



*the* GOLDEN KEY *to*  
PARADISE  
— PERFECT CONTRITION —

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## PREFACE

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**T**his little book is as valuable as lengthy treatises, as much for the sovereign importance of the subject that it discusses (a subject, sadly, very little known by most Christians) as for the abundance of doctrines and the interest of its practical applications. "The Great Means of Salvation," such is the title that St. Alphonsus de' Liguori gave to a tract on prayer published with many other works from his pen. And so great was his confidence in the efficacy and the power of prayer to assure the salvation of souls, that he would have wished, said he, to see his little book in the hands of everyone. About the exercise of the love of God and of perfect contrition, we can say, with just as much truth, that they are "the great means of salvation," because between an act of charity or perfect contrition and the acquisition of eternal life, the connection is more intimate and even closer than between prayer and salvation.

Consequently, I would like to see this little work, like St. Alphonsus' own, in the hands of everyone, convinced as I am that the careful reading of it and putting into practice its teachings would open the gates of heaven to a multitude of souls in danger of eternal damnation without it, and it would increase, in a marvelous way, the grace of God in those who have been faithful since their baptism.

Every Christian ought to be soundly instructed about the capital importance of the act of perfect contrition and of charity on account of the inestimable services that such knowledge can render us at the hour of our death and allow us to render at the deathbed of a dying person, to whom Providence might lead us. No one, even in good health, should forget this truth. But it is desirable overall that every-one cherish it deeply engraved in his heart for the hours of infirmity and the perils of death.

May it please God that this pamphlet be distributed as far and wide as possible. There is no doubt that its reading will be accompanied by abundant blessings.

*Father Augustine Lehmkuhl, S.J.*

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## FOREWORD

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**T**his succinct little work was providentially found in a decrepit seventy-five-year-old copy published in French. It is unquestionably the most important matter a Catholic, or anyone for that matter, could ever read—the key to heaven indeed. Knowledge of perfect contrition is more important today than ever before, the sacrament of penance having been all but obliterated by enemies within the Church and true confessors ever fewer and farther between.

See, on reading this booklet, how perfect contrition is even for those not baptized, nothing less than baptism of desire (*in voto*). In the words of the

prophet, one cannot but exclaim that “the Lord your God. . . is gracious and merciful, patient. . . and ready to repent of evil” (Joel 2, 13). Where perfect contrition is, there is charity, and where charity is, there is sanctifying grace. This grace, as the Angelic Doctor St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, is not limited to the sacraments, the visible signs and causes of grace. And whoever dies in the state of grace is saved, as surely as those who die without it are lost.

The pamphlet, however, has no polemical intent, but is solely for those who, for ignorance of perfect contrition, stand to despair of forgiveness at the hour of death.

It is our prayer that everyone who reads this booklet will procure a supply for himself and give copies to all his family and friends, that a translator for it may be found in every language, and that it may reach to the ends of the earth. Indeed, may its propagation become a veritable apostolate for every true Catholic. How many souls stand thereby to be saved, and what a rich reward for oneself in such an apostolate! “Charity covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4, 8).

—*The Most Reverend Robert F. McKenna, O.P.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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Upon seeing the little book *The Golden Key to Paradise*, you will, dear reader, experience, I surmise, the curiosity of seeing whether the content

matches the title.

Perhaps some mistrust will inspire you, and you will ask with misgiving if you are dealing with one of those so-called sensational and foolproof pieces of mass-marketing literature.

Well then, dear reader, no, it is a genuine and tangible key, and certainly, easy to handle: it is perfect contrition. It can open heaven for you, every day, at every moment, if you have had the misfortune to close it through mortal sin, and especially if, at the hour of death, you do not have by your side a priest, the dispenser of divine mercy. *Perfect contrition* will be the last key that, with the grace of God, will open heaven for you.

However, to do so, you must have gained the habit of employing it effectively during your life. How many souls, thanks to perfect contrition, have been assured of heaven, who without it would have been irremediably lost! “If I were able to traverse the countryside preaching the divine word,” said the learned and pious Cardinal Franzelin, “my favorite sermon topic would be perfect contrition.”

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## *What is contrition?*

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Contrition is *a pain of the soul and a hatred for sins committed*. It must be accompanied by a good purpose, that is to say, a firm resolution to correct oneself and to sin no more.

In order for contrition to be real, it is necessary that it be interior, that it come from the depths of the heart; it must not then be a simple formula uttered without reflection. It is not necessary to show it either by sighs or tears etc. All those displays may be an indicator, but they are not the essence of contrition. That resides in the soul and in the will determined to flee from sin and return to God.

Beyond that, contrition must be *universal*, that is to say, it must be understood of *all* sins committed—at least of all mortal sins. Finally, it must be *supernatural* and not purely *natural*, for that has no use.

This is why contrition, like every other good thing, must come from God and from His grace. Only the grace of God can engender it in us. However, God always grants us the necessary grace provided that we ask it of Him, provided that we possess good will and a sincere

and supernatural repentance.

If our repentance is based on a motive of interest, or for a purely natural reason (i.e. temporal evils, shame, or illness), we shall have only natural contrition without merit. However, if it is based on some truth of the faith (i.e. hell, purgatory, heaven, God, etc.), then we will truly possess a supernatural contrition.

This supernatural contrition can be, in turn, *perfect* or *imperfect* and here we are come to our topic of *perfect contrition*.

**What, then, is perfect contrition?**

In a few words, perfect contrition is contrition based on the motive of *love*, and imperfect contrition is that which is based on the *fear* of God.

Perfect contrition is that which flows from the *perfect love of God*. Now, our love of God is perfect if we love Him because He is infinitely perfect, infinitely beautiful, and infinitely good (love of benevolence) or because He has shown us His love in such an admirable way (love of gratitude).

Our love of God is imperfect, if we love Him because we expect something from Him.

Accordingly, in imperfect love, we think above all about the favors received, and in perfect love, we think above all of the goodness of the

*Perfect contrition is that which flows  
from the perfect love of God.*

One who bestows these favors. Imperfect love makes us preferably love the favor itself, whereas perfect love makes us love the Author of these favors, and that less for His *gifts* than for the *love* and the *goodness* that these gifts manifest.

From love, contrition flows. As a result, our contrition will be perfect, if we repent of our sins for the sake of the perfect love of God, whether from *benevolence* or from *gratitude*.

It will be imperfect, if we repent of our faults owing to the *fear of God*, whether because sin has made us lose the reward that we have been promised, viz., heaven; or because we have earned the punishment imposed on the sinner, viz., hell or purgatory.

In *imperfect* contrition, we think particularly about ourselves and about the evils that sin brings to us, according to the light of faith. In *perfect* contrition, we especially think of God, His greatness, His beauty, His love, and His goodness; we consider sin an offense and that it has been the cause of the many sufferings endured to redeem us. We wish not only our own

good, but that of God.

An example will help us grasp it better. When St. Peter had denied our Savior, “he went forth and wept bitterly.” Why did he weep? Was it for the shame that he was going to endure in front of the other Apostles?

In such a circumstance, it would have been a purely natural pain and without merit. Is it because his divine Master is perhaps going to strip him of his dignity as an Apostle and Supreme Pastor, or drive him from His kingdom? In this case, the contrition would be good, but imperfect. No indeed! He repents, he weeps because he has offended his beloved Master, so good, so holy, and so worthy of love. He weeps because he has responded to that immense love with base ingratitude, and that is perfect contrition.

Now, don't you, too, dear reader, have the same motive as St. Peter to detest your sins, *for the sake of love, for the sake of perfect love, and for the sake of gratitude?*

Without any doubt, God's favors are more numerous than the hairs on your head and every one of them should make you repeat the words of St. John: “Let us love God, because He first loved us” (1 John, 4, 19).

And how has He loved you?

“I have loved thee,” says God Himself, “with an everlasting love, I have had pity on thee and I have drawn thee to me” (Jer. 31, 3).

“With an everlasting love I have loved thee.”

From all eternity, before there was even a trace of you upon the earth, He cast upon you this look of love that penetrates everything. He prepared for you a soul and a body, heaven and earth, with all the tenderness of a mother who prepares to welcome the child who is going to come into the world. It is God Who has given you life and health; it is He Who gives you the good things of nature every day.

This idea was sufficient for the pagans themselves to bring them to the knowledge and the perfect love of God. For a greater reason, it should bring you there—you a Christian who possesses the love and the supernatural goodness of God for you. Through the prophet He says, “I have had pity on you.”

You were condemned like all men as a result of original sin; God sent His only Son who became your Savior and redeemed you with His blood by dying on the cross.

It was of you that He lovingly thought in His agony in the Garden of Olives, when He shed His blood under the whips and the thorns,

when He followed, carrying His cross, the long and painful path of Calvary; when, nailed upon the cross, He expired in the midst of ghastly torments, it was of you that He thought, with a tender love, as if you had been the only person in the world. What shall we make of that? “Let us love God, because He loved us first.”

Moreover, God *drew you to Himself* by baptism, which is the first and chief grace of life, and by the *Church*, in whose bosom you were then incorporated. How many men have been able to attain the true faith only through the strength of effort and sufferings! But to you, God gave it to you from the cradle, out of pure love. He drew you to Himself, He draws you every day by means of the sacraments and by numberless graces, interior and exterior, with which He showers you.

You are, as it were, submerged in an ocean, the ocean of goodness and divine love, and He wishes again to crown all these graces by placing you near Him and making you eternally happy. What will you give Him for such love?

*He drew you to Himself, He draws you every day by means of the sacraments and by numberless graces, interior and exterior, with which He showers you.*

Isn't it true that you must make a return for these advances? Then let us love our God, since He loved us first.

Let us come to the point: How have you responded to the love of a God so lovable and so good? Without doubt, by your ingratitude and by your sins. But do you repent of this ingratitude? Ah, yes, without any doubt, and you burn with a desire to make amends for it by a limitless love. Well, then, if that is so, you have at this moment perfect contrition, that which is based on the love of God and which is called *contrition of love* or *of charity*.

But in contrition of charity itself, there is a degree, more elevated yet, that consists in purely loving God, because He is infinitely glorious, infinitely perfect, and worthy of being loved, the abstraction of His mercy for us. Let us make a comparison. There are, in the firmament, a number of stars so distant from us that we cannot perceive them, and yet they are all as large and as bright as the sun that so freely imparts to us warmth and life.

Likewise, suppose that man had never been in possession of this eternal star that is God's love. Suppose that God had created neither the world nor any creature: He would be no less

great, no less beautiful, no less glorious, no less worthy of being loved, for He is Himself and in regard to Himself the greatest good, the most perfect, and me most lovable.

Such is the sense of the formula: I am heartily sorry. . . because You are infinitely lovable and You deplore sin. Reflect a moment and consider God's love; especially contemplate the Savior's bitter sufferings. In this light, you will easily understand, and it will pierce your heart through.

Here, then, are the practical means to achieve perfect contrition.

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*How do you obtain perfect contrition?*

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**Y**ou must recall first of all that perfect contrition is a grace, and a great grace, from the mercy of God. You must ask it of Him earnestly. Ask it of Him, not only at the moment when you wish to make an act of contrition, but frequently. It should be the object of our most ardent desires. Therefore, repeat often, "My God, grant me perfect contrition for all my sins." Our Lord will grant your prayer, if He sees in you a sincere desire to please Him.

That said, here is how you will easily be able to make a perfect act of contrition. Cast yourself at the foot of a crucifix, either at church or in your room, where you imagine yourself in the presence of Jesus crucified, and, in the sight of His wounds, meditate with devotion for a few moments and say to yourself:

“Who, then, is nailed on this cross? It is Jesus, my God and my Savior. What does He suffer? His mangled body covered with wounds shows the most terrible torments. His soul is soaked with pains and insults. Why does He suffer? For men’s sins and also for my own. In the midst of His bitterness, He remembers me, He suffers for me. He wishes to expiate my sins.”

Stop there, while the ever-warm blood of your sweet Savior falls drop by drop upon your soul. Ask yourself how you responded to your lovable Savior’s tokens of tenderness.

Recall your sins and, forgetting for a moment heaven and hell, repent especially because they are your sins that have reduced your Savior to such a state. Promise Him no longer to nail Him to the cross with new sin, and lastly, recite, slowly and with fervor, an act of contrition.

The act of contrition may be expressed in many ways, according to the feelings of each penitent.

Below is one of the most well known:

“My Lord and my God, I repent from the depth of my heart of all the sins of my life because by them I have earned the punishments of Thy justice, in this life and for eternity; because I have answered Thy favors with my ingratitude; but especially because by them I have offended Thee, Who art infinitely good and infinitely worthy of being loved. I firmly resolve to amend my ways and to sin no more. Grant me the grace to be faithful to my purpose. So be it.”

In this prayer, we express three motives of contrition: the first is imperfect contrition and the next two are perfect contrition. Nothing prevents us, in effect, from linking these two kinds of contrition; the first leads us so much the more easily to the second.

1. “Because by them I have earned the punishments of Thy justice....” This pertains to imperfect contrition.

2. “Because I have answered Thy favors with my ingratitude....” This is a motive that approaches perfect contrition and is joined with it, for if I have the sincere regret of having answered God’s love by my ingratitude and my sins, I would necessarily wish to make amends for this ingratitude by my love.

Now, he who, by a motive of love, regrets having offended his benefactor, truly possesses perfect contrition, or contrition of charity.

3. “But especially because by them I have offended Thee....” Reread the above prayer and you will understand the meaning of these words. There you will see, clearly expressed, love and perfect contrition. To obtain it more easily, add the following words to your act of contrition, either orally or from your heart:

“But especially because, by my sins I have offended Thee, Who art infinitely good and infinitely worthy of being loved. Who art my Savior, and who died upon the cross for my sins.”

Afterwards comes your resolve: “I firmly resolve to amend my ways and to sin no more....”

But you will say, this is easy for someone else, but for me it is something too lofty and almost impossible. Do you think this is true? Don't believe it!

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*Is it difficult to make a perfect  
act of contrition?*

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Without a doubt, the act of perfect contrition is more difficult than the act of imperfect contrition required for confession.

*“I firmly resolve to amend my ways and to sin no more. Grant me the grace to be faithful to my purpose. So be it.”*

However, there is no one who, with God’s grace, cannot obtain perfect contrition, provided he desires it sincerely. Contrition is in the will and not in the sentiment, though even without tears its intensity should have some proportion to the sin or sins we have committed.

Moreover, and this is a very proper consideration to give us encouragement, before the time of our Lord, in the ancient law perfect contrition was, for 4,000 years, the only means of obtaining forgiveness of sins. Again, in our times, there exists no other form of forgiveness for thousands of pagans and heretics. Now, it is true that God does not wish the death of the sinner; He cannot wish to impose a perfect contrition impossible to attain. Contrition must, on the contrary, be within the range of all men. Well, then, if so many unfortunates who live and die can obtain this perfect contrition far from (though through no fault of their own) the stream of grace and the Catholic Church, is perfect contrition so difficult for you who have the good fortune of being Christian and

Catholic, who are the object of much greater graces and who are better taught than these poor infidels?

I will go further. Often, without your suspecting it, you have perfect contrition. For instance, when you devoutly hear holy Mass, when you make with fervor the Stations of the Cross, when you meditate with devotion in front of an image of Jesus crucified or of His divine Heart.

Some words often suffice to express the most ardent love and the sincerest contrition. Some of these are, for example, the ejaculatory prayers: “My God and my all”; “My Jesus, mercy”; “My God, I love Thee above all things”; “My God, have pity upon me, a poor sinner”; “My Jesus, I love Thee.”

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*What effects does perfect  
contrition produce?*

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**S**ome truly admirable effects! For the sinner, thanks to perfect contrition, he immediately receives forgiveness for each of his faults even before making his confession. Nevertheless, he must make a resolution to confess himself at an opportune time; of course, this resolution is in-

cluded in perfect contrition. Every time he makes an act of perfect contrition, the pains of hell are immediately remitted, he recovers all his past merits, and he turns from being an enemy of God to being His son by adoption and co-heir to heaven.

For the just man, perfect contrition enlarges and strengthens the state of grace. It erases the venial sins he has detested, and increases in him the true and sound love of God. Here are the marvelous effects of divine mercy in the soul of the Christian owing to perfect contrition. Perhaps, they may appear unbelievable to you. Undoubtedly, you think, in danger of death, we should ask for contrition; but is it credible that at every moment perfect contrition produces such effects? Is this teaching concerning perfect contrition well founded? I answer you that it is as solid as the rock upon which the Church is built and as certain as the very word of God. At the Council of Trent, the Church, in explaining the chief truths disputed by the heretics, declares (Session xiv, Chap. 4) that perfect contrition, that which proceeds from the love of God, justifies man and reconciles him to God, even before the reception of the sacrament of penance.

Now, the Council nowhere says that this is

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only in danger of death. Therefore, perfect contrition at all times produces this effect. Besides, in that the Church relies on the words of Jesus: “If anyone love me”—and with perfect contrition we truly love Him—“my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode in him” (St. John 14, 23). God cannot live in a soul stained by sin. Perfect contrition or the contrition of charity accordingly wipes away sins.

Such has always been the teaching of the Church, the holy Fathers, and her doctors: Baius has been condemned for having maintained the contrary. In fact, if, as we said just now, perfect contrition must have brought forth such admirable effects in the Old Testament, in the era of the law of fear, it will all the more produce these effects in the New Testament, where the law of love reigns.

But then, someone will say, if perfect contrition wipes away sin, what good is it to confess it afterwards? It is true that perfect contrition produces the same effects as confession, but it

does not affect them independently of the sacrament of penance, since perfect contrition precisely supposes a firm purpose to confess the same sins that it has just pardoned. For, to confess all sins, at least the mortal ones, is a law of Jesus Christ and a law that cannot change. Is it necessary to confess one's sins as soon as possible after the act of contrition? Very strictly speaking, that is not necessary, but I strongly urge you to do so. You will thus be all the more sure of being forgiven and you will obtain, at the same time, the precious graces attached to the sacrament of penance, those that are called the sacramental graces. Perhaps, now, you will be tempted to say to yourself: "If it is easy to obtain the remission of sins through perfect contrition, I do not have to trouble myself about confession. I will sin without scruple, and I will be discharged of the debt by an act of perfect contrition!" Anyone who would think in such a way will not have even a shadow of perfect contrition. He would not love God above everything, since he would not have the serious desire to break with sin and change his life, the condition required equally by confession and perfect contrition. He could well fool himself, but he could never fool God. He who truly has

perfect contrition is entirely resolved to renounce mortal sin. He will cleanse himself as soon as possible in the sacrament of Penance, and, by his good will aided by the grace of God, he will keep himself from sin, and he will strengthen himself more and more in the happy state as a child of God.

Perfect contrition is a great aid for those who loyally and sincerely wish to recover and preserve the state of grace, and especially for those who fall into sin from habit, i.e., who, in spite of their good will, lapse again from time to time owing to their bad habits and their own weakness. It is, however, entirely different for those who use perfect contrition as a means of sinning with impunity: they turn the divine remedy of perfect repentance into a hellish poison.

Don't be among the latter, my dear reader, and don't allow so precious a grace to serve you ill."

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*Why is perfect contrition so important  
and sometimes even necessary?*

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**I**t is important throughout our life and at the moment of our death.

First and foremost, it is important during our life. What, in reality, is more important than

grace? It beautifies our soul; it penetrates it and transforms it into a creature of a new order by making it a child of God and heir to heaven. It renders all the works and sufferings of the Christian worthy of eternal life, it is the magic wand that changes all into gold—into the gold of supernatural merits. What, on the contrary, is sadder than a Christian in the state of sin! All his sufferings, all his works, all his prayers remain barren, without any merit for heaven. He is an enemy of God, and if he dies, he goes to hell.

The state of grace, therefore, is of capital importance and necessary to the Christian.

If you have lost grace, you can recover it in two ways:

- (1) by confession,
- (2) by perfect contrition.

Confession is the ordinary means, but since it is not always available, God has given us an extraordinary means: perfect contrition.

Let us suppose that one day you have the misfortune to commit a mortal sin. After the worries of the day, in the quiet of the night your

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conscience awakens; it condemns you forcefully, and you are in agony. What are you to do? Well, then, God puts in your hands the golden key, which will open for you the gates of heaven. Repent of your sins intensely, for the love of the good and bountiful God.

On the contrary, how much is the Christian to be pitied who ignores the practice of perfect contrition. He goes to bed and rises in the state of mortal sin. He lives in this manner two, three, four or more months, from year to year, perhaps. The dark night in which he is shrouded is not for one moment interrupted by confession. A sad state, to live almost always in mortal sin, as an enemy of God, without any merit for heaven and in danger of eternal damnation!

Another benefit: if before receiving a sacrament, say Confirmation or Matrimony, for instance, you recall an un-pardoned sin, perfect contrition allows you to receive this sacrament worthily. Only for Communion is confession required.

Even for a Christian in a state of grace, the frequent practice of perfect contrition is very useful. First, we are never certain of being in a state of grace. Now, every act of perfect contrition in-

creases this certainty. It often occurs to us to wonder whether we have given in to temptation. Such doubts delay and discourage the soul on the path of virtue. What are we then to do? Scrutinize ourselves if we have or have not consented to temptation? This would be fruitless. Make an act of perfect contrition and be at ease.

Even supposing that we possessed certainty of being in a state of grace, perfect contrition will still be very useful to us. Each act of perfect contrition increases grace and an ounce of grace is worth more than all the treasures in the world. Each act of perfect contrition erases the venial sins that disfigure the soul; thus the soul grows more and more beautiful. Each act of perfect contrition remits temporal punishment due to sin. Let us remember the words of the Savior regarding Mary Magdalene: "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much" (St. Luke 7, 47). And if this forgiveness of temporal punishment makes us appreciate and value indulgences, good works, almsgiving, charity toward God, which is the queen of the virtues, it stands in the first rank of these good works.

Lastly, with each act of perfect contrition and of love, our soul strengthens itself in good, and thus it has firm confidence of obtaining the

paramount grace of final perseverance.

The practice of perfect contrition is, therefore, very important during our life, but most especially at the hour of our death and above all if we are in danger of sudden death.

One day, a large fire broke out in a heavily populated city, and many were found dead. Among the many persons who cried out in the courtyard of a house, a twelve-year-old child, on his knees, begged for the grace of contrition; then he entreated his companions to pray with him. Entirely hapless, perhaps they owed him their salvation.

Now, similar dangers threaten us at every moment and at the time when we least think about them. You can be the victim of some accident, fall out of a tree, be run over by a train or a bus; you can be taken unawares at night by a fire in your bedroom; you can make a misstep on a stairway or fall in the midst of your work. They carry you away, dying. They run to look for a priest, but the priest is late in coming, and the time is short. What do you do? Immediately

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treasures in the world.*

make an act of perfect contrition. Repent mightily out of love and gratitude to God and Jesus Christ crucified. Perfect contrition will have afforded you the key to heaven. It is not the case that it is lawful for everyone to wait until the last hour in the hope of being free from every sin by means of a simple act of perfect contrition. It is very doubtful, in fact, that perfect contrition can avail those who have misused it in order to sin. The benefits detailed are chiefly for those who have good will. "But," you will ask me, "will I have the time to make an act of perfect contrition?" Yes, with God's grace. Perfect contrition does not require much time, especially if, during your life, you have practiced it often. It takes only an instant to make it from the depths of your soul. Besides, God's grace is more efficacious at the moment of danger, and our mind is much more active. At death's door, the seconds seem like hours. I speak from personal experience.

On July 20, 1886, I came very close to death. It was a matter of eight to ten seconds of pain, the time it takes to pray half an Our Father. In this very brief moment, thousands of thoughts crossed my mind. My whole life passed before me with an unimaginable speed; at the same

time I thought of what was in store for me after death. All that, I repeat, happened during the short period of half a Pater. Fortunately, my life was spared. God thus willed it so that I could write *The Key to Heaven*. Well! The first thing I had to do in such a danger was to make what they taught us in catechism—an act of contrition—and to have recourse to God in seeking His protection. Truly, it was then that I learned to love and treasure, as is proper, perfect contrition. Afterward, I made it known and prized everywhere when I had the opportunity. What a loss that people do not better understand its importance in this last moment!

Everyone rushes about; they do not understand the tears and cries; they lose their heads; they go to find the doctor or the priest; they bring fresh water and all the remedies that they secretly possess. And while the sick person is in agony, no one, perhaps, has pity on his immortal soul; no one suggests to him to make an act of perfect contrition. If you find yourself in a similar situation, hasten to the side of the dying person and, calmly and serenely presenting to him, if possible, the image of Jesus crucified, with a sure and firm voice, tell him to think and to repeat from the depths of his soul what you are about

to say. Then slowly and clearly recite the act of contrition even though it would appear that the sick person understands and comprehends nothing. You will have done a supremely good work that will earn you his eternal gratitude. Even if you are dealing with a heretic, help him in his last moments in the same way. It is not necessary to speak to him about confession. Urge him to make an act of love of God and of Jesus crucified in slowly reciting to him the act of contrition.

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*When should you make an  
act of contrition?*

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If you have carefully followed me up to this point, dear reader, let me at once ask this of you: for God and your soul, every evening do not fail to make an act of contrition along with your prayers. Assuredly, it is not a sin to leave it out sometimes, but what I offer is good and useful advice. Do not say that the examination of conscience and perfect contrition are good

*The practice of perfect contrition is, therefore, very important during our life, but most especially at the hour of our death and above all if we are in danger of sudden death.*

for priests and for perfect souls; do not say, "I don't have time. In the evening, I am too tired!" How much time do you need? A half hour? Fifteen minutes? No, a few minutes will suffice. Don't you say some prayers lying in your bed? Well, after praying, think a few moments about the faults and the sins of that day and recite slowly and fervently, at the foot of the crucifix, the act of contrition. Start this evening, and you will not regret it. If you should ever have the misfortune to commit a mortal sin, do not remain in this state. Restore yourself by perfect contrition. Restore yourself at once, or at least at your evening prayers, and without delay go to confession.

Finally, dear reader, sooner or later the hour of death will strike for you, and if, God forbid, it comes unexpectedly, you know the remedy; you know where to find the key to heaven. If you do have the time to prepare yourself, may your last action be an act of love toward God, your Creator, your Redeemer, your Savior, a sincere and perfect act of contrition for all the sins of your life.

After that, throw yourself into the arms of divine mercy.

And now I leave you, dear reader. Reread this

little book, and put it into practice. Cherish perfect contrition; practice this precious means of obtaining grace, which Providence has placed in your hands.

In sum, the true key to heaven. ■



# ACT OF CONTRITION

**M**y Lord and my God, I repent from the depth of my heart of all the sins of my life because by them I have earned the punishments of Thy justice, in this life and for eternity; because I have answered Thy favors with my ingratitude; but especially because by them I have offended Thee, Who art infinitely good and infinitely worthy of being loved. I firmly resolve to amend my ways and to sin no more. Grant me the grace to be faithful to my purpose. So be it.

**J**esus' call to conversion and penance, like that of the prophets before Him, does not aim first at outward works, "sackcloth and ashes," fasting and mortification, but at the **CONVERSION OF THE HEART, INTERIOR CONVERSION**. Without this, such penances remain sterile and false; however, interior conversion urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.

Interior repentance is a radical reorientation of our whole life, a return, a conversion to God with all our heart, an end of sin, a turning away from evil, with repugnance toward the evil actions we have committed. At the same time it entails the desire and resolution to change one's life, with hope in God's mercy and trust in the help of His grace.

—*from the Catechism of the Catholic Church; 1430-31.*

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