A SERVICE OF PREPARATION FOR AN ACT OF PERFECT CONTRITION IN THE SEASON OF ADVENT

SIGN OF THE CROSS **GREETING**
Minister:
Grace, mercy and peace be with you
From God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour. R. **And with your spirit.**

INTRODUCTION

My brothers and sisters, Advent is a time of preparation, when we make ready to celebrate the mystery of our Lord's coming as man, the beginning of our redemption. Advent also moves us to look forward with renewed hope to the second coming of Christ, when God's plan of salvation will be brought to fulfilment. We must make sure that he will find us prepared for his coming, as the gospel tells us: 'Blessed are those servants who are found awake when the Lord comes' *(Luke 12:37).* This service is meant to make us ready in mind and heart for the coming of Christ, which we are soon to celebrate at Christmas.

In our service today we pray for true conversion of heart. We pray especially that our reflection on God's infinite love for us may enable us to be ready to offer to him from our hearts an Act of Perfect Contrition for our sins.

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God,
you have brought us together in the name of your Son
to receive your mercy and grace in our time of need.
Open our eyes to see the evil we have done.
Touch our hearts and convert us to yourself.
Where sin has divided and scattered, may your love make us one again;
where sin has brought weakness, may your power heal and strengthen;
where sin has brought death, may your Spirit raise to new life.
Give us a new heart to love you, so that out lives may reflect the image of your Son.
May the world see the glory of Christ revealed in your Church,
and come to know that he is the one whom you have sent,
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. R. **Amen.**

READING A reading from the letter to the Hebrews
Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone through to the highest heaven, we must never let go of the faith we have professed. For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way we are, though he is without sin. Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help. During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the one who had the power to save him out of death, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was

heard. Although he was a Son, he learnt to obey through suffering; but having been made perfect, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation.
The Word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM *Psalm 50*
R. Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin. R.

My offences truly I know them;
my sin is always before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
what is evil in your sight I have done. R.

A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your holy spirit. R.

O rescue me, God, my helper,
and my tongue shall ring out your goodness.
O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall declare your praise. R.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION
Alleluia, alleluia!
Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened,
and I will give you rest. Alleluia!

GOSPEL A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke *7:36-50*
One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his
feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment.
When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is that is touching him and what a bad name she has." Then Jesus took him up and said, "Simon, I have something to say to you."
"Speak, Master" was the reply. There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he pardoned them both. Which of them will love him more?" "The one who was pardoned more, I suppose" answered Simon. Jesus said, "You are right."
Then he turned to the woman. "Simon," he said "you see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.
For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love. It is the man who is forgiven little who shows little love." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Those who were with him at table

began to say to themselves, “Who is this man, that he even forgives sins?” But he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection

During the current pandemic it has been difficult for us to gather as a Christian community to celebrate the sacraments. When we have been unable to attend Mass, we have prayed to receive Christ into our hearts through making a Spiritual Communion. Similarly, when we are unable to receive the grace of God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can at any time confidently place our trust in his mercy through an Act of Perfect Contrition.

We read in the Catechism; “When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.” *(Catechism, n.1452)*

The woman in the Gospel presents a vivid image of perfect contrition. Her sins are forgiven by virtue of the depth of her love for Christ.

Pope Francis tells us: “ *You do what the Catechism says. It is very clear: if you do not find a priest to hear your confession, speak to God, he is your father, and tell him the truth...Promise him: ‘Later I will confess, but forgive me now.’ And immediately you will return to the grace of God. This is the right time, the opportune moment…An act of contrition done well, and our souls will become white like the snow.” (Homily at Mass, 20 March 2020)*

We need to ask God to give us the grace of perfect contrition. It is by the power of his grace that our hearts are turned back to him. Our repentance, our sorrow for sin, springs from our love of God and our gratitude for his goodness to us.

How do we make an Act of Perfect Contrition?

- We come before God as we are.
- We reflect on his infinite love for us. We contemplate the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross for our sins.
- We honestly recognise our sins and how they have betrayed the God who loves us.
- We make a firm commitment with the help of God’s grace to make amends and not to sin again.
- We firmly resolve to go to Confession and receive the sacrament of reconciliation as soon as it is possible to do so.

We are obliged to bring our serious sins to Confession as soon as we can because God calls us to do so by the sacrament he has given to us through Jesus Christ. The sacrament also supports us in taking ownership of the wrongs we have done

by naming them. We hand them over to the Lord, in the person of the priest, in a clear physical sign of encounter with the mercy of God and of our reconciliation with Him. It is also a sign of our recognition that our sin has weakened the unity in love of the Christian community, the Church, and that we need to be reconciled with the Body of Christ which we have wounded. Through it we make our repentance concrete. Through this visible sign the grace of God is realised in us.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

This examination of conscience is taken from *The Catholic Family Book of Prayers*.

This brief examination of conscience, loosely based on the Ten Commandments...

- Have I made anything more important than God: myself, others, money, things I own, things I want? Have I set aside time to pray to God every day?
- Have I acted pridefully, as if I know everything, am better than others, or don't need God or others?
- Have I used God's name in a bad way? Have my words hurt God, his Church, or the good he wants for all people?
- Have I given love and respect to my family members? Have I tried to help without being asked? Have I whinged, complained, nagged, or otherwise been difficult toward them?
- Have I shown love and respect to my children? Have I been patient and kind? Have I disciplined my children with love, and in ways that help them become the people God wants them to be?
- Have I been a good citizen? Have my words and actions strengthened my community, or harmed it?
- Have I hurt others, with my hands or my words? Have I excluded others, or treated others with less than the respect they deserve as children of God? Have I held onto anger or hatred? Have I refused to forgive?
- Have I respected my body and given it what it needs to be strong and healthy? Have I viewed pornography, or otherwise offended human dignity for my own pleasure?
- Have I taken what does not belong to me? Have I used my talents and resources to help those in need? Have I done my work well? Have I contributed to the good of others through my work?
- Have I always told the truth to myself, God, and others? Have I gossiped, or shared information I shouldn't have?

- Have I been grateful for what I have, or greedy to have what others have? Have I been generous with my time and possessions?

ACT OF REPENTANCE
Christ our Lord came to call sinners into his Father's kingdom. With faith in the loving mercy of God we pray together:

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,
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.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION
Minister:
Lord our God, you know all things.
You know that we want to be more generous in serving you and our neighbour.
Look on us with love and hear our prayer.

Reader:
Give us the strength to turn away from sin. R. **Hear our prayer.**

Help us to be sorry for our sins and keep our resolutions.
R. **Hear our prayer.**

Forgive our sins and have pity on our weakness.
R. **Hear our prayer.**

Give us trust in your goodness and make us generous in serving you.
R. **Hear our prayer.**

Help us to welcome your Son Jesus with joy into our hearts and into our homes.
R. **Hear our prayer.**

Minister:
With the Lord there is mercy and fullness of redemption. May he be pleased to grant us perfect sorrow for our sins, and help us to know his great mercy, as we pray in obedience to his Son.

Our Father…

CONCLUDING PRAYER
Lord our God,
On the first day of creation you made the light that scatters all darkness.
Let Christ, the light of lights, hidden from all eternity,
shine at last on your people and free us from the darkness of sin.
Fill our lives with good works as we go out to meet your Son,
so that we may give him a fitting welcome.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. R. **Amen.**

BLESSING

DISMISSAL
Let us go in the peace of Christ. R. **Thanks be to God.**