

Session 3: Overview

Monday, November 17, 6:30-8 PM

1. Welcome Song: *His Mercy Is More*
2. *The Seeker* prayer
3. Fr Severance – introduction
4. *Informed Conscience* – handout
Examination of Conscience – handout
Reconciliation/Confession/Sin – video
Handbook for Catholics – See page 63
Purgatory – video
St Brendan Confession pamphlet
5. Reconciliation stories by ICH members
Preparing for Confession – booklet
6. *Mary* – video
Angels/Guardian Angel/Saints – video
7. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* – a summary of Catholic doctrine and teachings on faith and morals, based on Sacred Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church
8. Closing Prayer and Song: *Kyrie Eleison* (Matt Maher, Matt Redman, Jason Ingram)

Relevant Quotes:

On Reconciliation, God said: *"I have swept away your sins like a cloud, I have scattered your offenses like morning mist, Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free."*

Rachel Held Evans famously stated: *But the gospel doesn't need a coalition devoted to keeping the wrong people out. It needs a family of sinners, saved by grace, committed to tearing down the walls, throwing open the doors, and shouting, "Welcome! There's bread and wine. Come eat with us and talk."*

Session 3: Informed Conscience

In Catholicism, a formed conscience is one that is built upon and through learning and experience, whereas an informed conscience is one that is researched and thought out through logic and reason. A person with a well-formed and well-informed conscience is less likely to reject God's law.

According to Catholic Doctrine, a good conscience can be revealed through natural law (Informed) or through the teachings of Jesus Christ. A conscience should be educated in God's word and obtained through the practices of Jesus.

Pope John Paul II described a correct conscience as one that involves a judgment that is in accordance with objective truth. An erroneous conscience, however, involves judgment that is purely subjective and thought to be true when it is not.

Catholic teachings encourages people to live as disciples of Christ, without ignoring concerns for human dignity, such as poverty and racism. A well-formed conscience can help guide a person to make the right moral and ethical choices in life. Catholic teaching says that individuals have a duty to examine their conscience and consult with others to keep their conscience in check. Making good choices keeps a Christian's individual virtue and integrity intact.

The development of a well-formed conscience is ultimately the obligation of all Christians.

Steps for Making a Moral Decision

- 1. Pray** – Pray for guidance, humility, wisdom and mercy.
- 2. Gather All the Facts** – Define the problem and the effects it is having on persons and/or situations in your life.
- 3. Consult with Informed People** – Take counsel with several people of various stages and experiences in life (doctor, priest, deacon, etc.)
- 4. Discuss** – Examine alternatives. Study, respect and heed the guidance of the Church.
- 5. Choose** – Judge which alternative is morally right, then choose to do it!
- 6. Be Open to Periodic Review** – Resolve to continue to pray about the decision.

Session 3: Examination of Conscience

(Also see, Page 62 Handbook for Catholics)

The daily examination of conscience is an ancient Catholic practice. It's very simple, and it's designed to help us identify our sins and weaknesses so that we can improve and grow stronger in the spiritual life. Basically, it consists in taking a few minutes at the end of the day to prayerfully review our actions in the light of God's commandments.

The Act of Contrition is often said afterwards. The daily examination also serves as an excellent ongoing preparation for regular Confession.

Some spiritual advisors recommend a daily examination of conscience before going to sleep. This involves thinking through the day and noting those moments when we sinned, even in the small things like impatience, failure to keep our commitments, being on time, and so forth.

There are at least 3 reasons for this recommended practice:

- 1. Small sins lead to big ones.** For example, we might be habitually late. This isn't so bad. But, maybe by being late we make those who wait for us feel angry or devalued. And maybe we start getting even later and then, in our embarrassment, we fib about the reason. Fibs become lies.
- 2. It keeps us humble.** We are all tempted to concentrate on the sins of others while letting ourselves off the hook. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus talks about this tendency and tells us not to look at the speck of sawdust in another's eye and ignore the log in our own. If every night we remind ourselves of our own sins, we will be more patient with the sins of others.
- 3. It does not end with us feeling bad about ourselves.** The goal of this practice is to recognize the mercy of God who loves us and forgives us. Some sins of the day may require reparation. You may realize that you owe someone an apology or that you have to change your ways. God's mercy and grace are there to help you.

Act of Contrition:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, Who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin. Amen.

Session 3: Examination of Conscience

(Mortal and Venial Sin)

What is the difference between mortal sin and venial sin?

Mortal sins are grave offenses that sever our friendship with God and, consequently, cause a loss of sanctifying grace. Anyone dying in a state of mortal sin would suffer eternal separation from God in Hell. **Venial sins** are lesser offenses that injure but do not destroy one's relationship with God.

The gravity of each sin depends upon the nature of the sin itself and circumstances that may either increase or mitigate guilt for that sin. (Cf. CCC 1853-1854)

A mortal sin cannot be committed and accidentally, willful or pretended ignorance of divine law does not excuse us and may in fact compound our guilt.

A mortal sin requires three conditions:

1. The evil act must constitute a grave matter, a serious offense against God's law.
2. The sinner must be fully aware that the act is indeed evil.
3. The sinner must fully and freely consent to the evil act, even if he or she does not explicitly and directly wish to offend God. (Cf. CCC 1857-1860)

If any of these requirements is not met, then the sin is considered a venial sin.

The sinner's relationship with God and the charity within his or her heart is weakened by venial sin but is not severed. (Cf. CCC 1862-1863)

Mortal sin results in the loss of sanctifying grace and thus requires recourse to the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation before any of the other Sacraments may be received, especially the Eucharist in Holy Communion.

Venial sins do not preclude the reception of Holy Communion. Nevertheless, the Church recommends frequent confession of venial sins to receive the sacramental grace that gives us the strength to overcome imperfections and habitual venial sins. It is important to bear in mind that venial sins can easily lead to mortal sin unless they are held in check. (Cf. CCC 1385,1415,1457-1458,1861)

Session 3: Examination of Conscience

(Mortal and Venial Sin)

Ten examples of mortal sins:

1. **Pride:** An excessive view of one's own importance, placing oneself above God. Humility is its opposite virtue.
2. **Envy:** Sadness or desire for another person's possessions, happiness, or talents. Fraternal charity is the opposite virtue.
3. **Wrath:** Uncontrolled feelings of hatred or rage. Meekness is the opposite virtue.
4. **Sloth:** Physical laziness or spiritual apathy and disinterest in spiritual matters. Diligence or "acedia" is the opposite virtue.
5. **Greed:** The desire for and love of possessions, also known as avarice. Generosity is the opposite virtue.
6. **Gluttony:** The overconsumption of food or drink to excess. Temperance is the virtue that counters it.
7. **Lust:** An inordinate, uncontrolled craving for sexual pleasure. Chastity is the opposite virtue.

Ten examples of venial sins:

1. **Lying:** Telling white lies to avoid embarrassment or in petty situations.
2. **Impatience:** Snapping at someone or showing frustration in minor situations.
3. **Gossip:** Sharing unnecessary or unkind information about others.
4. **Wasting time:** Excessive sloth or idleness, or not returning borrowed items.
5. **Overindulgence:** Gluttony, such as overeating, or other forms of intemperance like drinking too much.
6. **Petty theft:** Stealing small or inexpensive items.
7. **Lack of charity:** Failing to help the poor or those in need when you have the ability to do so.
8. **Judgmental attitudes:** Unjustly suspicious or judgmental thoughts about others.
9. **Disregard for rules:** Minor violations of laws, such as illegal parking or littering.
10. **Neglecting prayer or worship:** A gradual and unmotivated neglect of prayer, spiritual reflection, or church attendance.

In the Catholic Mass, venial sins are wiped away through various elements, primarily the Penitential Act at the beginning of Mass and the worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist.

Session 3: Examination of Conscience

(Penitential Act)

The Penitential Act

The Mass begins with the **Introductory Rites**, which include the **Penitential Act**.

This rite often includes the **Confiteor**:

*I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and
in what I have failed to do,*

[Pray while striking the breast three times.]
*through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;*

*therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin,
all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

[At Mass, absolution by the priest follows.
The people reply: Amen.]

...which is followed by the **Kyrie Eleison** (a Greek phrase meaning, "Lord, have mercy")

The Penitential Act litany recalls God's merciful actions throughout history and is a general acknowledgment of sinfulness and an expression of sorrow. At this time, the faithful recall their sins and place their trust in God's abiding mercy.

How it works: The general absolution given by the priest at the conclusion of this rite, though not a sacrament like the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is effective for the forgiveness of venial sins for those who are truly contrite. The effectiveness of this act depends on the disposition and true contrition of the person participating. While it can help a person deepen their sorrow and may aid in preparing for confession, it does not replace the sacrament itself, which is necessary for the forgiveness of mortal sins.

Session 3: Mary, Angels, Saints

– Our Guides!

In the Catholic tradition, Mary, saints, and angels can serve as guides through prayer and intercession, with angels acting as personal guardians and messengers from God. Catholics believe they can seek guidance from the Blessed Mother and saints, who act as intercessors on their behalf. The belief in guardian angels is based on Scripture and is understood as God's constant, loving care for each person.

Mary as a guide:

- **Intercession:** Catholics ask Mary, as the Mother of God, to intercede for them and guide them toward Jesus. Mary always points to Jesus.
- **Role:** She is seen as a maternal figure who can offer comfort, help bear crosses with grace, and inspire love and compassion.
- **Inspiration:** Mary's life and virtues are a model for believers to imitate.

Saints as guides:

- **Intercession:** Saints are viewed as a "great cloud of witnesses" who can pray for and intercede on behalf of those on Earth.
- **Role:** Mystics like St Padre Pio have reported familiar conversations with their guardian angels, while St. Catherine of Siena's prayers guided the Pope.
- **Inspiration:** Various saints are considered patrons of specific causes, professions, or people, and are prayed to for help in those areas.

Angels as guides:

- **Guardian angels:** Each person is believed to have a personal guardian angel assigned by God to help guide and protect them throughout their life. This is supported by Jesus' words in Matthew 18:10, "See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven. Guardian Angel Prayer, Pocket Book of Catholics Prayers, Page 47.
- **Guidance and protection:** Guardian angels can inspire, enlighten, and guide individuals toward God's will and offer strength in difficult times.
- **Intercession:** The three archangels—Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael—are honored by name in Scripture and are also invoked for intercession.
- **Role:** Angels serve to aid prayers and present souls to God at death.

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Patron Saints

A patron saint is a canonized saint who is considered a special intercessor and heavenly advocate for a specific nation, place, craft, activity, class, clan, family, or person. This practice is rooted in the doctrine of the communion of saints and the belief that those in heaven can intercede with God on behalf of the living. Catholics do not pray to saints as if they were God; rather, they venerate them and ask for their prayers and intercession with God, similar to how people ask a friend to pray for them. The saints act as friends and companions, lifting the prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of the faithful to God's throne. The choice of a patron saint is often determined by a real or perceived connection between the saint's life and the area of patronage. Examples of patron saints by their patronage are:

- Fathers and workers: **St Joseph**
- Animals and the environment: **St Francis of Assisi**
- Lost causes: **St Jude Thaddeus**
- Fishermen: **St Andrew the Apostle, St Peter the Apostle**
- Mothers: **St Monica and St Mary**
- Doctors and surgeons: **St Luke the Evangelist**
- Students: **St Thomas Aquinas**
- Journalists: **St Francis de Sales**
- Children: **St Nicholas**
- The universal Church: **St Joseph, St Mary**

New St Carlo Acutis – Patron saint of “the Internet” because of his interest in computers and because he built a website that documented miracles related to the Eucharist. Born in 1991, he was also dubbed “the first millennial saint” once his cause for sainthood was under way. Canonized September 7, 2025.

New St Pier Giorgio Frassati - “Patron saint of “youth, young adults, athletes, and ordinary people, and has been officially recognized as a patron of the Italian Confraternities and certain World Youth Days. His life and work also inspire those in fields such as mountain climbing, and his example has led to him being informally seen as a patron for other groups, including students and those involved in the lay apostolate. Canonized September 7, 2025.

Examples of ordinary people: Saints are ordinary people who responded to God's call in extraordinary ways, demonstrating that everyone can achieve a virtuous life.