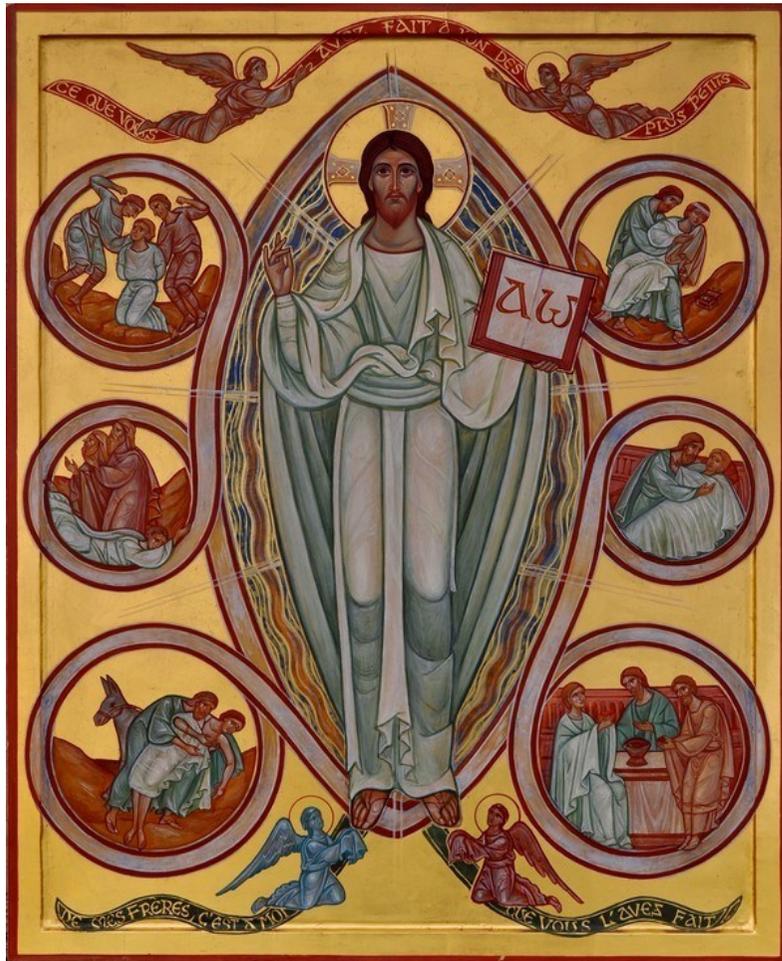


In 2015 the Community at Taizé commissioned an icon *Christ the Good Samaritan*.

Christ, dressed in white, is the heavenly Christ, transfigured, as he will come at the end of time. By his presence he blesses us and he tells us the story of the Good Samaritan. The mandorla signifies the mystery of God that is beyond our understanding. But, dressed in white like a new born child, Christ comes to us and reveals God to us.

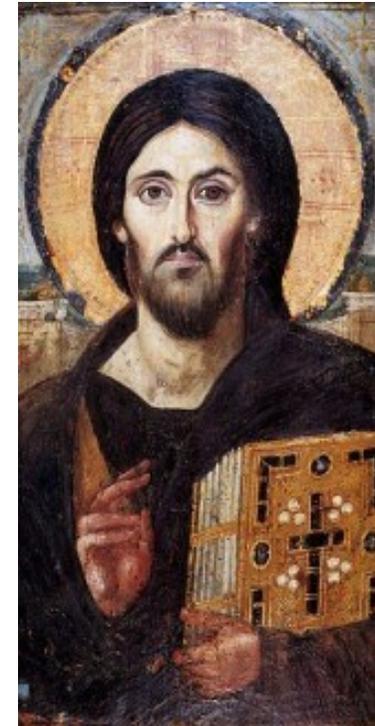


In the images telling the parable story, the victim is also represented clothed in white: Christ is present in the wounded person who needs our help. In several of these images, the position of the victim echoes moments of Christ's passion (the scourging, the taking down from the cross). The good Samaritan is dressed in green, a colour that symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is true that it is not easy to come to help those who are in need, but if we begin to do so, the Holy Spirit comes into us and works through us.

In the first image, three figures are visible: the two robbers and the victim they are attacking. It is the image of a disfigured trinity. Recalling the story of the murder of Abel by Cain at the beginning of the Bible, the parable begins by showing harmony broken by sin. Humanity, though created "in the image of God", is no longer in his likeness. In the last image, again we see three persons. They are sitting around the table, on which stands a cup – as on the icon of the Holy Trinity: the Trinitarian harmony has been re-established. While a piety that forgets one's neighbour, like that of the priest and the Levite who pass by the victim, is only a form of idolatry, love, the work of charity accomplished by the good Samaritan, restores humanity to the likeness of God.

## Tools of Self-Examination for making a confession of your sins by Jim Forrester

This Examination of Conscience by Jim Forrester comes from the Orthodox Church (which is why he mentions the Early Church saints a lot). There are all sorts of different aids to prepare for the Sacrament but often they use lists and sin rarely comes in lists! Confession is about health - the health of our souls and spirits - which Christ, the Physician of our souls is able to give. That's why, in the Book of Common Prayer, confession comes in the Visitation of the Sick. Jim Forrester focusses on the healing that Christ brings.



“ Most icons are inviting. But the *Christ Pantocrator* icon, especially the oldest known version, the one found at St. Catherine's monastery in Egypt, gives one pause. The icon depicts Christ with two quite different facial expressions juxtaposed together. As one gazes at the right, Christ's eye is blackened and enlarged, almost engorged it seems in anger. The eyebrow above it is arched, the chin and mouth below it drawn tight. The other side is a different story. The features are softer, there's a note of sadness in the eye. One common interpretation is that the icon depicts both Christ as divine judge and Christ as the God of mercy. As faithful Christians it is axiomatic for us that Christ, as fully human and fully divine, shares fully in the divine attributes, which include justice and mercy. What is so arresting about this icon is its insistence that we do not become so focused on one that we lose sight of the other. *Stephen Beale* ”

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann provided this summary of the three key areas of confession:

**Relationship to God:** Questions on faith itself, possible doubts or deviations, inattention to prayer, neglect of liturgical life, fasting, etc.

**Relationship to one's neighbour:** Basic attitudes of selfishness and self-centeredness, indifference to others, lack of attention, interest, love. All acts of actual offense—envy, gossip, cruelty, etc.—must be mentioned and, if needed, their sinfulness shown to the penitent.

**Relationship to one's self:** Sins of the flesh with, as their counterpart, the Christian vision of purity and wholesomeness, respect for the body as an icon of Christ, etc. Abuse of one's life and resources; absence of any real effort to deepen life; abuse of alcohol or other drugs; cheap idea of "fun," a life centred on amusement, irresponsibility, neglect of family relations, etc.

In the struggle to examine conscience, we have tools that can assist us, resources that help both in the formation and the examination of conscience. Among these are the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and various prayers, as well as lists of questions written by experienced confessors. In this small booklet, we will look at only one of these, the Beatitudes, which provide a brief summary of the Gospel. Each Beatitude reveals an aspect of being in union with God.

### **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Poverty of spirit is my awareness that, more than anything else, I need God's help and mercy. It is knowing that I cannot save myself, that neither money nor power will spare me from suffering and death, and that no matter what I achieve and acquire in this life, it will be far less than I want if I let my acquisitive capacity get the upper hand. This is the blessing of knowing that even what I have is not mine. It is living free of the domination of fear. While the exterior forms of poverty vary from person to person and even from year to year in a particular life, depending on one's vocation and special circumstances, all who live this Beatitude are seeking with heart and soul to live God's will rather than their own. Christ's mother is the paradigm of poverty of spirit in her unconditional assent to the will of God: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Similarly, at the marriage feast at Cana, she says to those waiting on the tables: "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). Whoever lives by these words is poor in spirit.

### **Questions to consider:**

We are bombarded by advertisements, constantly reminded of the possibility of having things and of indulging all sorts of curiosities and temptations. The simple goal of poverty of spirit seems more remote than the moons of Neptune. Am I regularly praying that God will give me poverty of spirit? When tempted to buy things I don't need, do I pray for strength to resist? Do I keep the Church fasts that would help strengthen my capacity to live this Beatitude? Do I really seek to know and embrace God's will in my life? Am I willing to be seen as odd or stupid by those whose lives are dominated by values that oppose the Beatitudes?

### **Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**

Mourning is cut from the same cloth as poverty of spirit. Without poverty of spirit, I am forever on guard to keep what I have for myself, and to keep me for myself, or for that small circle of people whom I regard as mine. A consequence of poverty of spirit is becoming

### **Making your first confession**

If you've never made a confession of your sins then don't be put off! Just follow these easy guidelines and you won't stew over the worst things you've ever done; that's what the Evil One wants you to do, God wants you to be free.

- ◆ take no more than 3 days thinking about what you'll say
- ◆ divide your life up into natural chunks (childhood, young adulthood, relationship and children, etc)
- ◆ ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind on the first day the first chunk of your life and wait for the sins to come to mind like the fat rising to the surface of a gravy
- ◆ write them down - hints or single words only - remember they are only to remind you!
- ◆ do the same for the rest of your life over no more than 3 days and then go confess!

### **What do I say when I go to confession?**

You come to the place set aside for the Sacrament. You can kneel facing a crucifix or sit or face the priest – the important thing to remember is that it is Jesus Christ who takes away our sins, and God our Father who gives us life.

You: **Bless me Father, for I have sinned.**

Priest: May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may make a true and right confession of all your sins. In the name of the Father, + of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

You: **I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, to all the angels and saints and to you my Father that I have sinned in thought, word and deed. Especially since my last confession which was...**

*(say how long it's been since your last confession or if this is your first confession)*

**I have committed the following sins...**

*(You here tell God your sins in the presence of the priest)*

**For these and all my other sins, which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry, firmly resolve to do better, humbly ask pardon of God and of you Father advice, penance and absolution.**

Priest: Our Lord Jesus Christ has given to His Church power to absolve all those who truly and unfeignedly repent and believe in him; of his great mercy forgive you your offences. And by His authority committed to me, I absolve you of all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, the prayers of Our Lady and all the saints, whatsoever good you have done or evil you have endured be to you for the increase of grace the remission of sin and the attainment of eternal life. And the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, + Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. **Amen.**

Priest: Go in peace now for the Lord has put away your sin, and pray for me for I too am a sinner.

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

The last rung is where the Beatitudes reach and pass beyond the Cross. "We must carry Christ's Cross as a crown of glory," wrote Saint John Chrysostom in the fourth century, "for it is by it that everything that is achieved among us is gained. . . . Whenever you make the sign of the cross on your body, think of what the Cross means and put aside anger and every other passion. Take courage and be free in the soul."

In the ancient world, Christians were persecuted chiefly because they were regarded as undermining the social order, even though in most respects they were models of civil obedience and good conduct. But Christians abstained from the cult of the deified emperor, would not sacrifice to gods their neighbours venerated, and were notable for their objection to war or bloodshed in any form. It is easy to imagine that a community that lived by such values, however well-behaved, would be regarded as a threat by the government. "Both the Emperor's commands and those of others in authority must be obeyed if they are not contrary to the God of heaven," said Saint Euphemia in the year 303, during the reign of Diocletian. "If they are, they must not only be disobeyed; they must be resisted." Following torture, Saint Euphemia was killed by a bear—the kind of death endured by thousands of Christians well into the fourth century, though the greatest number of Christian martyrs belongs to the twentieth century. In many countries religious persecution continues.



#### **Questions to consider:**

Does fear play a bigger role in my life than love? Do I hide my faith or live it in a timid, half-hearted way? When I am ordered to do something that conflicts with Christ's teaching, whom do I obey? Am I aware of those who are suffering for righteousness' sake in my own country and elsewhere in the world? Am I praying for them? Am I doing anything to help them?

#### **Prayer before a Crucifix**

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Thy face I humbly kneel and, with burning soul, pray and beseech Thee to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope and charity; true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment. While I contemplate, with great love and tender pity, Thy five most precious wounds, pondering over them within me and calling to mind the words which David, Thy prophet, said of Thee, my Jesus: They have pierced My hands and My feet, they have numbered all My bones." Amen.

vulnerable to the pain and losses of others, not only those whom I happen to know and care for, but also those who are strangers to me. "When we die," said Saint John Climacus, the seventh-century abbot of Saint Catherine's Monastery near Mount Sinai, "we will not be criticized for having failed to work miracles. We will not be accused of having failed to be theologians or contemplatives. But we will certainly have to explain to God why we did not mourn unceasingly."

#### **Questions to consider:**

Do I weep with those who weep? Have I mourned those in my own family who have died? Do I open my thoughts and feelings to the suffering and losses of others? Do I try to make space in my mind and heart for the calamities in the lives of others who may be far away and neither speak my language nor share my faith?

#### **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**

Meekness is often confused with weakness, yet a meek person is neither spineless nor cowardly. Understood biblically, meekness is making choices and exercising power with a divine rather than social reference point. Meekness is the essential quality of the human being in relationship to God. Without meekness, we cannot align ourselves with God's will. In place of humility, we prefer pride—pride in who we are, pride in doing as we please, pride in what we've achieved, pride in the national or ethnic group to which we happen to belong.

Meekness has nothing to do with blind obedience or social conformity. Meek Christians do not allow themselves to be dragged along by the tides of political power. Such rudderless persons have cut themselves off from their own conscience, God's voice in their hearts, and thrown away their God-given freedom. Meekness is an attribute of following Christ, no matter what risks are involved.

#### **Questions to consider:**

When I read the Bible or writings of the saints, do I consider the implications for my own life? When I find what I read at odds with the way I live, do I allow the text to challenge me? Do I pray for God's guidance? Do I seek help with urgent questions in confession? Do I tend to make choices and adopt ideas that will help me fit into the group I want to be part of? Do I fear the criticism or ridicule of others for my efforts to live a Gospel-centered life? Do I listen to others? Do I tell the truth even in difficult circumstances?

#### **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.**

In his teaching about the Last Judgment, Christ speaks of hunger and thirst: "I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink" (Matthew 25:35). Our salvation hinges on our caring for the least person as we would for Christ Himself. To hunger and thirst for something is not a mild desire, but a desperate craving. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means urgently to desire that which is honourable, right, and true. A righteous person is a right-living person, living a moral, blameless life, right with both God and neighbor. A righteous social order would be one in which no one is abandoned or thrown away, in which people live in peace with God, with each other, and with the world God has given us.

#### **Questions to consider:**

Does it disturb me that I live in a world that in many ways is the opposite of the Kingdom of heaven? When I pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," am I praying that my own life might better reflect God's priorities? Who is "the least" in my

day-to-day world? Do I try to see Christ's face in him or her?

### **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**

One of the perils of pursuing righteousness is that one can become self-righteous. Thus, the next rung of the ladder of the Beatitudes is the commandment of mercy. This is the quality of self-giving love, of gracious deeds done for those in need. Twice in the Gospels Christ makes His own the words of the Prophet Hosea: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7). We witness mercy in event after event in the New Testament account of Christ's life—forgiving, healing, freeing, correcting, even repairing the wound of a man injured by Peter in his effort to protect Christ, and promising Paradise to the criminal being crucified next to Him.

Again and again Christ declares that those who seek God's mercy must pardon others. The principle is included in the only prayer Christ taught His disciples: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). He calls on His followers to love their enemies and to pray for them. The moral of the parable of the Good Samaritan is that a neighbour is a person who comes to the aid of a stranger in need (Luke 10:29–37). While He denounces hypocrisy and warns the merciless that they are condemning themselves to hell, in no passage in the Gospel do we hear Christ advocating anyone's death. At the Last Judgment, Christ receives into the Kingdom of heaven those who were merciful. He is Mercy itself.

**Questions to consider:** When I see a stranger in need, how do I respond? Is Christ's mercy evident in my life? Am I willing to extend forgiveness to those who seek it? Am I generous in sharing my time and material possessions with those in need? Do I pray for my enemies? Do I try to assist them if they are in need? Have I been an enemy to anyone?

Mercy is more and more absent even in societies with Christian roots. Concerning the sick, aged, and severely handicapped, "mercy killing" and "assisted suicide" are now phrases much in use. To what extent have I been influenced by slogans and ideologies that promote death as a solution and disguise killing as mercy? What am I doing to make my society more welcoming, more caring, more life-protecting?

### **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

The brain has moved up in the world, while the heart has been demoted. The heart used to be widely recognized as the locus of God's activity within us, the hub of human identity and conscience, linked with our capacity to love, the core not only of physical but also of spiritual life—the ground zero of the human soul. In our brain-centred society, we ought to be surprised that Christ didn't say, "Blessed are the brilliant in mind." Instead, He blessed purity of heart.

The Greek word for purity, *katharos*, means spotless, stainless; intact, unbroken, perfect; free from adulteration or anything that defiles or corrupts. What, then, is a pure heart? A heart free of possessiveness, a heart capable of mourning, a heart that thirsts for what is right, a merciful heart, a loving heart, a heart not ruled by passions, an undivided heart, a heart aware of the image of God in others, a heart drawn to beauty, a heart conscious of God's presence in creation. A pure heart is a heart without contempt for others. "A person is truly pure of heart when he considers all human beings as good and no created thing appears impure or defiled to him," wrote Saint Isaac of Syria.

Opposing purity of heart is lust of any kind—for wealth, for recognition, for power, for vengeance, for sexual exploits—whether indulged through action or imagination. Spiritual

virtues that defend the heart are memory, awareness, watchfulness, wakefulness, attention, hope, faith, and love. A rule of prayer in daily life helps heal, guard, and unify the heart. "Always keep your mind collected in your heart," instructed the great teacher of prayer, Saint Theophan the Recluse. The Jesus Prayer—the prayer of the heart—is part of a tradition of spiritual life that helps move the centre of consciousness from the mind to the heart. Purification of the heart is the striving to place under the rule of the heart the mind, which represents the analytic and organizational aspect of consciousness. It is the moment-to-moment prayerful discipline of seeking to be so aware of God's presence that no space is left in the heart for hatred, greed, lust, or vengeance. Purification of the heart is the lifelong struggle of seeking a more God-centred life, a heart illuminated with the presence of the Holy Trinity.

### **Questions to consider:**

Do I take care not to read or look at things that stir up lust? Do I avoid using words that soil my mouth? Am I attentive to beauty in people, nature, and the arts? Am I sarcastic about others? Is a rhythm of prayer part of my daily life? Do I prepare carefully for Communion, never taking it for granted? Do I observe fasting days and seasons? Am I aware of and grateful for God's gifts?

### **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.**

Christ is often called the Prince of Peace. His peace is not a passive condition—He blesses the makers of peace. The peacemaker is a person who helps heal damaged relationships. Throughout the Gospel, we see Christ bestowing peace. In His final discourse before His arrest, He says to the Apostles: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). After the Resurrection, He greets His followers with the words, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). He instructs His followers that, on entering a house, their first action should be the blessing, "Peace to this house" (Luke 10:5).

Christ is at His most paradoxical when He says, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34; note that a similar passage, Luke 12:51, uses the word "division" rather than "sword"). Those who try to live Christ's peace may find themselves in trouble, as all those who have died a martyr's death bear witness. Sadly, for most of us the peace we long for is not the Kingdom of God, but a slightly improved version of the world we already have. We would like to get rid of conflict without eliminating the spiritual and material factors that draw us into conflict. The peacemaker is a person aware that ends never stand apart from means: figs do not grow from thistles; neither is community brought into being by hatred and violence. A peacemaker is aware that all persons, even those who seem to be ruled by evil spirits, are made in the image of God and are capable of change and conversion.

### **Questions to consider:**

In my family, in my parish, and among my co-workers, am I guilty of sins which cause or deepen division and conflict? Do I ask forgiveness when I realize I am in the wrong? Or am I always justifying what I do, no matter what pain or harm it causes others? Do I regard it as a waste of time to communicate with opponents? Do I listen with care and respect to those who irritate me? Do I pray for the well-being and salvation of adversaries and enemies? Do I allow what others say or what the press reports to define my attitude toward those whom I have never met? Do I take positive steps to overcome division? Are there people I regard as not bearing God's image and therefore innately evil?