT** a **chat listing our sins** as if we had too many parking tickets and want mercy from the judge.
- ✿ **NOT** seeking **relief from guilt** that we feel burdened of.
- ✿ It **IS** an action because we **love** God so much.
- ✿ **IS** revealing a sickness we know we have in our soul where we act separate from God.
- ✿ We lay bare our soul, reveal our wounds, our sickness and our personal pain and our longing for God's love and forgiveness.



Preparing for Confession

- ✿ How do we prepare for Confession?
- ✿ Most come **unprepared** to confession
- ✿ Many expect the priest to ask them questions.
- ✿ Some come to affirm what good people they are.
- ✿ Tendency to want to hide from God, from others and ourselves our weaknesses and our falling away from God.
- ✿ We need to expose what is hidden. Need to reprogram our brains.
- ✿ Repentance and confession is the path for spiritual growth.



Preparing for Confession

- ✦ The more we love God the more we know our sinfulness.
- ✦ The more we know our sinfulness the more we love God.
- ✦ The more we know our sinfulness the more we desire to repent.

Saint Theophan says,

“You must come to know that you are definitely sinful, and you must know to what degree.”

- ✦ *“A sinner returning to God will be accepted by God if he a) **admits his sins, b) repents of them, and c) makes a***



Preparing for Confession

- ✿ What **God desires** is to **recognize our sinful state** and on **journey of repentance**.

- ✿ Need to **know ourselves** - what is hidden.

- ✿ Will we go to hell because we have sinned?

- ✿ No!

Will go to hell because we have **not repented!**

- ✿ Remember,

More we think of ourselves as good, god like, living without sin, the **further we are from God**.



Preparing for Confession

- ✿ What is there to fear?
Did Christ ever condemn the sinner?
- ✿ No, only the sin.
- ✿ Only one kind of sinner did he rebuke.
What was that?
- ✿ Hypocrite - What is a hypocrite?
- ✿ How do we know if we are a hypocrite?
- ✿ A common sin among “good people” young and old.



Preparing for Confession

- ✦ How do saints face confession?
 - ✦ Ask God to receive them as sinners.
“Receive me as the harlot, as the thief, as the publican and as the prodigal.”
 - ✦ They do not justify themselves; do not recount their virtues or good deeds as we tend to do.
Show only their wounds and seek God’s mercy!



Preparing for Confession

- ✿ An individual endeavor.
- ✿ An Anthonite monk says, *“someone who has killed ten people may well go to paradise, whereas someone who has performed ten miracles may go to hell”*
- ✿ How can this be?
 - ✿ Did not face same temptations.
 - ✿ First faced many temptations but only killed ten. Other living in a totally different environment was negligent and only performed ten miracles.
- ✿ We not only confess what we have done but also what



Preparing for Confession

- ✿ Sinfulness not about external behavior only, but also about one's **inner disposition** and state of passionlessness.
- ✿ One has cancer but does not feel anything and another suffers a bad tooth and suffers unimaginable pain.
- ✿ First is like one whose **conscience has become dulled** and no longer is distraught over sin.
- ✿ Second has a great sensitivity to their condition.

Preparing for Confession

- ✦ Do we **need to justify** ourselves in confession?
 - ✦ If we feel like we should explain how we are really a good person, what does this imply?
- ✦ Does the fact that we have not been caught by the police when we have broken a law mean everything is OK? Or if a friend does not make any complaints mean everything we are doing is OK?
- ✦ For Christ, sin is **not just what someone does** but **also state of their heart**. Sin is committed in the heart:
- ✦ *“**From his heart** come the evil ideas which lead them to kill, commit adultery, and do other immoral things; to rob, lie and slander others”* (Matt 15:19)

Preparing for Confession

- ✿ *“The pure in heart shall see God” Matthew 5:*
- ✿ What is a pure heart?

Guilt or Sorrow

- ✿ **Guilt** has nothing to do with true repentance.
- ✿ A self examination of our conscience can bring a sense of relief. This may be a trap.
- ✿ Guilt can led to **heretical idea that we will be punished** by God, that He is not a Father who awaits our return, but a merciless judge who awaits to punish us.
- ✿ Or can be example of **pride and egoism** where we say, *“How is it possible that I could have done such a thing?”*
- ✿ A **contrite heart** is what is appropriate.
*A sacrifice to God is a **broken spirit**. A broken and humbled heart God will not despise.* (Psalm 50 (51) v 19)

Examination of Conscience

- ✿ **Before** we go to our spiritual father must sit down in quiet place, pray that God will give us a true repentance and illuminate what is hidden in the deepest part of our heart.
- ✿ What are some ways to do this?



Examination of Conscience



- ✦ Saint Theophan advises us to do the following:
- ✦ **A.** Recall all your obligations in relation to God, your neighbor and to yourself.
- ✦ **B.** Go through the **Ten Commandments**.
(Questions online or red prayer book)
- ✦ **C.** Review **Sermon on the Mount** (Matthew 5).
- ✦ **E.** Read **Epistle of James** and **Epistles of Paul**:
especially 12:9-21 in Romans and chap. 4 in Ephesians.
- ✦ **F.** Read **1st Epistle of Saint John**.

Relationship With God



Theologian Alexander Schmemmann writes:

all sins can be summed up in one fundamental sin:

lack of genuine love for God, and belief and hope in Him.

- ✦ Questions on a living relationship with God.
- ✦ **i. Holy Communion:** To avoid the Cup is to scorn His sacrifice and a grave sin.
- ✦ **ii. Prayer:** How frequently and with what attention do we pray?
- ✦ **iii. Superstitions, astrologers, heretics:** How often have we relied on astrologers, coffee-cup readers, pseudo-visionaries or non-Orthodox teachers.

Relationship with Neighbor, Family, Work

- ✦ i. problem in **personal relationships**.

Comes from our hardheartedness, egoism, lack of love as Christ teaches.

Example if we have stopped our communications with another person, and then when we confess we do so with a cold heart with no intention to change.

- ✦ Is Only sin that is impediment to participation in Holy Communion.



“So if you are about to offer your gift to God at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, go at once and make peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift to God” (Matt 5:23-24)

Relationship with Neighbor

- ✦ **ii. Judging others:** Christ says: *“Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you (Matt 7:1)”*
- ✦ Story of monk who did not judge (p 42)



Relationship with Neighbor

- ✿ **iii. Scandalizing others:** How do we do this?
 - ✿ Inconsistency between our words and action; by what we say; by our carelessness and dishonesty; by our unruly life and provocative appearance.
 - ✿ The worst is when through our action we lead others into sin - especially our own children.

Relationship with Ourselves

- ✿ **i. Sins of the flesh:** Those that come from our sexual desires.
- ✿ Many feel the church should adapt to the needs of man today. What do you think?
- ✿ Others put overemphasis on sex and are either ashamed to confess issues or insist on focusing on them to the neglect of all others.

Relationship with Ourselves



Christ was particularly compassionate towards prostitutes. They were treated different than hypocrites.

He says to them (hypocrites) *“Woe unto you,” and: “I tell you: the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you”* (Matt 21:31)

- ✦ Such sin not limited to body but also includes our heart.
- ✦ Christ says, *But now I tell you: anyone who looks at a woman and wants to possess her is guilty of committing adultery with her in his heart”* (Matt 5:28)

Relationship with Ourselves

✿ ii. Avarice & Greed:

- ✿ Many say, *“I have neither killed anyone or stone from anyone, not committed adultery, why should I go to confession, I am a good person”*



But Christ said: *Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none..*” Christ did not show much compassion for the rich.

He says, “I assure you: It will be very hard for the rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven. I repeat: it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle” (Matt 19: 23-24)

- ✿ Way of Pilgrim handout

Know Your Sins



Step 1: In a quiet place, pray and reflect on your love of God and how well you have lived up to His Teachings. Makeup a sheet with the Commandments of God on one side and your life on the other. See how they compare.

<i>Commandments of God</i>	<i>My Life</i>

Know Your Sins



Step 2: Identify the **underlying patterns**

Identify the governing passions.

Find the one passion which will condition all the other actions.

This is the root of your sinfulness.

Know Your Sins



Step 3: Reflect on these sins and their root until you see that each was committed according to your own desire. Don't listen to the excuses.

- ✿ Work on this until you can honestly say, I am guilty of this and that.
- ✿ You will begin to feel burdened and wretched. Desire that they all come forward.
- ✿ The right condition is a feeling of regret and repentance. This leads to a vow to change (metanoia).

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ **Step 4:** I will get up and go to my Father
 - ✦ The path to return is not easy. What are some of the things the Prodigal son would have wrestled with prior to deciding to return to his Father?
 - ✦ Reasons : Main ones are fear, shame or despair.

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ What are some of the excuses you have heard?

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ **I am ashamed.** Feel ashamed when you commit the sin not when you confess it.
- ✦ **I am so sinful! Can God forgive my sins?**
 - ✦ There is no sin that cannot be washed away by the tears of repentance.



“The power of repentance is based on the power of God. The Doctor is all-powerful, and the Medicine given by Him is all-powerful.” (Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov)

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ **I have no special sins. Why do I need to go to Confession?**
- ✦ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)
Identifying our sins is hard work.
Don't allow yourself to stay in blindness

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ ***Why confess when I know tomorrow I will sin again?***



Which is better—to roll in the mud of the spiritual swamp, or to pick yourself up after each fall and go on with the hope that someday you may reach the solid and beautiful shore of Virtue?

Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev

- ✦ Young Monk to Abba Siseos:
 - ✦ Monk: *Abba, what should I do, I fell?*
 - ✦ Abba: *Get up!*
 - ✦ Monk: *I got up and fell again!*
 - ✦ Abba: *Get up again!*
 - ✦ Monk: *But how long to I do this”*
 - ✦ Abba: *Until your death.*



Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ **I confess my sins before God.**

- Why do I need to go to the priest?**

- ✦ Good to confess before God - shows knowledge of sins.
 - ✦ You **do not** receive His grace of forgiveness though that.
 - ✦ Priest has been ordained to administer the sacraments so you can receive the **healing Grace**.
 - ✦ Standing before a priest humbles and cures your pride, instills in us shame and fear protecting us from further sin.
 - ✦ But will my sins be kept secret?
 - ✦ Priest has no right to tell what he hears.
 - ✦ If protecting your honor is so great, it won't be long until everyone will be talking about them. You can't hide them. Just think how well we know sins of others.

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✦ **Procrastination**

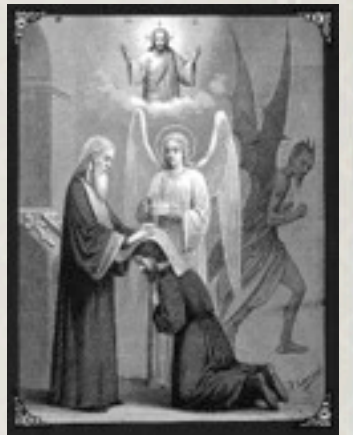
- ✦ Remember: *“Be on your guard, because you do not know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come.”*
(Matt 25:13)

Obstacles and Excuses

- ✿ *One night, on Christmas eve, St Jerome was praying on his knees in the cave of Bethlehem. He was weeping as he prayed. He was pondering the mystery of God's love, the miracle of His Incarnation. He thought of the Wise Men who on that same night, had brought to the newborn Child so many gifts of such richness, gifts fit for a King, and he said: 'O holy infant, what can I, a sinner give you, poor and miserable as I am? I have nothing to give you.' 'but you can give me something, Jerome', answered the voice of the Lord. 'And what might that be, Holy Child? What can I give you?' asked the saint with heartfelt longing. 'Your sins, Jerome', answered the Lord.*
- ✿ To Christ our sins offered in repentance are a **great gift!**

Confession - Face to Face

- ✦ Properly prepared we are ready to run to our Spiritual father to open our hearts to God with him as our witness and counselor.
- ✦ Do not ask the priest to question you.
- ✦ Do not lay burden of responsibility on others, nor mention their names.
- ✦ Do not tell long stories.
- ✦ Do not speak in generalities but clearly identify the nature of the sinfulness.
- ✦ Do not mention your good deeds or your virtues.
- ✦ Do not bring up sins you have already confessed.
- ✦ Do not conceal anything. This would be to mock God



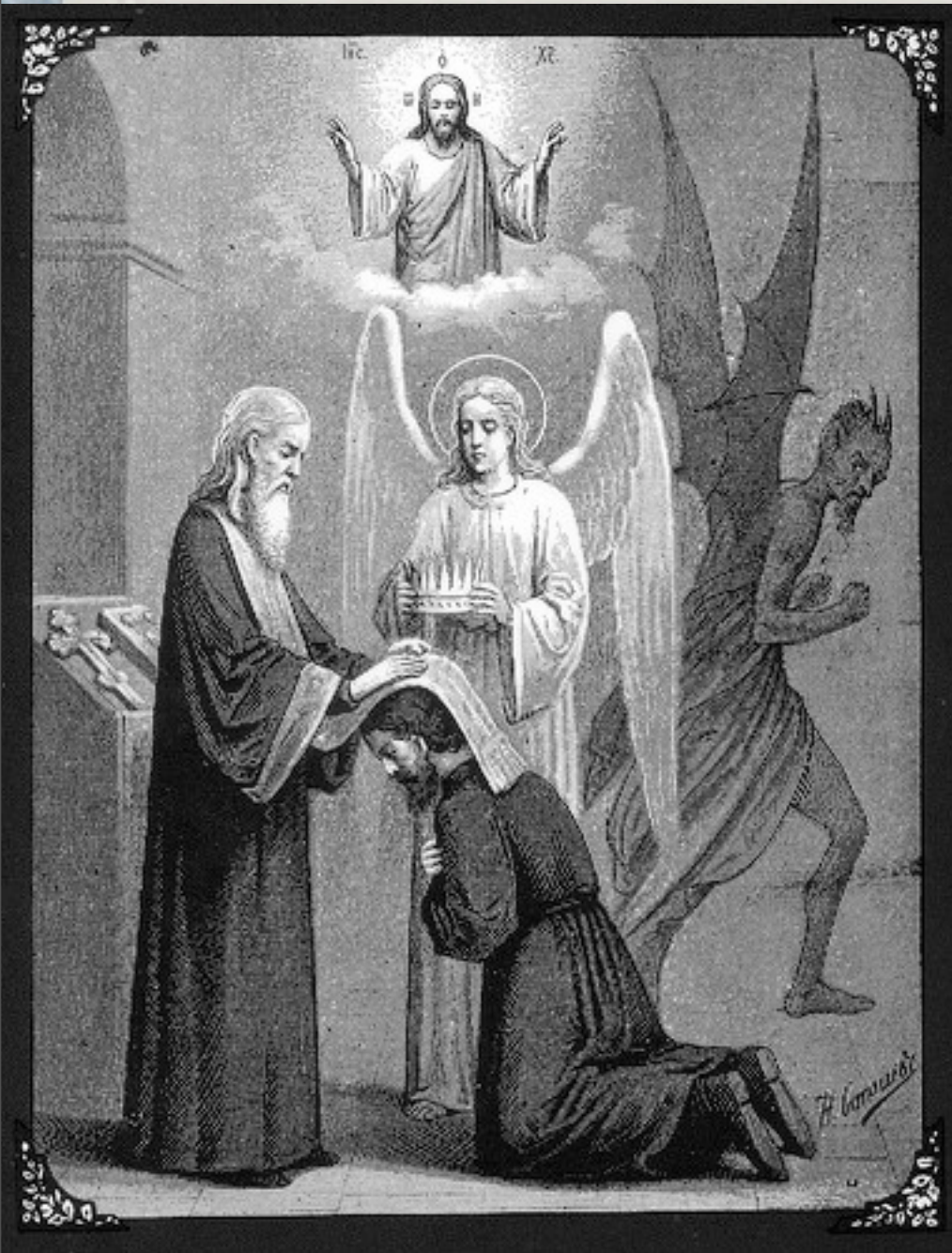


Mystery of Repentance

- ✦ Mystery for the Remission of Sins
- ✦ Remission of sins is bestowed through the mercy of God through the intermediary of the Priest, after we offer our repentance of our sins.
 1. Confession of sins before a priest
 2. Prayer of forgiveness pronounced by the Priest.
- ✦ An act of mercy for our spiritual benefit.

for edification, and not for destruction

(2 Cor 10:8)





Mystery of Repentance

✦ Instituted by Christ



He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:22-23)

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
(Matt 18:17-18; 16:19)

- ✦ Priests are the instrument of God's mercy. Sins are remitted not on their authority but in the name of the Holy Trinity.

The Order of the Sacrament of Confession

- ✿ Trisagion Prayer
- ✿ Penitent says: Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I confess before You all that is in my heart and mind, both hidden and known, that I have committed this day. Wherefore I beg of You, righteous and merciful Judge, remission of the grace to sin no more.
- ✿ Priest says: My brother/sister, whatever brings you before God and to me, you relate not to me, but to God, in whose presence you stand.
- ✿ Penitent then makes oral confession.

The Order of the Sacrament of Confession

- ✿ Priest puts his stole over the penitents head and says:
My spiritual child, what you have confessed to my humble
person, I who am lowly and a sinner have no earthly
power
to remit, but God alone. But because of that divine
word,
spoken to the Apostles after the resurrection of our Lord
saying, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are retained”
we make bold to say” Whatever you have related to my
lowly self, and whatever you have failed to relate,
whether through ignorance or forgetfulness, may God
forgive you in this present life.





Mystery of Repentance

- ✿ Priest will give you guidance to help you change.
Often called penance
Is to help you.
- ✿ Must forgive yourself.
Burn the written list you used.
- ✿ Carry out the guidance you received.

After Confession



- ✿ *The Father called his servants, ‘**Hurry!**’ he said. ‘**Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet.**’*
- ✿ We are again clothed in the white garment of our baptism.
- ✿ God restores us into full and perfect communion with Him and welcomes into His home once more as a member of His family.
- ✿ The Book of Life is wiped clean of all sinful deeds.

After Confession

- ✿ Take special care immediately after confession.
- ✿ Many feel unburdened but confession is not like a drug.
- ✿ Now have a greater consciousness of our sinfulness
- ✿ Need a greater watchfulness of ourselves as well as boundless love of God.
- ✿ Priest does not have a magic wand.
Still need to make **our effort** to change our ways.
- ✿ Repentance is a **never ending journey**.