Lesson 22 – The Holy Spirit’s Fruit of Self Control

How can we learn real self-control, which is control of our passions?
What are the three temptations we have to overcome every day?
What two spiritual practices are recommended to overcome our temptations?
Name four practices that will drive out your devils.
What are the spiritual values received by frequent confession?
What are the psychological values received by frequent confession?

The Greek Translation
Egkrateria – (self control or temperance) is the spirit which has mastered its desires and its love of pleasure….It is the virtue which makes a man so master of himself that he is fit to be the servant of others.

How can we learn real self-control, which is control of our passions’?

Temperance: Controlling Our Passions
In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the temperance movement was popular and growing in America. To combat the use of alcohol, temperance activists took for their motto a passage from Colossians: "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (2:21). Ironically, when the passage is read in context, just the opposite concept is communicated. St. Paul was talking about human commands and teachings, which "have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe abasement of the body," but are "of no value in checking self-indulgence" (2:23). Temperance is not about a lifestyle of rules and regulations designed to imprison our tendency toward self-indulgence.  Instead, temperance has more to do with allowing the Spirit to produce within us strength of self-control, even when all external restraints have been removed.

Temperance is often translated as self-control, but perhaps its meaning would be communicated more accurately if we referred to it as passion-control. The person with temperance has been enabled by the Spirit to bring his passions under the control or rule of his renewed spirit, rather than to allow his passions to control his spirit. This ruling of our passions is impossible without the Holy Spirit's help to both conform our thinking to his will and to strengthen our will to do his bidding. See what you can discover about temperance in the following verses.

Q: Why do we need the virtue of temperance?

2. Timothy 1:6-7: “6 For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God” that you have through the imposition of my hands. 7 For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.
Q. According to this passage, who is the source of temperance, and how can we nurture this gift?
3. Galatians 5:16-17. “16 I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. 17For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want.”

Q. How does the fruit of temperance relate to St. Paul's teaching on the desires of the flesh as opposed to the desires of the Spirit?

4. Q. In what areas of your life would you like to exercise temperance more faithfully?

Self-control

Man must become the master of his body, his body must not master him. The carnal man despises the Holy Spirit and doesn't exercise self-control.

By self control we must overcome all the passions of the flesh, since he who produces the fruits of the Holy Spirit belongs to Christ and has crucified the flesh with all its passions.\[\text{Galatians 5:24}\]

One good way to overcome the flesh is fasting and prayer, by overcoming the desires of the body for food, the soul learns to be deprived by the authority of the will and the result is self-control.

Couples can agree to exercise self-control only for set periods of time, say during lent, during holy days of obligation or Fridays as an act of penance, but always remembering that they must not deprive each other of their conjugal rights. The husband's body belongs to the wife and the wife's body belongs to the husband, otherwise satan may lead each other to lose self-control.\[\text{1 Corinthians 7:3-5}\]
Overcoming Temptations – Bishop Sheen

Temptations seem to be everywhere these days. Luxurious food commercials on TV, lusty billboards, R-rated movies, dirty jokes, etc. The challenge for us all is to overcome these things and to stand up for morality and chastity. So how do we do this? Through sheer will power? Or is there a better way?

The Bible talks about Jesus being tempted in the desert by Satan himself. These three temptations concerning the flesh (turn these stones into bread if you are the son of God), the devil (all these kingdoms will be yours if you fall down and worship Satan), and the world (throw yourself down from the pinnacle, and let the angels catch you), are the same 3 temptations that we have to overcome every day - those of the flesh, the devil, and the world. **Jesus overcame these temptations through prayer and fasting, which is an excellent recipe for us today.**

Another parallel to the above 3 temptations of Jesus regards the Israelites in the desert. The Israelites had just come up out of the water of the Red Sea into the desert, where they spent 40 years. Jesus came up out of the waters of the Jordan River, following His Baptism, and spent 40 days in the desert. The Israelites worshiped a golden calf in the desert, instead of God. Then the Israelites grumbled about food, and God sent them bread from heaven, called manna. Then they grumbled about thirst, and put God to the test. Moses then struck the rock, and out came water. Notice the parallels here with Jesus - satan wanted Jesus to worship him, a false God (the golden calf), the devil told Jesus to turn the stones into bread (the manna from heaven), then he wanted Jesus to put God to the test by jumping off of the high pinnacle (putting God to the test by striking the rock to bring water). Whereas the Israelites failed their 3 tests in the desert, Jesus passed the same 3 tests with flying colors.

Jesus also gave us some great insights resulting from these temptations- "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God" (a prefigurement of the Mass, composed of the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist), "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (the sin of presumption), and "Begone Satan. You shall worship the Lord your God, and only Him shall you serve" (how many of us worship money, pleasure, drugs, food, etc., instead of God).

Matthew 4:1-11: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, `Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, `He will give his angels charge of you,' and `On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, `You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, `You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.
Deuteronomy 8:1-20: "All the commandment which I command you this day you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but that man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell, these forty years. Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. "Take heed lest you forget the LORD your God, by not keeping his commandments and his ordinances and his statutes, which I command you this day: lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest you say in your heart, `My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth; that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your fathers, as at this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you this day that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

In the above chapter 8 of Deuteronomy, God tells us all how he operates - He tests us to see if we really love Him. If we don't love Him, and trust in our own strength to save us, then we will perish. And whereas this is referencing the Israelites in the desert, if you substitute the word "heaven" for "a good land" and "modern society" for "wilderness" in the verses above in Deuteronomy, you will see that this also applies to us, who walk in the very dry and arid wilderness of a secular culture. Our serpents and scorpions that could keep us from heaven are the spirit of lust and gluttony we see on TV, the movies, and on billboards. Our thirsty ground is living in a society where many people don't even acknowledge that God exists. So if we want to get to our promised land of heaven, then we need to not go after the false gods of money, sex, drugs, power, and the occult. Rather, just like Jesus, we need to tell satan to "begone" and to worship Jesus Christ only, through his body that He created, the Church.
Some people believe that by giving in to the devil, he will leave you alone, when just the opposite is true. So start saying that rosary every day, ask Jesus for Divine Mercy, and start going to daily Mass and Eucharistic Adoration as often as possible. If you really want satan to leave you alone, then start singing "Hail Holy Queen" or "Immaculate Mary" in your car. He really hates Mary, and flees from her every time, because she is the one human being other than Jesus that he has no power over, even for a second.

Self-Control

And because of His glory and excellence,
He has given us great and precious promises.

These are the promises that enable you to share His divine nature
and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.

-2 Peter 1:4 (NLT)

As Christians, we all have two natures. No matter how holy we think we are, we are still human.

So, we have our sin nature, and, because of Jesus' sacrifice, we have God's divine nature that we are allowed to share in.

But, there is an issue.

The two natures don't get along! "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other." And, if you were working on your own, you would not be able to do the things of the Spirit, even if you really wanted to (Galatians 5:17 NLT).

But the Holy Spirit has been sent to help you. God tells you to "live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." If you live by the Spirit, you will be able to maintain self-control.

What would you look like if you were able to gain self-control through walking in the Holy Spirit?

Would there be less of those moments when you weren't walking in love. Fewer instances when you said something that wasn't kind, and then regretted it. Or less times where you tried to exalt yourself instead of being humble and counting on God to exalt you.

Allowing God's Spirit to develop this spiritual fruit within you gives you the help you need to walk in all 9 Fruits of the Spirit. No wonder God put it last.
As we read the *Spiritual Exercises*, we may be overwhelmed by the minute detail of St. Ignatius’ treatment of what he calls the particular examination of conscience. At the same time, he is careful to provide, “Some Notes on Scruples.”

It is very important, therefore, that we form a clear and correct conscience. This means that we cultivate a sensitive judgment which is alert to the least offense against the Divine will and, at the same time, protect ourselves against the wiles of the evil spirit.

“The enemy,” says St. Ignatius, “considers carefully whether one has a lax or a delicate conscience. If one has a delicate conscience, the evil one seeks to make it excessively sensitive in order to disturb and upset it more easily. Thus, if he sees that one will not consent to mortal sin or venial sin, or even to the appearance of deliberate sin, since he cannot cause him to fall in a matter that appears sinful, he strives to make the soul judge that there is a sin, for example in a word or passing thought, where there is no sin” (*Spiritual Exercises*, 349).

It is valuable to reflect on this tactic of the evil spirit before we offer some practical norms for making our daily examination of conscience. Why? Because otherwise, we are liable to overlook the importance of a daily inventory of our moral conduct for fear of becoming scrupulous.

There is such a thing as growing in prudent sensitivity of conscience, without becoming a victim of the “enemy” as St. Ignatius calls him.

We may set this down as a general principle, for those who are sincerely striving to do the will of God:

It is characteristic of God and His angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy.

It is characteristic of the evil one to fight against such happiness and consolation by proposing fallacious reasonings, subtleties, and continual deceptions (Rules for Discernment of Spirits, II, 1).

What are we to conclude from this? That the more zealous we are in trying to please God, the more He will give us a deep interior peace of soul. We should suspect as a temptation from the evil one, when we find ourselves worried or anxious or disturbed, no matter how pious the source of the worry or anxiety may be.

The key to applying this principle is that, before God, I honestly want to do His will even though through weakness, I may fail to live up to my resolutions.

One basic virtue on which we should daily examine ourselves is peace of soul. We should ask ourselves, “Have I given in to worry or anxiety?” “Have I allowed myself to get discouraged?” A good practice is to pronounce the name, “Jesus,” when we find ourselves getting despondent, or say some short aspiration like, “My Jesus, I trust in you,” whenever we become dejected over something.
The Spiritual and Psychological Value of Frequent Confession

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

Judging by the drastic drop in confessions in countries like the United States, the false opinion is gaining ground that Confession is not to be received, or made, frequently.

No doubt, one reason for this sad state of affairs is the prevalence of some wild theories about mortal sin. For example, the Fundamental Option theory claims that no mortal sin is committed unless a person totally rejects God. Who but the devil hates God? One adultery or one abortion is not a mortal sin. On these grounds, there are parishes in which almost no one goes to Confession.

Our focus in this conference, however, is more specific. We wish to emphasize the value of frequent Confession, where no conscious mortal sins are being confessed. We are speaking of the frequent, and therefore early confessions of children, as soon as they reach the age of reason—and let’s make sure before they receive their First Holy Communion. We are speaking of the frequent confessions of youth, of married people, of those in declining years. We are with emphasis speaking of the frequent confessions of priests and religious, whose progress in sanctity is so closely bound up with their often receiving the sacrament of Penance.

Before going on, let me assure you that I am quite familiar with the present state of affairs in more than one diocese. People tell me it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a priest to hear your confession. You may have to make an appointment by telephone at the priest’s convenience. You may have to meet a priest in person in the parlor and identify yourself before you go to Confession. You may have to listen to an unwelcome homily on not abusing the sacrament by having nothing except venial sins to confess, or be told to come back some other time, when you have something worthwhile to say.

Before going any further, I must tell you: choose your confessors carefully and wisely, and pray for those priests who seem unwilling to exercise this precious sacramental ministry as the Savior who ordained them wants it to be exercised, with prudence and kindness and the practice of Christlike mercy.

The Church’s Teaching

There is no doubt that the practice of frequent Confession in the absence of mortal sin is a relatively recent development in the Catholic Church. Such development under divine guidance is part of the genius of Catholic Christianity.

Consequently, those who frown on frequent Confession and go back to dusty volumes about the practice of Penance in the early Church are behind the times. They fail to realize that the Church is not a static organization, but the living and therefore developing Mystical Body of Christ. So what is wrong with the Church growing up?

The nine pontiffs of the present century have defended frequent Confession against, you guessed it, critics among the clergy.

Let me quote the words of Pope Pius XII. The quotation is long, but I do not hesitate saying it deserves to be memorized.

It is true that venial sins may be expiated in many ways that are to be highly commended, but to ensure more rapid progress day by day in the practice of virtue we want the pious practice of frequent Confession which
was introduced into the Church by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to be earnestly advocated. By it genuine self-knowledge is increased, Christian humility grows, bad habits are corrected, spiritual neglect and tepidity are resisted, the conscience is purified, the will strengthened, a salutary self-control is attained, and grace is increased in virtue of the sacrament itself. Let those, therefore, among the younger clergy who make light of or lessen esteem for frequent Confession know what they are doing. What they are doing is alien to the spirit of Christ and disastrous for the Mystical Body of Christ.

Then came the Second Vatican Council with widespread liturgical changes that are common knowledge. What may not be common knowledge, however, is that since the Council, Pope Paul VI authorized one of the most eloquent pleas in papal history for frequent reception of the sacrament of Penance. While recognizing that the immediate purpose of the sacrament is to remit grave sins, the new ritual emphasizes its salutary function also when mortal sins against God have not been committed. Once again, I quote in full.

Frequent and reverent recourse to this sacrament, even when only venial sin is in question, is of great value. Frequent confession is not mere ritual repetition, nor is it merely a psychological exercise. Rather is it a constant effort to bring to perfection the grace of our Baptism so that as we carry about in our bodies the death of Jesus Christ who died, the life that Jesus Christ lives may be more and more manifested in us. In such confessions penitents, while indeed confessing venial sins, should be mainly concerned with becoming more deeply conformed to Christ, and more submissive to the voice of the Spirit.

Pope John Paul II, in one document and speech after another, repeats the same message. He dares to say that those who discourage going to Confession because it produces a repressive mentality “are lying.” He tells the faithful to receive this sacrament as often as possible. Why? Because “by this sacrament, we are renewed in fervor, strengthened in our resolutions, and supported by divine encouragement.” How we need to hear these words in an age when discouragement, leading to despair, is almost the hallmark of the modern world.

**Spiritual Value of Confession**

Suppose we examine, and even number, the spiritual benefits of frequent Confession as identified by the modern popes.

**Self-Knowledge is Increased.** How blind we are to our own failings and weaknesses. We are hawk-eyed in seeing the faults of others, but stone blind when it comes to our own. There is nothing in the world that we more need to grow in humility than to recognize how stupid and helpless we are in the face of temptation. How desperately we need God’s grace to see ourselves as we really are.

**Bad Habits are Corrected.** Another word for bad habits is “vices.” These bad habits are acquired by the repetition of bad actions. We may have the habit of unkind words, or of selfish behavior, which may have taken years to acquire. On the natural level, it would take years to change these bad habits into the opposite virtues. But with the grace of the sacrament of Confession, we can overcome these vices in record time, beyond all human expectation.

**Conscience is Purified.** We do not commonly speak of purifying the conscience. But we should. What is a pure conscience? A pure conscience is one that sees clearly, we may say instinctively, what should be done in a given situation and how to do it. The opposite of a pure conscience is a dull or insensitive conscience. People will do all kinds of evil, commit every kind of sin, without even realizing that they are doing wrong. The sacrament of Penance purifies our mind to recognize God’s will in every circumstance of our lives, instantly and almost without reflection. How? By the action of the Holy Spirit, whose gift of counsel enlightens the mind to know exactly what the Lord wants us to do and how to do it the moment we are faced with a moral decision.
The Will is Strengthened. We could spend not just a whole conference on this subject, but a semester course on the value of what I call “the sacrament of courage.” Certainly, we all have a free will. But our natural inclination is to do our own will, to choose what we want and reject what we do not want. The very expression “pro-choice” has become a synonym for the culture of death in our society. Christ told us to love others as He has loved us, even to dying out of love for another person. The world is now telling us in the laws of most nations to murder innocent unborn children out of self-love.

Do we ever need to have our wills strengthened to resist our love of self and submit these wills to the will of God! I do not hesitate to say it is the single most desperate need as we come to the close of the twentieth century. The self has been literally deified. In one Western university after another, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant is the staple diet of the academic curriculum. At the root of Kantian morality is the principle of the autonomy of the will. My will is the basic and final norm of my conduct.

Did we ask whether we need the sacramental grace of Confession to strengthen our wills to submit to the will of God? In our age of self-idolatry, this grace is indispensable, dare I say, for the survival of Christianity.

Salutary Self-Control is Attained. A standard English dictionary contains, by actual count, three hundred eighty terms beginning with the word “self.” Among these are such terms as self-absorption, self-admiration, self-advancement, self-applause, self-approbation, self-assertion, self-assurance, to mention only the words with an “a” after the prefix “self.”

To its credit, the dictionary defines self-control as “restraint exercised over one’s own impulses, emotions, or desires.”

But everything depends on what we mean by “restraint.” All that we have so far said about the spontaneous tendency we have to satisfy our own desires brings out the importance of the Christian meaning of self-control.

Our faith tells us that we have a fallen human nature. Part of that nature is the loss of the gift of integrity that our first parents possessed before they had sinned. From the moment of our conception in our mother’s womb, we already have the spontaneous tendency to desire what is pleasant and to run away from what is painful.

On these premises, self-control means the mastery of our impulses to conform to the mind and will of the Creator. Not everything we want is pleasing to Him, and not everything we dislike is contrary to His will. Self-control means mastering our thoughts and desires to correspond to the infinite mind and will of God.

That is why the Church, founded by the Incarnate God, is telling us to have frequent access to what Christ has instituted in the sacrament of Confession. We need the light which this sacrament assures us and the strength we so desperately need to surrender our “Selves” to the almighty Self from whom we came and for whom we were made.

We Become More Sinless. By the frequent and reverent reception of the sacrament of Penance, we make more perfect the justification we first received in Baptism. What does this mean? It means we become more and more sinless. Christ thereby exercises His saving redemption on our souls by cleansing us more and more and thus preparing us better and better for that kingdom of glory where nothing undefiled can enter and where only the sinless have a claim to enjoy the vision of the All-holy God. And who in his right mind would claim he or she is already sinless?

We Become More Conformed to Jesus Christ. We become more like Jesus Christ in the power to practice the virtues that characterized His visible life on earth. What virtues are they? We become more humble and better able to conquer our foolish and stubborn pride. And the very humiliation of telling our sins to another sinner is God’s way of telling us, “If you confess, I will make you more humble.” We become more patient in
bearing with pain and enduring the people that God puts into our lives. Sometimes I think pain should have a masculine and feminine gender. Most of our suffering, most of the difficulties and problems and tribulations, that we have to endure on earth, if your lives are like mine, come from other people. And of course, we pay them the favor of being corresponding graces of tribulation in their lives. Through this sacrament we become more conformed to Jesus by becoming more prayerful in greater awareness of God’s majesty and, therefore, our need to pay attention to God, and in greater awareness of our weakness and constant need for assistance from the Lord. This is one place where Jesus did not have to pray to overcome His sinful tendencies. Above all we become more loving in giving and giving and giving ourselves according to the divine will even as Jesus kept giving Himself to the will of His Father even to the last drop of His blood.

**We Become More Submissive to the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit, dwelling in the depths of our hearts, is always speaking to us, but we are not always listening to Him. We are so busy with so many things, so preoccupied with ourselves, our interests and concerns, that He is often not only the unseen but, I am afraid, the unappreciated Guest in our souls. As John the Baptist said of the Savior to his contemporaries, “There is one in our midst whom we know not.” And if we are going to be submissive to this Spirit of God, the first condition is that we are aware that there is a Spirit, that He has a voice and that He is talking. You do not listen to silence. And this is divine speech.

The Spirit of God wants nothing more than for us to pay attention to Him. Pay Him the courtesy, if you will, of recognizing that He is within us. The Spirit of God wants us to thank Him for all the good things He has given us. He wants us to keep asking Him. That is why He keeps creating problems. Those are divine signals. Did you know that? They are divine shouts, “Listen to me. Thanks. Thanks for at least looking at me. And except for the pain or sorrow or trial or temptation, knowing you,” He tells us, “you would not even bother thinking of me. Thanks! Now that you are awake, listen!” So we rub our eyes and say, “Yes, Lord.”

But mainly the Holy Spirit wants us to be submissive to His will whether this be obedience to His commands when He tells us, “Do this,” or “Do not do that,” or when He gently invites us to do something more than we have to under penalty of sin, when He just whispers, “Would you mind doing this?” or “Would you mind avoiding that?” Not because you have to, but because I would like you to show that you love me.” All of this, and far more than human speech can describe, is available to us, so the Church of God tells us, by our frequent and reverent reception of the sacrament of Christ’s peace.

**Psychological Value of Confession**

Frequent Confession has not only deep spiritual value as we have just seen. It is also immensely beneficial psychologically. In other words, the frequent reception of the sacrament of Penance contributes to the well-being of our mind. In one declarative sentence, it is a divinely instituted means of giving us peace of soul.

Remember what happened on Easter Sunday night. As described by St. Luke, “The doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, ‘Peace be with you,’ and showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and He said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.’ After saying this, He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained’” (Jn 20:19-23).

As the Catholic Church teaches, by these words of the risen Savior, He instituted the sacrament of Confession. For twenty centuries, it has been called the sacrament of peace.

The principal source of conflict in the human spirit is the sense of guilt. Psychologists tell us, it is the mysterious feeling of guilt which lies at the root of most people’s disquiet of mind and disturbance of will.
On both levels, the sacrament of Confession is the Lord’s great gift to His followers.

Peace of mind is the experience of knowing the truth. We all know that we are sinners. We also know that, as sinners, we have offended God and become estranged from His love in the measure of our sins. How we need the assurance, based on faith, that this offended God is still pleased with us. When Christ tells us that there is greater joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine who are just, He is speaking of us who have deserved His rejection. The more often we receive His sacrament of mercy, the more deeply we are at peace.

Peace of heart is the experience of doing the will of God. There is no peace in doing what we want. I know whereof I speak when I say that, doing one’s own will is hell on earth. God wants us to enjoy peace of heart. That is why He instituted the sacrament of Confession. The more frequently we confess our failings, no matter how minor they may seem to be, the more deeply peaceful we shall be. Why? Because if there is one thing that God wants us to admit, and keep admitting, it is that we are sinners who trust in His loving mercy.

There is some value in explaining what the Catholic Church understands by guilt. Guilt is the loss of God’s grace. The more deeply we have sinned, the more guilt we incur. That is what mortal sin means. It is the supernatural death of the soul by the loss of sanctifying grace.

But all sin incurs guilt. Every sin we commit deprives us of more or less of the grace of God. The subjective experience that is called guilt is only the tip of an iceberg. Beneath the feeling of guilt is the objective fact that we have been deprived, however minimally, of God’s friendship.

I like the statement of St. Thomas Aquinas who says, “The act of sin may pass, and yet the guilt remains.”

The more frequently we receive the sacrament of Christ’s mercy, the more grace is restored to our soul. We can experience the effect by growing in that peace of soul for which there is no substitute this side of heaven, realizing and not only knowing that, in spite of our sins, God loves us with that special love He deserves for repentant sinners.
PARTICULAR EXAMEN ON THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Before applying the particular examen to my own spiritual life, it is well to first ask myself, “What are the virtues that I know from experience I most need to develop?”

The reason why this question should first be answered is that no two of us are equally prone to commit the same kind of sins. Nor are we personally always tempted in the same direction. There is wisdom in first knowing enough about myself, to be able to get to the root of my own moral weakness. Otherwise, I may be ignoring what really needs attention in my spiritual life and concentrating on what is not so necessary for me at this time in my service of God.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to suppose that by attending to my moral failings, I am being “negative” in my pursuit of holiness.

On the contrary, in God’s providence, He allows us to fail in those areas in which He especially wants us to grow in virtue.

We can fail in the practice of these virtues either by commission, omission, or by tepidity, in not acting as generously as we might in responding to the grace we have received from God.

**FAITH**

1. Do I make an honest effort to grow in the virtue of faith by daily mental prayer on the mysteries of the faith as revealed in the life of Jesus Christ?
2. Do I make at least a short act of faith every day?
3. Do I pray daily for an increase of faith?
4. Do I ever tempt God by relying on my own strength to cope with the trials in my life?
5. Do I unnecessarily read or listen to those who oppose or belittle what I know are truths of my Catholic faith?
6. What have I done today to externally profess my faith?
7. Have I allowed human respect to keep me from giving expression to my faith?
8. Do I make a serious effort to resolve difficulties that may arise about my faith?
9. Do I ever defend my faith, prudently and charitably, when someone says something contrary to what I know is to be believed?
10. Have I helped someone overcome a difficulty against the faith?

**HOPE**

1. Do I immediately say a short prayer when I find myself getting discouraged?
2. Do I daily say a short act of hope?
3. Do I dwell on my worries instead of dismissing them from my mind?
4. Do I fail in the virtue of hope by my attachment to the things of this world?
5. Do I try to see God’s providence in everything that “happens” in my life?
6. Do I try to see everything from the viewpoint of eternity?
7. Am I confident that, with God’s grace, I will be saved?
8. Do I allow myself to worry about my past life and thus weaken my hope in God’s mercy?
9. Do I try to combine every fully deliberate action with at least a momentary prayer for divine help?
10. How often today have I complained, even internally?
CHARITY

1. Have I told God today that I love Him?
2. Do I tell Jesus that I love Him with my whole heart?
3. Do I take the occasion to tell God that I love Him whenever I experience something I naturally dislike?
4. Have I capitalized on the difficulties today to tell God that I love Him just because He sent me the trial or misunderstanding?
5. Do I see God’s love for me in allowing me to prove my love for Him in the crosses He sent me today?
6. Have I seen God’s grace to prove my love for Him in every person whom I met today?
7. Have I failed in charity by speaking unkindly about others?
8. Have I dwelt on what I considered someone’s unkindness toward me today?
9. Is there someone that I consciously avoid because I dislike the person?
10. Did I try to carry on a conversation today with someone who is difficult to talk to?
11. Have I been stubborn in asserting my own will?
12. How thoughtful have I been today in doing some small favor for someone?
13. Have I allowed my mood to prevent me from being thoughtful of others today?
14. Am I given to dwelling on other people’s weaknesses or faults?
15. Have I been cheerful today in my dealings with others?
16. Do I control my uncharitable thoughts as soon as they arise in my mind?
17. Did I pray for others today?
18. Have I written any letters today?
19. Have I controlled my emotions when someone irritated me?
20. Have I performed any sacrifice today for someone?

by Fr. John Hardon, S.J.