

## **A Guide to Confession –** **Written while in the Communist Gulag by Valeriu Gafencu**

***Introductory Notes:** In general, too little is known about the spiritual life of confessors in Communist prisons and the various types of such confessors. It is true that until the collapse of Communism it was impossible to uncover anything, while after the collapse in 1990 testimonies of the survivors were not always available to those who were interested. Nevertheless, it would be of no small benefit to anyone to devote oneself to reading testimonies of those who passed through these prisons. In them, one would find such valuables which can rightly be compared to those found in a Paterikon or in the lives of the saints. Among the many portraits of the confessors, one will be found in particular that is recalled with reverence by all and is considered a saint: Valeriu Gafencu. Nicknamed “the saint of the prisons”<sup>3</sup> by Father Nicolae Steinhardt) a Jew converted to Orthodoxy) in a truly inspired moment, Valeriu Gafencu was one of the more impressive figures who lived an admirable spiritual life amidst prison conditions. Through his sacrificial love springing from a perfect dedication of his life to Christ, he remains painted in the most luminous of colors in the hearts of those who knew him. Father Gheorghe Calciu wrote, “I have no doubt that he is a saint. He lived the word of God to such a level that it was incomprehensible for us”.*

*The spiritual atmosphere of Aiud played an important role in Valeriu’s spiritual formation. It was here that he experienced a moment of Illumination and succeeded, through the grace of God, to see his own sins. The work of repentance that began at that time gave rise to a state of spiritual joy that would accompany him through all of his trials. After Aiud came the prison at Pitesti (1948 – 1949), then a few months at Văcărești, and finally the convalescent prison at Târgu-Ocna (1950 – 1952). Confined to bed rest at Târgu-Ocna in an advanced stage of tuberculosis, Valeriu was the haven where his prison mates found comfort and drew their strength. Through his faith and influence many things were made possible. Several atheistic prisoners returned to God, so-called re-education-through-torture attempts were thwarted, bonds of special brotherly love among prisoners were forged, a spirit of sacrifice for the sake of the more seriously ill was promulgated. His grace-filled presence created a spiritual atmosphere unique in the history of the Communist gulag. Knowing beforehand the day of his passing to the Lord, Valeriu was found at the moment of death in such a state of grace, that his friend Ioan Ianolide, who was beside him at the time of his passing, later testified,*

*“In eternity I could not wish to be in a more exalted state, for then [at the moment of Valeriu’s passing] I was totally, completely happy.”*

*Men like Valeriu Gafencu and other confessors of the prisons through whom the Holy Spirit worked with power, men worthy of high regard, await their place in the calendar, being the surest models of Christianity for us in these times dominated by confusion. Their lives deserve to be made known not for earthly glory, but “so that people living in these times, darkened by so much stray wandering, a result of estrangement from God, will know that such chosen ones existed in the twentieth century, men who raised themselves to the same level of faith and sacrifice as that of the early Christian martyrs.*



*Let him who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her.  
(John 8:7).*

*Most assuredly I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. (John 16:20)*

*He arose from supper and laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. (John 13: 4-5)*

*Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. (John 13:23) "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13: 34)*

*"By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13: 35)*

### ***What sin is!***

Sin is treading upon the law of God, a voluntary or involuntary treading, in knowledge or in ignorance, in deed, in word, in thought. Sin is dishonor toward God, insult, disdain, defamation, ingratitude and wounding toward the Divine being, in an egocentric spirit.

Sin is a lack of faith and a lack of confidence in God and in His law, and too much faith and confidence in oneself, such that a man becomes a law unto himself, because whenever you break the law of God, you obey another law, your own, or the devil's.

Sin is a second crucifixion of Christ, for through sin all the insults, mockery, and beatings are renewed. The nails, the spear, the thorns, through sin, Christ feels them all again. Today, however, the blows no longer come from those who defamed Him and shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Now they are administered by those who say they believe in Him, who say that they follow His commandments, that they love Him. Now it is those who are baptized who spit

in His face, it is those who call themselves Christians who put the crown of thorns on His head, now it is they who slap Him, who nail Him to the cross, who goad Him with the spear, those for whom Christ suffered mockery and beating and for whom He shed His blood on Golgotha in order to make them sons of God, in order to open the gates of heaven for them, to destroy death and demolish hell.

Sin is estrangement from God and drawing near to the devil. It is estrangement from the house of the Father and life in a faraway country with the devil's pigs.

Because we are the servants of him whom we serve (John 8:34), sin means slavery to the devil. When you sin, you no longer consider what God has done for you, you are no longer His son, and you do not think about His justice, by which He will punish those who sin against His will. Through sin, all the creatures of God act contrary to the purpose for which they were created. The mouth was not created by God that we might curse and swear with it or slander and curse our neighbor, but that we might use it to speak things useful to the soul. God did not give you a mind so that you can find arguments to distance yourself from Him, but that you might find arguments to draw near Him. The eyes were not made so that we might look at things that damage the soul, but that we might look upon God's creation and give Him thanks. Just so, the ears, hands, and feet were not made in order that we might distance ourselves from God. Don't you want to acknowledge the goodness and long-suffering of God? For you should know that time was given to you in order to gain paradise, and you waste it believing that God will no longer judge, that He will forgive us, that there are others much worse than you.

### *The Consequences of Sin*

The evil brought about by sin:

- 1) Through sin, we lose the most precious gift that we have received from God. Without this gift, the soul remains deformed.
- 2) Through sin, the Holy Spirit is taken from us and we are no longer recognized as sons.
- 3) Through sin, we lose the eternal blessedness of heaven. We lose the possibility of union with God and life together with the saints. We lose eternal light and rest.
- 4) We attain unto hell with its unquenchable fire and its eternal darkness.
- 5) Through sin, we lose all the good deeds that we may have done previously, for God will judge you according to the state in which He finds you.
- 6) Through sin, we lose the help of God (to the extent that you are found in sin).

### *Confession*

Do you not weep at the thought that you have lost heaven? Does the sorrow you have caused God not make you tremble?

Does the thought of hell not frighten you? Do you not seek to acquire the state that you have lost? Is it still possible? Yes! But you must want it....

From the very beginning, God has known our powerlessness and has given us the possibility of being purified from sins. He knew that man will sin as long as he lives and that no one is without sin, and therefore He said to His disciples: *Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*, words through which He instituted the sacrament of Confession.

Confession or repentance is a bath from which the soul emerges relieved from the weight of sin and cleansed from the filth of sin, a bath in which we are cleansed of all our defilements and errors.

Confession is a medicine that heals the soul of the wounds inflicted by demons, a medicine that renders ineffective the poison of sin.

Confession turns a sinner away from the devil and back to God and restores His connection with his Creator.

Confession leads the soul to deeds and things that are for the sake of and according to the soul. Confession restores a man clean before God. Confession prepares the soul and body to receive the body and blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Confess in the Church four times a year to the same spiritual father.

When you examine your conscience, consider yourself guilty, don't justify yourself; think about the following things:

- 1) The motive or aim with which or for which you sinned. The following day, try to avoid the same situation.
- 2) The intention with which you sinned.
- 3) The surroundings, avoid them the following day.
- 4) The place where you sinned.
- 5) Whether your sin influenced others by encouraging them to sin also.
- 6) The number [of times you've performed this particular sin] .... Confession must be done with contrition of heart and a sense of regret. Contrition of heart is the grief and pain that the memory of the sin causes you. This pain consists not only in feeling the sin, to sigh and weep for it, but consists primarily in hating the sin. Regret is the pain that the repentant feels because he now lacks the grace of God and has earned torment. The church has established the rule that one should fast for seven days before confession, or possibly less. The sick are excused. Write down your sins on paper and read them alone before your spiritual father. Make a promise before God to not repeat your sins.

## *The Ten Commandments*

### *The First Commandment:*

**I am the Lord thy God, thou shall not have any gods before me.**

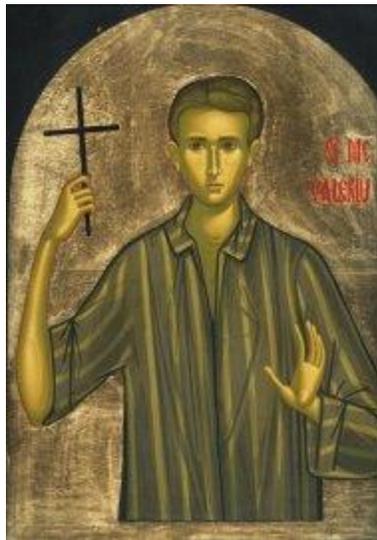
- 1) Do you believe in God?
- 2) Do you believe in the Holy Trinity?
- 3) Do you worship God?
- 4) Do you love Him?
- 5) Do you know Him? Have you compelled yourself to learn something about God from the books of Holy Scripture, church books, or from somewhere else?
- 6) Do you somehow believe in charms and magic spells?
- 7) Have you visited fortune tellers and astrologers?
8. Do you practice occultism?
- 9) Do you believe in dreams? Believe only in God.
- 10) Do you somehow bestow more honor upon some creature or things than to God?
- 11) Do you value money, food or wine, a woman or a man, more than God?
- 12) Have you ever grumbled against God?
- 13) Have you despaired because of any trouble, misfortune, or any other evil that has befallen you?
- 14) Have you opposed the truths of Christian teaching?
- 15) Have you read books that are against religion?
- 16) Have you given such books to someone else to read
- 17) Have you attended gatherings of nonbelievers?
- 18) Have you read their books and magazines with the intention of discovering another truth other than that of the Church?
- 19) Have you defended lack of faith or sects or Islam?

- 20) Have you brought gifts to sectarians?
- 21) Do you believe in superstition or paganism?
- 22) Is God your main concern?
- 23) Have you always put hope in God?
- 24) Do you believe that heaven and hell exist?
- 25) Do you believe that there will be a judgment?
- 26) Do you put too much trust in the goodness of God and in this way not fear judgment?
- 27) Do you believe that God can no longer forgive you because of the multitude and gravity of your sins?
- 28) Have you always sought the help of God?
- 29) Have you prayed regularly? Evening, morning, and at noon?
- 30) Do you go to church regularly?
- 31) At prayers and at church do you think only of God?
- 32) At the end of the day, do you remember God?
- 33) Have you brought thanks to God through all your deeds?
- 34) Have you sought His help before doing something?
- 35) Do you sometimes say prayers only from habit?
- 36) Do you think of other things during the time of prayer?
- 37) Does the thought ever come to you that you cannot be saved?
- 38) Have you put off repentance until old age?
- 39) Do you deliberately go late to church?
- 40) Do you pay attention to the service?
- 41) Do you laugh or talk or look at other people when in church?

***The Second Commandment:***

**Thou shall make no graven image or the likeness of any thing of what is in heaven or on earth, in the sea or on the earth, nor shall you worship them or serve them.**

- 1) Do you believe that some men are great and have the same value that Christ had? For example, philosophers or religious leaders.
- 2) Do you believe in the holy icons?
- 3) What kind of worship do you accord them?
- 4) Do you believe that an icon is in fact the very saint that it depicts?
- 5) Do you believe in people – your wife, your husband, your child – instead of believing in God?
- 6) Do you worship things such as money, food, drink, or other pleasures?
- 7) Is your own mind your only law and do you do only that which it tells you?



***The Third Commandment:***

**Do not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain.**

- 1) Have you ever sworn by God the Father or by the Savior Jesus Christ?
- 2) Have you sworn by the angels, archangels?
- 3) Have you sworn by the Holy Virgin?
- 4) Have you sworn by the saints, the church, Pascha, the oil lamps, the icons, the cross, or other things?

- 5) Have you brought false witness to the Name of God?
- 6) Have you sworn other kinds of oaths, for example on your eyes, your life, the salvation of your soul? For the Savior said, „Let your speech be yes and no; for anything more than that is of the devil.”
- 7) Have you cursed anyone? Have you sent others to the devil or yourself?
8. Do you have the habit of cursing those who do you wrong? The Savior taught us to pray for them.
- 9) Have you sworn a false oath?
- 10) Have you sworn a true oath?
- 11) Do you use as an oath the word “zău,” which is an abbreviation for “pe Dumnezeu meu” [upon my God]?

***The Fourth Commandment:***

**Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.**

Sunday is the Lord’s day. And all the feast days instituted by the church throughout the year have the same value.

- 1) Have you kept all Sundays and feast days?
- 2) Were you in church on each of those days?
- 3) Did the other members of your household keep them, did they attend church, did you prevent them for any reason?
- 4) Have you given others work on those days? Do you go to church late?
- 5) Did you keep the Lord’s day in a worthy manner? Or is it for you an ordinary day or a day for parties and amusements? Do you go to church in the morning? In the afternoon do you read books that are useful and constructive for the soul?
- 6) Do you look after your soul more on those days than on others?
- 7) Have you done or participated in a *clacă* (see 199)?
8. Do you behave improperly in church?
- 9) Have you cursed the church or the servants of the Holy Altar?

10) Do you honor priests as the servants of God?

Do you make fun of them or disdain them? Do you gossip about them and speak of their sins?

11) Do you pray for them? Do you obey them?

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*(199 Clacã: An informal gathering around a campfire for conversation, music, and dancing. – Translator's note)*



***The Fifth Commandment:***

**Honor thy father and thy mother.**

- 1) Have you beaten your parents or in-laws?
- 2) Have you abused them or persecuted them?
- 3) Have you heeded their advice?
- 4) Have you deceived them in any way?
- 5) Have you taken advantage of their good faith?
- 6) Have you helped them when they are in difficulty?
- 7) Have you done church services for them after their deaths?
8. Have you helped your brothers and sisters?
- 9) Have you taken care of your wife and children?

For St. Paul says, *If anyone does not look after his own, and especially those of his own household, such a one has abandoned the faith and is worse than a non-believer.* (1 Tim 5:8)

- 10) Have you beaten your wife? Have you held anything against her? Have you abused her?
  - 11) Have you honored your husband? Have you loved your husband or wife as your own self?
  - 12) Have you deceived your husband or wife?
  - 13) Have you made his/her life more difficult? Do you nag or criticize?
  - 14) Have you sufficiently looked after the spiritual well-being of those in your household?
  - 15) How have you behaved with your spiritual fathers? Godparents, teachers, priests? Have you respected them and helped them?
  - 16) Have you been insolent or stubborn with your parents?
  - 17) Have you upset them? Angered them?
  - 18) Have you spoken ill of them or derided them?
  - 19) Have you made fun of their weaknesses?
  - 20) Have you been mindful of your religious obligations?
  - 21) Have you been ashamed of them?
  - 22) Have you spent money on useless things (tobacco or other pleasures), causing your family to be lacking in necessary things?
- If you are a parent:
- 23) Have you steered your children on the path of the Church, in word and in deed?
  - 24) Have you set a bad example with arguments, drunkenness, filthy language, lying, stealing, dishonor, gossiping, laziness?
  - 25) Do you live with a concubine and the children see it?
  - 26) Have you punished them for bad deeds: such as arguing, lying, fighting, stealing? Have you spared them out of mercy?
  - 27) Have you prayed for your children, wife, husband, brothers, sisters, parents?
  - 28) Were you too harsh or too easy on your children?
  - 29) Have you had bad servants who taught your children things harmful for the soul? If you are a guardian:

- 30) Have you fulfilled all your material and moral obligations toward the children?
- 31) How have you behaved with your servants or apprentices?
- 32) Have you paid them honest wages, have you held anything back for any reason?
- 33) Have you encouraged them to fulfill their religious duties?
- 34) Have you encouraged them to commit any sin?

If you are a servant:

- 35) Have you obeyed your master or boss?
- 36) Have you diligently fulfilled all your duties?
- 37) Have you done your work in a careless, slipshod manner?
- 38) Have you stolen anything?
- 39) Have you told bad stories about the house to others?

***The Sixth Commandment: Thou shall not kill.***

- 1) Have you ever killed anyone, voluntarily or involuntarily?
- 2) Do you want to kill anyone, or have thoughts of revenge? Have you ever praised anyone who killed?
- 3) Do you want anyone to die, in order to gain their wealth, wife, husband, etc.?
- 4) Have you beaten anyone?
- 5) Have you threatened anyone?
- 6) Do you hate anyone, are you reconciled with all those you know?
- 7) Do you wish anyone evil, death, or harm?
8. Do you rejoice when evil befalls your fellow man?
- 9) How do you behave with those around you?
- 10) If you are a man, have you abandoned your children?
- 11) If you are a woman, have you voluntarily abandoned your baby?

12) Have you sought to kill yourself, directly or indirectly?

13) Have you gone hunting?

***The Seventh Commandment:***

**Thou shalt not commit adultery.**

Those unmarried commit fornication, those married adultery.

1) Have you committed fornication, or if you are married, adultery?

2) Do you live as a concubine?

3) Do you sin against nature – masturbation or homosexuality?

4) Do you desire to sin with the husband or wife of another?

5) Do you seek opportunities to commit sexual sins?

6) Do you think about shameful things too much?

7) Do you seek to recall such scenes?

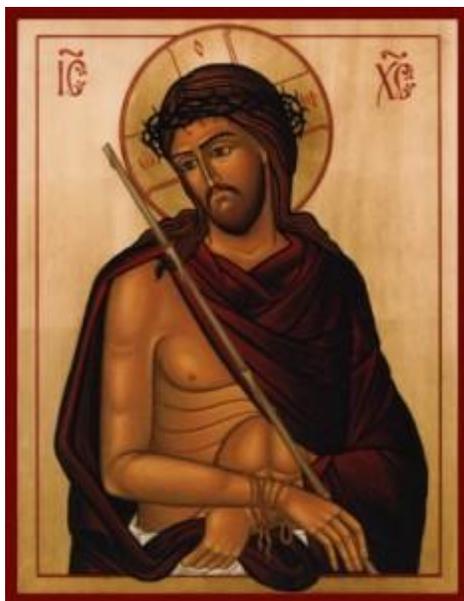
8) Do you want to see the shameful parts of the body?

9) Do you speak about shameful things?

10) Have you read books that give you sexual pleasure?

11) Have you urged anyone to commit such sins?

12) Have you caused someone else to sin through clothing or dressing up?



***The Eighth Commandment:***

**Thou shalt not steal.**

A priest cannot forgive the theft of something that has not been returned. Therefore, give back what you stole and then go to confession.

- 1) Have you stolen money or other objects from the state, society, or any man?
- 2) Have you done harm to others?
- 3) Have you helped those you have harmed to recover?
- 4) Have you taken adequate care of the wealth of another man that has been entrusted to you?
- 5) Have you given back money or other objects that you borrowed?
- 6) Have you received stolen things (things that were stolen)?
- 7) Have you given back things that you found?
8. Have you secretly changed the property line between you and your neighbor?
- 9) Have you urged someone else to do this?
- 10) Have you charged too much interest for borrowed monies?
- 11) Have you altered merchandise and then sold

it as if it were good?

12) Have you deceived anyone by weighing or counting goods wrongly?

13) Have you taken things by force from someone smaller than you?

14) Have you accepted bribes?

15) Have you taught children to steal?

16) Do you have thoughts about making money by dishonorable means?

***The Ninth Commandment:***

**Thou shall not bear false witness.**

1) Have you sworn a false oath?

2) Have you lied?

3) Have you born false witness?

4) Have you behaved correctly with your neighbor?

5) Have you lied to him?

6) Have you told lies about others?

7) Have you purposefully spread false account about others?

**The Tenth Commandment:**

**Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife.**

**Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's goods.**

1) Have you desired the wife, daughter, husband, or son of your neighbors?

2) Have you desired the wealth of your neighbor?

3) Have you desired the social status of someone higher than you?

4) Have you hated your neighbor for any reason?

5) Have you desired the house, the land, the vineyard, or the work of your brother?

## *The Seven Deadly Sins*

**Pride:** is the source of all spiritual evil. It is a spiritual greed through which the demons fell from the grace of God.

- 1) Are you proud, haughty, conceited?
- 2) Do you put too much faith in your own beauty or your wealth, have you grown proud because of them?
- 3) How do you behave with those who are rich or important?
- 4) Do you despise anyone?
- 5) Are you willing to talk to anyone?
- 6) Are you hypocritical (you say one thing, and do another)?
- 7) Have you bragged through deeds, words, or clothing?
8. Have you said something in order to be praised?
- 9) Have you slandered your neighbor in order to lower his honor and in order to raise up your own?
- 10) Have you born the offenses of him who offended you?
- 11) Have you forgiven those who upset you?
- 12) Have you prided yourself on your learning and knowledge?

**Greed:** Starting out as something abstract, egotism is put into effect through greed.

The Holy Apostle Paul is looking from this point of view when he says that greed is the root of all evil.

- 1) Are you greedy for food and drink [gluttony]?
- 2) Do you want to collect wealth or other things?
- 3) Are you greedy in accumulating money, have you deceived your neighbor for this reason?
- 4) Have you eaten or drunk secretly?
- 5) Have you eaten on fast days or before the Holy Liturgy?

6) Have you eaten carrion?

**Laziness:** is the failure to make use of the physical and spiritual powers that God has granted us to use in our lives.

1) Are you lazy?

2) Do you waste time without working?

3) Do you occupy yourself with things that are vain or pointless?

4) Do you pray regularly?

5) Do you look after your soul?

6) Do you do your duty as a clerk, worker, servant?

7) Do you force those smaller than you to do your work?

8. Have you sought a spiritual father who is more lenient?

9) Have you fulfilled your penance?

**Anger:** is also based upon the pivot or axis of greed.

When a man cannot fulfill his desires, he becomes angry because he is prevented from achieving his evil goal. Man is allowed to be angry only against sin.

1) Have you done evil through anger, cursing, beatings, etc.?

2) Do you get angry often? How long do you stay angry? You should know that St. Paul said, “*Do not let the sun set on your anger.*” (Eph 4:26)

3) Are you presently angry with anyone?

4) Have you beaten or struck anyone with a stick, a club, or your palm?

5) Have you angered or scolded anyone without good reason, spitefully?

6) Have you wished evil to someone who did you evil? Or to someone who did you good?

7) Have you gotten angry with a neighbor because he is somehow better than you? Have you envied him?

8. Have you shed anyone's blood (in drunkenness)?
- 9) Have you engaged in a duel?
- 10) Have you prayed, in anger, that evil come upon your enemies?

***Avarice (Greed):*** is material and spiritual.

Material when someone does not want to provide physical comfort to the poor, while spiritual when one does not want to steer someone away from evil.

- 1) Are you stingy?
- 2) Have you ever deprived a neighbor of necessary things out of stinginess?
- 3) Have you helped the poor?
- 4) Have you called both the rich and the poor to eat at your table? You should know that the Savior urges us to call to our table those who cannot repay us.
- 5) Do you sell items at too high a price?
- 6) Do you cheat people?
- 7) Do you regret any good deed that you have done?
8. Do you eat little and clothe yourself or your family poorly in order to grow rich?
- 9) Do you neglect the health of your children, wife, parents, brothers, in order to avoid spending money?

***Envy (Quarreling or Jealousy):*** When an angry man cannot prevail over the obstacles that are in his way by anger, unable to do anything else, he sweetens his heart with the passion of envy, so that he might conceal his neighbor's spiritual and physical honor and exalt himself.

- 1) Have you argued with anyone?
- 2) Do you like to argue?
- 3) Do you hate anyone?
- 4) Do you deride or disdain anyone?
- 5) Do you give advice maliciously?
- 6) Are you presently jealous of anyone?

7) Are you on speaking terms with everyone?

8. Have you given anyone a bad nickname?

9) Have you sown dissension between brothers?

10) Have you been jealous of anyone because he is somehow better than you and enjoys more honor, wealth, social standing, etc.?

*Lust:* is also a form of greed, but not of a material or spiritual order, but of a sentimental order. The sin of dissoluteness, unlike all other sins, is committed with the body.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. (You can commit the sin of dissoluteness by looking at or hearing things that cause you to sin. Even eating, sleeping too much, speaking, etc.)

1) Have you fallen into fornication?

2) Or adultery?

3) Do you like to see or read books that cause you to sin in your thoughts, do you like to hear or to speak vulgar or shameful words? You should know that St.

Paul tells us that there should not be heard from our mouth any foul or filthy words, nor silly jokes that are improper, nor words that are imprudent.

4) Do you like to speak sensibly or senselessly?

5) Are you mastered by any passion?

6) Do you eat or sleep too much? You should know that St. Paul also said “*All things are permitted to me, but not all things are useful.*” (1 Cor. 6:12)

7) Do you have in your home paintings with naked bodies? Do you look at them passionately?

8. Have you committed sexual sins with blood relatives or spiritual relatives (godchildren, godparents)?

9) Have you touched someone’s body, overcome by the passion of lust?

10) Have you wanted to see the shameful parts of the body?

### *Sins That Cry Out to Heaven*

#### A. Voluntary Killing

- 1) Have you killed anyone?
- 2) Have you sought to kill?
- 3) Do you want to kill anyone?
- 4) Have you sought to gain revenge by killing someone?
- 5) Have you beaten anyone?
- 6) Have you quarreled with or threatened anyone?

B. Sodomy (coupling against nature)

- 1) A man with a man or any kind of animal?
- 2) A man with a woman against nature?
- 3) Masturbation. Have you masturbated?

C. Withholding the pension or the wages of orphans, widows, workers, employees, or servants.

- 1) Have you withheld pensions or salaries?

For what reason, as reimbursement for something broken, or other reasons?

- 2) Have you withheld pay partially or unjustly?
- 3) Have you always compensated others for the work they have done?

D. Oppressing widows, orphans, invalids, or the helpless.

- 1) Have you beaten children, old people, or orphans?
- 2) Have you derided or made fun of them?
- 3) Have you oppressed anyone weaker or smaller than you?
- 4) Have you laughed at the crippled or the helpless?
- 5) Have you angered or irritated them?
- 6) Have you somehow been obligated to help them and failed to do so?
- 7) Have you helped those whom you were not required to help, or did you pass them by like the priest and the Levite in the Gospel in the story of the good Samaritan?

8. Have you deliberately caused a blind man to fall by guiding him wrong?
- 9) Have you made fun of anyone who is helpless, deaf, a stutterer, lame, crippled, one-eyed?

### *Obligations Regarding the Spiritual Life of our Neighbor*

- 1) To protect our neighbor from sin
- 2) To teach the uneducated (ignorant)
- 3) To give good advice to those who have need of it
- 4) To pray to God for others
- 5) To comfort the sad/grieving
- 6) To suffer patiently when we are treated unjustly
- 7) To forgive the sins of others

### *Commandments Regarding the Physical Life of Our Neighbor*

- 1) To give food to the hungry. Have you given or not?
- 2) To quench the thirst of the thirsty
- 3) To clothe the naked
- 4) To care for the sick
- 5) To take in and show hospitality to strangers
- 6) To inquire after those in prison
- 7) To bury the dead

### *Strange Sins*

- 1) When you advise someone to sin
- 2) When you order someone to sin
- 3) When you permit someone to sin
- 4) When you help someone to sin

- 5) When you praise someone who sins
- 6) When you were able to but didn't want to prevent someone from sinning
- 7) When you know that someone is sinning but you don't tell him

### *Sins against the Holy Spirit*

- 1) Disregarding the grace of God and having excessive trust in one's own self
- 2) To believe that God does not have the power to forgive you is a very great sin.
- 3) To believe that you are everything and that God has no power in the world
- 4) Lack of trust in God
- 5) Opposition to the Truth established by the Holy Church
- 6) Leaving the Orthodox Church. Guard yourself from this sin, for Christ says, "*He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal condemnation.*" (Mk 3:29)

### *The Nine Church Commandments*

- 1) Church attendance every Sunday and every feast day
- 2) Keeping the four fasting periods of the year
- 3) Respect toward the Church's representatives (priests, monks, nuns)
- 4) Confession of sin during the four fasts
- 5) Guarding ourselves from heretics
- 6) To pray for our country's leaders and the officials of the church
- 7) To abstain from weddings and parties during the fast periods
8. To protect those things belonging to the church from inappropriate use

9) To keep the fasts and to say the prayers that the bishop ordains in times of trouble

### *Various Sins*

1) Failure to carry out one's obligations:

a) Have you carried out all your obligations to God, to your own self, to your neighbor?

b) Have you carried out the penance given to you in confession?

2) Theft of holy things

a) Have you lied at confession?

b) Have you avoided telling everything and for what reason have you done so?

### *Counsels*

a) Go to confession at least four times a year, during the fasts.

b) Fast before confession.

c) Maintain the same spiritual father.

d) Make a serious examination of conscience before going to confession.

e) Write down all your sins, otherwise you might forget them. After confession, burn the paper at once.

f) Confess not only sins you have committed, but also those of your heart.

g) Do not conceal any sin.

h) Be reconciled with those who have offended you.

i) Avoid occasions of sin.

j) Give up your sins – make a promise that you will no longer sin.

k) Feel contrition for your sinfulness.

l) Guard yourself from sins.

m) Receive Communion only if you feel clean.

Otherwise, it will be for condemnation.

n) Fulfill in a holy manner the penance given to you by your spiritual father.

o) Judge only yourself for the sins you have committed.

Each one of us has his or her own mission to fulfill, but we must heed the advice of our spiritual father, who puts aside our own ill-informed will, making room for the will of God in each one of us. Our spiritual father reveals the will of God in us. If we don't heed him, we can wander astray and make mistakes that are even worse than the passions. I consider a friend anyone who sends me even one thought of love. And I wish and request that every one of my friends copy down this guide to confession. I have written this as best as I could, in great haste, out of a genuine wish to send you this guide to confession.

*With all my love, Valeriu.*

*The end and glory be to God!*



(Taken from the book **“The Saint of the Prison”**, *Translated* by Monk Sava – an American convert to Orthodoxy from Oasa Monastery)