



Wear the Light

Bringing Your Family Back to Confession

A quiet, practical guide for parents and children

If it has been a while, you are not the first, and you are not alone. Maybe a few months. Maybe years. Maybe you cannot remember the last time. That is okay. This little guide will walk you through the whole thing, from the parking lot to the pew and home again. You do not have to be ready. You just have to come.

"While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him."

Luke 15:20

What this guide gives you

A one-page plan for the weekend. Two examinations, side by side. The exact words to say if you are frightened or forgetful.

Answers to the questions you were embarrassed to ask.

Print it. Fold it in half. Bring it with you.

C H R I S T U S L U M E N . C O M

Start Here

If you are ready to go this weekend and just want a plan, this is the whole plan. Read the rest of the guide when you have time. Come back to it later.

1. Find a confession time.

Check your parish website or call the office. If Saturday afternoon does not work, ask about an appointment or try a neighboring parish. Their confessions are open to you too.

2. Tell the family calmly.

Give a day or two of notice. Not weeks. Say something like: "We are going on Saturday. Here is what will happen."

3. Review what to expect together.

Walk through the next page. Read the child version aloud for younger kids.

4. Each person prepares alone.

Adults use the adult examination on page 3. Children use the child's, right next to it. No one reports what they wrote down.

5. Go together. Confess separately.

Wait for one another in the pew. When someone comes out, no questions. Just quiet warmth.

6. Complete the penance.

The priest gives a short prayer or small act. Do it in the church if you can.

7. Choose the next date before you leave.

Put it on the calendar in the parking lot. Every four to six weeks is a healthy rhythm for a family.

If you remember nothing else:

Walk in and say: "Father, it has been a long time, and I may need some help making my confession." The priest will take it from there.

What Confession Actually Is

Confession is not a report card. It is not an interrogation. It is a conversation with Jesus, through the priest, where honesty is met with forgiveness.

After the Resurrection, Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive sins in his name (John 20:21-23). That authority is passed down through the Church. When the priest says the words of absolution, Christ himself is the one who forgives. The priest is not the source. He is the instrument.

Something happens in there. Naming a sin aloud, hearing that it is forgiven, walking out lighter than you walked in. It is not psychology. It is grace.

What a sin actually is

A free choice to do something you know is wrong, or to refuse to do something you know is right. Three parts: you knew, you were free, you chose.

These are not sins:

- Being tempted. Being tempted to lie is not a sin. Telling the lie is.
- A thought that pops in without warning.
- A feeling. Anger, jealousy, sadness are human. What you do with them matters.
- An accident, an honest forgetting, an ordinary mistake.

Serious sin ("mortal sin") needs all three:

- The action itself is seriously wrong.
- You knew it was seriously wrong when you did it.
- You chose it freely, not under panic or compulsion.

If any of the three is missing, it is not mortal. That is not a loophole. It is honest Catholic teaching.

"The confessional is not a courtroom. It is a doorway."

Two Examinations of Conscience

Ten quiet minutes. Adults on the left, children on the right, so a parent can prepare with a child on the same spread. Bring what your conscience surfaces. Leave the rest. Nobody has to share what they find.

For Adults

God and prayer

- Have I pushed God to the margins of my day?
- Have I missed Sunday Mass without serious reason?
- Have I received Communion while knowingly in grave sin?
- Have I used God's name carelessly or in anger?

Marriage and parenting

- Have I been faithful to my spouse in action, thought, and speech?
- Have I treated my spouse with patience and love?
- Have I given my children time, stability, and formation?
- Have I corrected them with patience, or with harshness?

Honesty and speech

- Have I lied in ways that caused harm?
- Have I damaged someone's reputation without just cause?
- Have I used sarcasm or criticism to put others down?

Anger, forgiveness, and repair

- Have I let anger lead me to real harm?
- Is there someone I have deliberately refused to forgive?
- Is there someone I harmed whom I have not tried to make amends with?

Work, money, integrity

- Have I acted with honesty in my work?
- Have I taken time, materials, or credit that were not mine?
- Have I let money hold a place that belongs to God?
- Have I been consistently closed to genuine need?

Chastity and the human person

- Have I respected my body and others' as made in God's image?
- Have I sought or lingered over material that objectifies people?
- Have I been faithful to the commitments of my state in life?

Screens, habits, omission

- Have screens taken time that belonged to prayer, family, or sleep?
- Is there a habit (alcohol, substances, gambling, other) causing real harm?
- Is there good I knew I should do and chose not to?

For Children (ages 7–12)

God and prayer

- Did I skip prayer when I knew I should pray?
- Did I use God's name in a disrespectful way?
- Did I refuse to go to Mass or cause trouble on purpose?

Parents and family

- Did I refuse to listen or talk back disrespectfully?
- Did I hide things my parents should know?
- Did I hit, tease, or name-call a brother or sister on purpose?
- Did I blame someone else for something I did?

Truth and honesty

- Did I lie to avoid trouble or look better than I am?
- Did I cheat or copy someone's work?
- Did I leave out important information to trick someone?

Kindness and anger

- Did I leave someone out or call a mean name?
- Did I ignore someone who needed help when I could have?
- Did I lose my temper and hurt someone with words or actions?
- Did I refuse to forgive someone who was really sorry?

Belongings and screens

- Did I take or break something and not tell?
- Did I refuse to share in a way that was selfish?
- Did I keep using a phone, game, or show after I was told to stop?
- Did I look at something online I was not supposed to see?
- Did I say unkind things in texts, games, or online?

For the child reading this.

You are not looking for every little thing. Feelings are not sins. Accidents are not sins. If you are not sure, tell the priest and ask. He will help. God already knows your heart.

For the pew (the exact words you may need)

To open, if it has been a long time: *"Father, it has been a long time, and I may need some help making my confession."*

If you go blank: *"Father, I am nervous. Could you walk me through it?"*

If something is hard to say: *"Father, there is something I am afraid to say. Can you help me say it?"*

Act of Contrition if the words will not come: *"Lord, I know I need Your mercy, and I believe You are here. Forgive me for the ways I have fallen short. Thank You for not giving up on me. Amen."*

What Happens During Confession

1. Enter and make the Sign of the Cross.
2. Tell the priest how long it has been. An estimate is fine.
3. Name your sins simply. No need to over-explain or give backstory.
4. Listen to the priest.
5. Receive your penance (usually a short prayer or small act).
6. Pray an Act of Contrition. Any version. Or your own words.
7. Receive absolution. This is the moment of forgiveness.
8. Say "Thank you, Father," and leave.
9. Complete your penance, in the church if possible.

What if I am scared to say it out loud?

This is the real fear for most people, and it is worth naming. Two things that help:

1. Write it on a note before you go. You can read it to the priest. He will not mind. He may even prefer it.
2. Tell him you are scared. That sentence alone is enough. He will do the rest.

"Father, this one is hard. Can you help me say it?"

The Questions Everyone Asks

What if I can't remember every sin?

Sincere effort is what is required, not a perfect list. Sins genuinely forgotten after honest examination are forgiven. Bring anything that surfaces later to the next confession.

Should I ask my child what they confessed?

No. What a child confesses belongs to them and to God. Bring them. Do not debrief. This one boundary builds enormous trust.

What if my child refuses to go?

Do not force a scene. Keep the plan calm and try again next week. Steady example matters more than any single visit.

What if a child hasn't made First Reconciliation?

They come along and wait with the family. Being present while the family goes is quiet formation.

How often should a family go?

The Church requires confession of grave sin at least once a year and before Communion in a state of grave sin. Beyond that, more often is recommended. Every four to six weeks is a good family rhythm, not a Church-wide rule.

Returning after a hard chapter?

The sacrament is for you. Nothing you can say will shock a priest, and nothing said will leave the confessional. Many priests will tell you this is the most sacred part of their ministry.

Struggling with scrupulosity?

If obsessive doubt about sin follows you, do not use this examination unaided. Follow the guidance of a trusted confessor. Do not reconfess the same sins out of doubt.

Can the priest ever tell anyone?

Never. Not to a spouse, not to a court, not to another priest. The seal is absolute.

A prayer before, and a prayer after

Before. Come, Holy Spirit. Give us the honesty to see ourselves clearly, the courage to name what needs naming, and the humility to receive what we have not earned. We come not because we are ready but because You are good. Amen.

After. Thank You, Lord Jesus. What we brought in has been forgiven. Help us to believe that fully. When we fall, remind us the door is always open. Amen.

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

John 10:10

Take one more step with us

Christus Lumen is a quiet place for Catholic families finding their way back, and for anyone walking deeper into the faith. Come find the rest: daily reflections, practical guides for prayer and family life, and a small shop of pieces that whisper the same thing.

christuslumen.com

If this helped, share it with someone else waiting for a nudge.

† Wear the Light †