

Examination of Conscience for Senior Adults

“I don’t need to go to confession!” said the elderly woman. “I never even leave the house! How could I ever commit any sin?”

Those who knew her best and who loved her anyway glanced skyward, sighed audibly, then checked just to see whether everyone was catching this hubris. Sure enough, half a dozen eyerolls confirmed what we all knew only too well; that this declaration of sanctity was coming from someone who was too quick to criticize, to manipulate, to judge.

Most seniors-in fact, most of us, regardless of our station in life-would never think of murdering or stealing. We go to church; we probably don’t commit adultery; we don’t deliberately lie; we don’t swear TOO much...In short, compared to some people(eyeroll again), we’ve really got those ten commandments down pat.

Too often for the chronically ill, the aged and the infirm, home or hospital seems a lonely prison. But while the younger generations are challenged by the sheer “busyness” of their lives to find time for God, those in their golden years-especially the homebound-have a unique opportunity to grow in prayer and in godliness, and to devote more time to that which is truly important, their relationship with their Creator. The failure to take advantage of this opportunity, focusing instead on one’s plight and personal problems, is in itself a sin against God.

We are only human-and that means that we face a constant battle against pride, against greed, against selfishness. If you find yourself forced by health or circumstances to remain indoors; if you are, or if someone you love is confined to a hospital or rehabilitation center or nursing home; even if the confinement is temporary-take time to grow in your faith. Choose your reading material carefully, and be sure to include the Scriptures and some inspirational reading or music. Use this valuable time to reconnect with God in prayer-pray for your family, pray for the reparation of sins, pray for the conversion of a loved one, for our leaders, for world peace. Pray for the grace to acknowledge your shortcomings, and for the will to overcome them.

For those who, like the elderly woman I mentioned, think they can do no wrong-may I suggest a different focus for your Examination of Conscience? Set aside those familiar commandments, and instead dust off a list of seven capital sins, and the seven cardinal virtues. Your personal reflection might look something like this:

Have I practiced the virtue of Chastity? For example:

- Have I permitted myself to watch movies or daytime television shows which are not edifying, which depict sexual scenarios or which advocate for cohabitation or homosexual relationships?
- Am I cohabitating, living with someone as if they were my spouse?
- Do I read books that indulge sexual fantasies?

Have I practiced the virtue of Temperance? For example:

- Have I indulged my love of sweets or snack foods, to the detriment of my health?
- Have I continued to smoke heavily, or to consume alcoholic beverages excessively?
- Have I been immoderate in any activity, such as watching too much television?

Have I practiced the virtue of Charity? For example:

- Have I been a “busybody,” unkind to a neighbor either by my thoughts or by my actions?
- Have I been kind to a family member or loved one, or was I critical or hurtful?
- Have I been mean or resentful to people younger than myself?
- Do I complain constantly to those around me?
- Do I gossip or tell stories to make others look bad?

Have I practiced the virtue of Diligence? For example:

- Have I used my physical limitations as an excuse for laziness?
- Have I neglected prayer, ignored my friend’s birthday, sat around the house when I might have helped?

Have I practiced the virtue of Patience? For example:

- Was I unkind (or downright rude) to a telephone caller, impatient with a visitor, crabby when things didn’t go just the way I wanted?
- Did I complain if someone took me to a restaurant or public place, because we had to wait for service?
- Did I criticize my doctor, my caretaker, my child, for not serving me better?

Have I practiced the virtue of Kindness? For example:

- Was I jealous of attention paid to someone else, wanting everyone to notice me instead?
- Did I feel angry because someone else had more money, or better health, or because my grown children did not have enough time to spend with me?
- Did I compliment someone who looked good, or did I have harsh words to say?

Have I practiced the virtue of Humility? For example:

- Did I accept a compliment graciously but then move on, refusing to keep the attention turned toward myself?
- Was I willing to let someone else be the center of attention?
- Did I feel grateful for the kindness of my family and others, and appreciative of my caregiver’s efforts?
- Did I believe that I had no need of confession, because I never leave the house?

Lord, help us to recognize the times that we have failed to live a virtuous life-and grant us the grace of true contrition and a resolve to do Your will. Amen.